

# Prospects and Challenges of Implementing Better Administrative Practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education

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## Abstract

This paper examines critically, the prospects and challenges of implementing better administrative practices of Early Childhood Care Education, (ECCE) in Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. This research is consequent upon the recent developments in Early Childhood Centres in the country; where none experts and deficient of the right pedagogical skill, are taking over the care and training at these centres especially in the privately managed centres. The government ECCE development centres are also toeing this line of mediocrity; as they are left in the hands of unskilled and unmotivated teachers in the primary schools where the school is centred. This paper shed more lights into the future prospect of ECCE the challenges notwithstanding, if everything recommended in this paper is followed.

**Keywords:** ECCE, Pedagogue, EFCC, NERDC,

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one amongst the community of nations that has very lofty philosophy of education, unfortunately, with administrative challenges which is the brain-child of the corrupt tendencies in the country. According to the National Policy on Education, (2004), it states that a nation's policy on education is government's way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. No policy on education, however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation.

In the light of the foregoing, Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) was designed by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a policy statement to achieve the broad goals of the nation's philosophy of education, beginning from at the early years of the child. In order words, this level of education is designed to serve as foundation and catalysts for the growth and intellectual development of the child from the very infancy, so that the child can be useful to himself and the society, through the acquisition of general knowledge, skills and morals that will guide him in his survival of his physical and immediate environment, (Acholem, 2011). In this paper, effort is made to x-ray the prospects and challenges of implementing better administrative practices of ECCE in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Thus, we shall discuss how the aforementioned challenges could be raveled with the aim of providing brighter and better prospect for ECCE in this 21<sup>st</sup> century education system.

According to Abamba (2005), Nigeria educational system inherited a lot of lofty educational policies since independence; which supposedly would without hesitation usher the country into an era and aura of educational freedom, meeting the global target of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) etc. Shocking enough these educational policies are aborted at random, with little or no patience for it to mature and be delivered or be perfected into a sustainable best practice; just as the adage goes, that 'practice makes perfect'. Howbeit, these abortions was caused by the incessant coup de tat experienced between 1963 till 1999; until true and enduring democracy was enshrined in the country.

Saddening enough, from the military experience, it was discovered that the Military was not better administrators or managers when it comes to educational best practice that befits the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The interlude of democracy within the Military regimes marked a watershed of the 1974 educational policy that ushered in the Universal Primary Education, (UPE), as bedrock in the history of education in the country. This policy did not survive the presupposed successful implementation only to be re-appraised to Universal Basic Education (UBE).

According to NERDC, (National Minimum Standard for Early Childhood Care Education, 2004), "Early Childhood Care Education evolved in Nigeria about two decades ago as a special field of focus for development intervention. It is base on Government's resolve to create an enabling environment for the Nigerian child to thrive and develop to the fullest potential in line with the national goal and aspiration of building a "land full of bright opportunities for all citizens." The backup for the resolution, also derives from the provisions of the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC), the World Summit for Children and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which Nigeria is signatory. Unfortunately, till now the prospect of best administrative practices that befits the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not realized due to some many hidden challenges.

According to Federal Government of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004 Reversed) Early Childhood Care Education (or Pre-primary Education) is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. It

further added that “the responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions, and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools.” Standing on the above foundation, it is very easy to argue that when the primary school system sneezes, Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) gets cold. Simply because the health of the mother determines the life and survival of the fetus, (here the mother is the primary education system, on which the burden to carter for ECCE is yoked)

From the above extractions, it is obvious that one prospect of ECCE is the lofty objectives as enshrined in the philosophy, but regrettably, its greatest challenges is the poor policy implementation for better administrative practices of ECCE in the country since the birth of the programme. One could imagine that a policy that was gazetted and published in the 80s is yet to gain ground as at 2015. Without gainsaying, the prospect of ECCE is as bright as the underlying philosophical purpose which includes:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- Provide adequate care and supervising for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc)
- Inculcate social norms;
- Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toy, etc;
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play.

From the foregoing extracts one can perceive that the prospect of ECCE is very bright and lofty as it could bring the needed synergy between the school, the child who is the future leader, the government and the larger society by fostering national unity, create cohesion, discipline, self dignity and the needed patriotism in the Nigerian child; that has been lacking amongst the adults of today. Nevertheless, the challenges that is currently befalling the prospect of better administrative practices in ECCE include; (1) poor funding of this level of education, (2) poor policy implementation, and (3) politics in ECCE administration/negligent and unpatriotic spirit in full government/private participation of inclusive practice in ECCE education in the country, etc. These challenges we shall discourse one after the other hereunder.

#### Poor Funding:

For better administrative practice in ECCE in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, funding ranks foremost in priority. Education generally is finance consuming and does not produce immediate dividend like other sectors (agriculture, service industries etc). Because of this fact, government does not see the immediate need to consider education and declare a state of emergency on its progressive dwindling/fall in standard over the years. According to Federal Government of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004 Reversed), Government shall:

- a. Establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education,
- b. Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- c. Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will;
  - i. Develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and
  - ii. Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages
- d. Ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25;
- e. Set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and
- f. Ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of Early Childhood Care Education facilities.

Unfortunately, the same teacher that is not motivated by way of regular and prompt payment of salaries, incentives and other emoluments are asked to handle this level of education. He is to be the administrator and is supposed to manage the other teaches that is already going hopeless and not motivated; plan with little or no resources in the provision of educational resources, facilities and supervision of instruction etc. According to Aimiwu, (2011), the tripartite funding of primary education over the years did not motive teachers in that sector to unleash their full potential. This has led to brain drain in that sector and serious apathy by the unfortunate primary school teachers who have not the means to leave the system. This could not in any way foster better prospect and administrative practices for both the Primary level and the ECCE that is attached to it. Today, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) that is supposed to liaise with government in the funding of ECCE programme in the community is not there; as only few women and a handful of men are usually seen in PTA

meeting attendance. This situation has compelled parents to send their children to privately run ECCE centres which does not maintain government minimum standard in all ramification (in as much as their aim is profit making and not nation building per say)

Poor Policy Implementation and Politics in ECCE Administration:

According to FME (2009), there are gaps in capacity in the training and retraining of ECCE teachers in Nigeria tertiary institutions. It suffices to state the obvious that this gap is due to large scale of negligence and unpatriotic spirit in full government participation of inclusive practice in ECCE education in the country. The private hands that are participating are placing financial benefits (profits) above national service.

According to Ojodale (2012), contributing on the incessant strike action by teaches across the nation and across all the sectors of education; blamed the cause of the strike actions on government politics in education; which should be; in as much as politics and education is not compatible to the magnitude it is played in the country. He thus, describe this politics as “the snake in a clay pot” saying that the clay pot is the education sector that is very fragile and needs careful handling, the snake represents government unhealthy political interest in education, while the various teachers unions in the bid to act as ombudsmen would want to kill the snake by all means, often than not destroy the clay pot – the educational system – through incessant strike actions.

From the same policy, it was enshrined that government shall:

- a. Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- b. Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will;
  - i. Develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and
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- c. Ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25;
- d. Set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and
- e. Ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of Early Childhood Care Education facilities.

From the above one could see that the old adage is come true – easier said than done – today, government is still parading in its force those that could hardly defend their certificate. For instance, in Edo State, when their Comrade Governor, Adams Alieu Oshomhole asked the primary school teachers to undergo competence test, the teacher declined and labour threatened to go on strike if government persist. According to Professor Rufia;

*“...the primary school teacher of those days was a well respected member of the community and the village beauties would thank their stars should he make advances at any of them. Quality was high such that a holder of the first school leaving certificate was fluent in oral and written communication. It follows then that secondary schools of those days were on a higher pedestal the universities were sacred, undergraduates were highly regarded and worshiped, government catered for their needs and on graduation, they were entitled to the legendary Volkswagen beetle for a start. There were no distractions at the universities and as such, both students and lecturers settled down to serious academic business. Examination malpractices were exceptions rather than the norm – there was no need when teachers and students had executed their parts of the bargain!”*

How can these crops of teachers be given the all important foundational education of children that will create a virile nation? How can these teachers stop the decline in education, when they are also accomplices in all sort of examination malpractice? Again, the policy state that medium of instruction shall be mother tongue or language of immediate environment. This is not the practice in most ECCE centres across the nation; as most teachers hardly speak fluently their own mother tongue talk less of the language of immediate environment. The existing ECCE centres in government school are not been monitored or supervised, the private ones are not certified to meet with the required minimum standard talk less of monitoring and supervision. This is not supposed to be if we are anticipating a high prospect and better administrations of the level of education in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Negligent and Unpatriotic Spirit in Full Government/Private Participation of Inclusive Practice in Ecce Education in the Country:

According to Nwaham (2008), the federal government of Nigeria under Decree 16 of 1985 distributed

primary school (which eventually included ECCE) management to the three tiers of government for better administrative practices that supposedly should compete favourably in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and proposes thus that;

- Federal ministry of education shall ensure that the minimum standard is maintained
- Prescribe sanctions against any state or local government that failed to perform
- Publish a national register of primary schools, classroom, and pupils bi-annually; while
- The state shall be responsible for infrastructural development, maintenance and the provision of learning equipment
- Provide an inspectorate to monitor, supervise and ensure maintenance of standard
- Keep up-to-date record of primary (pre-primary) schools teachers and pupils in the local government areas
- Keep up-to-date number of available classrooms in the schools in the local government areas and forward same to FME
- Assume full responsibility for teachers training in the state and
- The local government is to take over 100% payment of salaries, allowances, pension and gratuities of teachers and support staff
- Encourage local/community participation in the development of primary and pre-primary education in their local government areas.

From the above extract, one can see that this policy in the paper is not what is currently obtained in the primary and Early Childhood Care Centres in the state. According to Abamba (2000), this tripartite management of basic education is adversely challenging global and better practices in basic education administration in the country as the country cannot compete favourably with international communities on basic education delivery and to meet up with the requirement of the treaties that Nigeria is a signatory to such as Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) etc. According to Abamba (2000), since the promulgation of the Decree till now, there are not significant records of classrooms renovation, building of additional blocks, provision of instructional materials, prompt and regular payment of staff salaries, pensions and other emoluments etc. These and many others are the challenges of better administrative practices of ECCE in Nigeria.

Without mincing words one can assert that government and private partnership in the country in realizing a virile prospect and overcoming the challenges towards better management of ECCE in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been treated all along with kids gloves. According to Ikpeba (2010), “The education industry today is faced with a lot of challenges ranging from mismanagement of resources to falling academic standards. So many factors have been indicted for this near crisis situation, ranging from home factors to school related factors. Among the school related factors, the issue of inadequate educational *facilities* rates high”. Educational facilities in the view of Adeola (1989) are more than just school buildings. It includes the central school site, playgrounds and other land, classrooms, corridors, lighting, sanitary facilities, recreational facilities, furniture, equipment as well as other consumable and non-consumable supplies required for the achievement of instructional and educational objectives. In the same line of reasoning, Enaowho and Eferakaya (1989), described school plant (facilities) as the entire scope of physical infrastructural facilities used in the school to educate a child. These include; buildings, permanent or semi-permanent structures, equipment or materials. The importance of school facilities in the secondary school system can therefore not be over-emphasized. The adequately or inadequacy of such facilities could significantly affect not only the attainment of educational goals but also the confidence of some major stakeholders in the education industry.

## CONCLUSION

Nwaoke, (2005) posit; “one of the noticeable differences in educational institution is their administrative management styles. Even when two schools are located in the same environment. With equal resources and facilities, there is usually significant difference in their output and managerial abilities. Since administration is the organization and direction of persons and materials in order to accomplish a specified goal, the main focus of school administrators is to enhance instruction.” She added that “at Addis Ababa conference of African ministers of education in 1961, the year 1980 was set as the target year for all African countries to achieve universal Primary Education (UPE), (UNESCO, 1961). More recently, a world conference on education for all was held in Jomtein, Thailand from March 5 to 9, 1990 under the joints auspices of the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF. ”The Universal Primary Education, this policy managed to survive only in the West and Middle Belt and failed in all other states of the federation as at then, due to the apathy shown on the policy by the Northern leaders who were against it. In the case of the Universal Basic Education, (UBE), since its formulation a lot of NCE teachers observed in the Two-year compulsory attachment, retainership of these teachers in the various primary and secondary schools in the country has not been effective. For the few states, like Lagos, Edo and Port Harcourt that managed to absorb some of the dropped UBE teachers, payment of their monthly salaries becomes another ‘Work House’ in Oliver Twist story. The young graduates out of frustrations,

have abandoned the popular UBE programme for Okada work and other petty activities that could keep the body and soul of these vibrant youths together.

In conclusion therefore, the prospects of implementing better administrative practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> century education can be brightened in Nigeria if the current trend of state and local government interventions in the name of UBEC and SUBEC in the provision of school teaching and learning faculties, supervision of instruction, prompt payment of staff emoluments, provision of children friendly schools etc are maintained in the present democracy. However the challenges of implementing better administrative practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> century can also be reduced to the barest minimum if the country could consider for appropriate implementation the recommendation of Lamorde the onetime EFCC Chairman, who postulated thus:

*Government must start today, as tomorrow is too late, to re-orientate the nation. Education must be deliberately orchestrated as the most cherished ideology of government. Government at all levels must take the society back to the seventies when member of the acidic community are well-respected. Apart from creatively rewarding excellence in the sector, saboteurs of the sector must also be treated with the big stick. The "carrot and stick" approach must be strictly enforced. If financial crimes are bad enough and capable of crippling our economy thereby necessitating the establishment of the EFCC, education crimes are worst off and should warrant the setting up of an education crimes commission. The education crimes commission ought to precede the EFCC because knowledge comes before finance...*

The way forward in realizing the most simple way of the implementation of better administrative practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> century could be align with the opinions of Dr. Alabi, who posit thus;

*"in as much as it is understandable that government is saddled with a gargantuan responsibly of providing and maintaining infrastructures for the rapidly growing population it is pertinent to observe that the countries that got it right were no different from Nigeria. No country even the developed economies ever had enough resources to work with..."*

This means that the government, the private individuals, other stake holders in education, NGOs etc, must all meet on the drawing board once again to chat the way forward for better and enduring ECCE best practices in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and in line with recommendation that this paper shall suggest hereunder.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that for virile and bright prospects in the implementation of better administrative practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> century and in order to reduce the challenges of implementing better administrative practices of ECCE in 21<sup>st</sup> century government, private partnership in education, stakeholders, Non Governmental agencies etc should:

- Fund and organize the primary school system, by ridding it of mediocre that is not currently helping the sector. This they can do ensuring that while the old ones leave the system, the new ones entering should be well scrutinized and motivated to be proud to there.
- In-service training, seminars and symposiums should regularly be provided for teachers in the sector to keep them abreast of educational best practices and administrative acumen of the current times.
- War against indiscipline should be reawakened in the system and teachers with their pupils should be made accountable for their acts of misdemeanor in their different categories. This will promote seriousness and hard work amongst the staff and pupils.
- Finally, administrators should one a while be rotated and drawn from staff of the various ministries of education in the three tiers. This will improve competitive spirit and advance administrative practices in primary schools and ECCE in the country.

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