

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Visionary leaders who are desirous of leaving progressive legacies for themselves and members of their state mainly do so through education particularly early childhood education. Early childhood education is functionally instrumental for the development of the human capital of a state, as it lights up the activities of a people by serving as entry point for transforming a people and their state. Unfortunately, the aura of progressive revolution that early childhood education receives in other climes terribly dims in Nigeria as she merely plays supervisory and oversight functions. The responsibility to provide early childhood education in Nigeria lies in the hands of private investors who run such institutions as capitalist institutions for profit, resulting in many Nigerians not affording to send their children to early childhood education institutions. Using the philosophical method, this paper establishes that Nigeria's supervisory and oversight functions in early childhood education has implications for patterns of social mobility, resource distribution, access to social goods, stability and patterns of national development of Nigeria. The paper suggests to the Nigerian government to adopt early childhood education as a measure for equalising opportunities, to take over all existing early childhood education institutions in Nigeria or alternatively support and provide incentives to private investors who have been rendering this service to enhance efficiently service delivery. The paper predicts that where something serious is not done, the possibility of using early childhood education as a platform for achieving social justice will remain a mirage in Nigeria.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Education, Philosophical analysis

Introduction

In recent times, there is much awareness that solid investment in human capital is the best alternative line of action to take for any state or a people that is eager and desirous of development. This line of thinking has been recognized and acknowledged in developed, developing and underdeveloped states of the world. Part of the philosophy that guides this

thinking that has become universal revolves around the consensus that human beings are at the centre or heart of any genuine national development and not skyscrapers, super highways and modern scientific and technological wonders and innovations. Most modern scientific and technological wonders and innovations have potentials to collapse distances,

remove barriers in transportation and communications and enhance the exploration of the resources of the earth. It is these potentials of scientific and technological innovations that have made the 21st century unique. Yet whatever accompanying development that innovations in science and technology may bring about, the existence of scientific and technological breakthroughs or wonders are dependent on the level of literary and sophistication of human beings.

The centrality of human beings in development discourse has gathered unprecedented and phenomenal force and has been expanded on all four cardinal points in some other ways. Whatever quantum of infrastructure any state has is for the comfort of human beings in that state. The possibility of any infrastructure to exist in any state owes its root and origin to the receptive and creative ingenuity of human beings whose creative thinking processes result or bring about the design and final translation of such ideas into reality. So, for any real development to occur or take place in any society, there must be reasonable and substantial improvements in the quality of life of human beings, whose actions and activities are at the foundations of development. We must remember that the availability of sophisticated and state of the art infrastructure without human beings who are to maintain and use such sophisticated and state of the art infrastructure makes no sense at all. In recognition of all these, there is a vigorous drive for real investment in the development of human beings and the instrument and institution the society uses in shaping human beings

for this empowerment, civilizing and moralising responsibility is education.

Providing education to human beings in a state is one of the features upon which a state and its rulers can be counted as being responsible and consequently operating in line with the requirements of a modern state in the 21st century. A state that provides education to its citizens can be said to have laid the foundations for the greatness of the citizens and the greatness of the state (Aminigo & Nwaokugha 2011:169-170). Such educational provisions can enhance the level of logical clarity of the citizens, can emancipate and empower the citizens by opening many windows of opportunities in their lives, can enhance their civic and democratic participation and above all can make them become acceptable members of their society in addition to making them easy to rule but extremely difficult to marginalize. Any state that fails to provide her citizens opportunities to acquire education can be said to have denied her citizens their basic and fundamental human rights. Any state where the citizens' basic and fundamental human rights to education have been denied, such citizens have been greatly impaired so much that their chances of survival have been compromised. The impressions of this denial can be visible throughout the period of life of such citizens.

Because education is this critical, central and fundamental in the chances of citizens of a state to survive, there are conscious efforts by responsible leaders to provide education for both sexes and for every member of the society across every age

irrespective of religious and cultural affiliations, parental socio-economic background, political and philosophical ideology, etc. In recent times, a group that has been described as being seriously and critically in need of education are children in the age brackets of 0-5 years. In the education circle providing education to children between the ages of 0-5 years is called early childhood education and it is strongly believed that providing education to children of 0-5 years of age is a worthy and worthwhile investment that the young ones that are so invested in and the state can maximally reap the dividends of such investment. Such education for the young ones make long lasting impressions in their psyche so much that the footprints of their participation in education early in their life can still manifest throughout the duration of their life. As the saying goes “catch them young”, most states have capitalized on this to lay new foundations for inculcating civic mindedness, democratic participation and critical thinking skills that can be exploited in repositioning and taking the state to the next level.

There are a plethora of advantages that individuals and the state that make early childhood education a norm can benefit and on the other hand initiating policies that can make citizens to key into the global trends in early childhood education has not been easy and may not be a bed of roses (Nwaokugha & Kalu, 2014) in as much as Nigeria is concerned. This suggests that there are issues that need to be subjected to the scrutiny of philosophical analysis in discussions on early childhood education in Nigeria.

In short, there is this universally accepted assumption that childhood level is a fundamental stage in which any society or state that is conscious of instilling in its citizens the hunger and curiosity for patriotism, nationalism, skills of critical and creative thinking, civil and civic consciousness, principles of acquiring the skills of statecraft, activism for justice and observance of the right behaviours in the conduct of the affairs of a state that can culminate into desirable positive changes that have potentials to produce maximum results for the qualitative development of a state. Achieving all the above are possible if all such efforts are started and initiated at the early childhood education level.

The analysis focuses on ascertaining if the principles of egalitarianism, public welfare, equity, equality, social justice, human rights, etc that are associated with early childhood education in other climes are the same in Nigeria. Such philosophical analysis or clarification may be expositions on political, economic, religious, cultural, and moral issues in which if no serious philosophical analysis is done may continue to hinder or prevent Nigerians from benefitting from global trends in early childhood education. Therefore this paper analytically and philosophically beam searchlights on early childhood education in Nigeria with a view to encouraging greater participation of Nigerians at this crucial level of education.

The philosophical method of enquiry is used. An academic undertaken or exercise according to Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016) is said to use the philosophical

method of enquiry if it uses speculative, analytic and prescriptive or normative methods. An idea which speculation invokes as a method of philosophical enquiry is that the degree of coherence or logical consistency or connectivity between ideas in a proposition is the strength and foundation upon which expositions or ideas contained in such a proposition can be accepted or believed to be true and correct. What this reveals is that the orderly sequence in the presentation of a proposition or an argument is the basis upon which any one can be convinced to accept such a proposition or argument as being reasonable and authentic. Taken this way, a speculation is accepted to be correct if a conclusion arrived at in any argument logically derives from the premise of the argument. What this points hand to is that speculation as a method of philosophical enquiry is basically and fundamentally interested in systematically building up ideas and semantically and aesthetically situating how one idea is intricately and inherently linked or connected to the others. This accounts for why speculation according to Miller (1996) is a key tool in mankind's rigorous and vibrant quest for knowledge across disciplines. To be successful in the expedition called speculation, the researcher who is receptive to using it heavily relies on logic and effective use of language in order to make sense or sound sensible.

Analysis as a method of philosophical enquiry concerns itself with establishing the various meanings that can be

associated with terms, concepts and propositions. What had been said above can be translated to mean that the primary reason for analysis revolves on a voyage or quest for meaning. The focus of analysis on meaning according to Anagwo, Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2020:4) is predicated on the fact that issues of conflicts, disagreements, violence or confrontations in any of their ramifications can be reduced to their barest minimum if meanings are presented in clear terms, without any form of ambiguity. The analyst begins his analysis by breaking down his terms, concepts and propositions into the smallest units that constitute such terms concepts and propositions and logically and systematically demonstrate how each term, concept and proposition is linked or connected to the other. The analyst heavily relies on logic and language in his business of analysis and both logic and language function to illuminate what Hirst and White (2000) call the relationship between language and reality or word and the world.

On the other hand, prescription as a method of philosophical enquiry concerns itself with the establishment of criteria or standards for judging values or the establishment of grounds for making prescriptive value judgements. There are numerous advantages that philosophical research methods avail researchers and the knowledge industry and Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016:421) emphasize this when they write that philosophical research method:

Affords freedom and opportunity that invites, motivates and challenges researchers to venture into various problem areas across disciplines. By this feature, researchers are availed platforms, which in addition to tackling diversified subject matters also promote progress in the form of extending and breaking new frontiers of knowledge...philosophical research method is not restrictive and consequently does not impoverish researchers...it rather contributes in ground breaking breakthroughs in the knowledge industry.

Any academic exercise with roots in the philosophical method of enquiry usually starts with detailed clarifications of key concepts in the work and we consequently do same, starting with the concept of early childhood education.

Early Childhood Education

In most societies of the world, the official age for admission or enrolment into the primary school is usually at the age of six. This age of six is symbolic as it is taken that the learner has reached or attained his or her sixth birthday. But this is not the case in early childhood education as there are fundamental needs for education to be provided to the child prior to his or her official age of enrolment into primary one. It could make an interesting question to ask why hurry to start up the education of a learner when he or she has not attained the age statutorily provided for by law and plausible answers to this could situate or locate the recognition of the instrumentality of education in the general wellbeing of all humanity in which people within the brackets of early childhood are one.

Focusing educational provision on person who fall within the age brackets of early childhood learners can also derive impetus from the United Nations Universal

Declaration of Human Rights in its article 26, which recognizes education as a human rights and built into this recognition is the fact that education as a social provision is good for every one irrespective of the age, gender, social group or socio-economic status, religious affiliations or political ideologies of citizens. The recognition that education is a human rights derives impetus from the awareness that providing education to a people is the hub and foundation upon which any meaningful development of a people and their state depends. The background of the above recognition and status of education as recognized by the United Nations is that education is so critical and fundamental in the life of every citizen so much that anyone who is denied the opportunities of claiming his rights to education has terribly been impaired and once such impairment has occurred in the life of an individual, it may not be so easy for such individual to access and explore opportunities that may come his or her way later in future.

This liberating and emancipatory status of education has reached levels where both the state and the citizens are aware of its potentials and instrumentality in the well of the individual and the wellbeing of the

state especially when well focussed and targeted at early childhood learners. The point above is well captured by Anagwo,

Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2020:2) when they write that:

In recent times, the trend in the development of citizens of states as well as the development of the state through education is best achieved when the state steps down and focuses its educational provision on learners in the age bracket of 0-5 popularly called early childhood education.

In what can be its simplest conception early childhood education is a consciously formulated educational provision for learners aged 0-5 years or educational provision for learners who are yet to attain their sixth birthday. It is instructive to note that two things occur or take place in discussions that are focused on early childhood education and those two things are care and education. The awareness of the existence of care and education in early childhood educational provisions may have accounted for why Nwaokugha (2016:244) writes that early childhood

education is a conglomeration of a variety of activities that take place simultaneously for enhancing the growth and development of the child including accelerating his or her responses to education and learning as well as events in his environment. These two activities that occur in early childhood education institutions naturally occur in an order where one occurs before the other. Obviously, care occurs before education in the circle of early childhood education. According to Nwaokugha (2016:266), care in the context of early childhood education invokes a meaning that revolves around:

Surveillance of the adult over the young or infant for purposes of given or providing him or her protection, security and keeping him or her protection, security and keeping him or her away or safe from danger and care in early childhood education falls within a lower order where the target is to guide, assist and nurture individuals (infants) into internalising basic habits for routine activities for personal upkeep.

Following the observation above, the remark by Hayes (2007) that care is custodial in tone can be a perfect truth especially when learners in early childhood institutions who benefit from care services are those between the ages of 0-3. Issues people should take note of in discussions of care in early childhood education is that educating learners at this level is more complex and problematic,

possibly because the age of learners hardly enable the care giver to interact with those under his or her custody and care givers can function with or without formal qualification.

On the other hand, learners who benefit from education in early childhood education institutions are those aged 4-5 years. What this reveals is that education

in early childhood education institutions comes between care and the learner's entry into the primary school. Here the structure is more purposeful as it is targeted at older children who had celebrated their sixth

birthday and consequently had gained admission into primary school. Because this level in early childhood education is as presented above, Nwaokugha (2016:247) writes that it

Is a higher order activity that is consciously designed to enhance and promote continuous learning in individuals in addition to enabling individuals indulge and creatively participate in abstract and critical thinking so as to respond to the problems of their immediate and external environment.

What has been said above means that teachers at this level of early childhood education according to Anagwo, Aminigo

and Nwaokugha (2019:10) have dual responsibilities, namely:

...to prepare the early childhood learners for a smooth and peaceful transition or adjustment as the children prepare to enter primary school and to stimulate or light up the enthusiasm, zeal and curiosity in the early childhood learners to learn in the primary school.

The revelation means that a teacher at this level must be professionally certificated and professionally competent in order to be effective to perform at this stage. This is where scholars who maintain that what obtains at ages 4 and 5 in early childhood education confers a superior status to education than what happens at care level can be said to be one hundred percent correct. This may account for while Gibbons (2007) sees the two as social constructions and why Nwaokugha (2016:248) writes that both care and education travel on the same road but maintain different speed rhythm, depth and more importantly do not target the same destination.

According to Kiebel (1996) and Nwaokugha (2016) organizations and individuals who show interest in providing

early childhood education services to the members of the society go by different names such as crèche, day care, pre-nursery, nursery, pre-primary, headstart and kindergarten. Under whatever name in which any one chooses to operate, what unites all of them or what they have in common is that they provide services rendered to a definite and identifiable group of persons who are yet to attain their sixth birthday and following the law are yet to be officially offered admissions into primary school.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) has settled to refer to the level of educational provision that focuses on early childhood education in Nigeria as pre-primary education. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), pre-primary education is the education

given in an educational institution prior to entering primary school where the purpose includes to:

- a) Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
- b) Prepare the child for the primary level of education
- c) Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, the market, offices, etc)
- d) Inculcate social norms
- e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.
- f) Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit
- g) Learn good habits, especially good health habits, and
- h) Learn the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play. (FGN, 2004:11).

Globally, early childhood education is associated with being at the root of progressive revolutions for the fast development of the human capital of a state. It is an instrument in the hands of a state for the introduction and implementation of policies that can radicalize and transform a state and its

people from the points of irrelevance to points of relevance. This accounts for why early childhood education is a force to reckon with, a rally point and a receptive concept in the hands of leaders who are desirous and conscious of adding value to the quality of lives of their citizens. No wonder every effort to explore and translate concepts whose focus are on translating abstracts ideas into reality find expressions through early childhood education programmes.

What all these illuminate is that early childhood education is a sure bet for kickstarting in learners the curiosity for early indulgence in claiming their natural rights to learn and triggering in a state the thirst, curiosity and inquisitive spirit that can ignite a push for the actualization of the dreams of the state. Learners who start their quest for learning in the early childhood levels respond receptively to internal and external stimuli that come their way, including applying the skills of critical and analytic thinking in solving their individual problems and the problems of their state. One benefit that cuts across to learners who go through early childhood educational institutions which by implications extend to the state is that the habits learnt in early childhood cement and glue permanently in the psyche of the learners. This is forcefully emphasized by Anagwo, Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2020:3) when they write that:

As no one consciously learns to be left handed in old age, good behaviours that support and promote social justice that children learn or acquire during childhood or in early years of their development are likely to remain throughout the rest of their lives.

These welfare-based and egalitarian principles which leaders institute in their states through early childhood education such as social justice, human rights, sense of nationalism and patriotism, diversity, multiculturalism and respect for the dignity of the human person strongly engine blocks for the building of a state. These visions are achievable using early childhood education as a platform and any state that makes achievement of the concepts as a norm can be said to have attained all what it takes to be great in all ramifications. However, considerations that require a serious second look especially in Nigeria is a conscious self-evaluation of our practice of early childhood education and a projection into the future on whether Nigeria's practice of early childhood education can lead Nigerian to the promise land. The promise land here being whether the possibility of translating, attaining and domesticating those concepts that make early childhood education the envy of all in other climes can be replicated following the way we handle early childhood education in Nigeria. What has been responsible for the various shortcomings? These will constitute the bulk of the philosophical analysis.

Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: A Philosophical Analysis

Events as they occur in the education industry in Nigeria stimulate so much surprises, interests and excitements and these surprises, interests and excitements open themselves up as opportunities and challenges. It is plausible to describe the above scenario in education as one of a summersault. Historians of education

acknowledge that individuals and private investors were the first to venture into the business of education in Nigeria. With time, the individuals and the private investors were stripped of this responsibility on the ground that "education should be provided by the state and the state alone" (Nwaokugha 2015:71). Not too long after the above decision was taken, the Nigerian state according to Nwaokugha (2015:71) revised itself by not only wooing the private sector to participate in education but also calling on the private sector to lead the way for the introduction of innovations, growth and expansion of the education industry". These circle of decisions place education under surveillance in addition to making education a state activity in which politics is played upon and consequently a victim of various policy summersaults of the state.

One tier of educational provision in which policy summersault is well pronounced is the early childhood education level. Among scholars in education like Odigie (2016: 169), there is a consensus that early childhood education is a critical level that the total success of any one's educational pursuit depends. Many reasons account for the aura of positive compliments on early childhood education and one that mostly comes to mind is that it smoothen entry and transition of the learner into the primary school. Outside the above, there is an overriding guiding principle under whose cover early childhood education gains unprecedented popularity and will continue to gain popularity. It is the philosophical altruism that the better the

foundation the better the structure. The image this invokes is that how sound a learner is from the scratch or the soundness of a learner from the scratch can produce long lasting effects in the academic pursuit of the learner.

The awareness of the members of the society on the potentials of early childhood education and the revelation that this tier of education is unexplored has made it lucrative investment destinations especially by the private investors. Placing side by side the compliments early childhood education receives and the

practice of early childhood education in Nigeria, one is strongly convinced that the best the situation presents is one that honestly needs the scrutiny of philosophical analysis.

A critical discussion on the attitudes of Nigeria and Nigerians to early childhood education can best start with the position of the Federal Government of Nigeria to that sector of education. The position of the Federal Government of Nigeria on early childhood education is clearly stated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004:11) in these words:

The responsibility of the government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary 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.

The position of the Federal Government of Nigeria on early childhood education as stated above is explicitly made clearer by Asodike and Abdulrahman (2013:334) when they write that:

Issues related to early childhood education in Nigeria at present is not appreciated as national responsibility. There is no gainsaying the fact that Government has not demonstrated a serious commitment to education of children between the ages 0-3 years and 3-5 years.

What seem to be a blunt presentation of the stand of the Federal Government of Nigeria on early childhood education in Nigeria is presented by Nwaokugha (2016:240) when he says that “care and early investment in educational development of the child is terribly neglected by the Nigerian state”. It is possible this neglect has potentials to influence the patterns of social mobility, patterns of resource distribution and access to social goods, stability and

patterns of national development in the near future.

What the above remarks attempt to implicate is that the involvement and responsibility of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards early childhood education is minimal, so minimal that one can locate or situate it within supervisory and oversight functions. The acknowledgement of the Federal Government of Nigeria that it merely

renders supervisory and oversight functions to early childhood education in Nigeria means that private investors are those providing foundational level of education to Nigerian and this is not without consequences and implications for Nigeria's national development and sense of commitment and responsibility of the government of Nigeria.

This development has obvious negative implications, part of it is that a serious and committed state as Nigeria claims she is in matters of education can start to demonstrate her claims by corresponding words with actions through providing quality education to Nigerians at the foundational stage. Anyone who judges Nigeria by her own words especially when Nigeria acknowledges that her involvement in early childhood education is for purposes of supervisory and oversight functions can come to a conclusion that such proclamations are nothing other than open deceit. One who is sincere in what to achieve later in life can show serious commitments to what happens at the beginning or at the start because it is only when a thing or a practice is gotten right at the start that any other development that is dependent upon the first can produce good results later in future. One can fault Nigeria's supervisory and oversight functions which it claims to be rendering to early childhood education especially against the background of promoting "the training of qualified pre-primary teachers in adequate number". Nwaokugha (2016:252) slams the Federal Government's claim as indicated above as zero because "quacks dominate among teachers who teach in early childhood

education institutions and teacher education institutions are silent on producing expert to teach, supervise and manage issues at that level". In fact, the trend of events in most early childhood education institutions is one in which they have "become employment destinations for Nigerians who claim they attended universities or post-secondary educational institutions but never had certificates" (Nwaokugha, 2016:252).

It is possible for the sake of analysis for, a curious observer to take a critical and realistic look at patterns of recruitment of staff in early childhood education institutions with a view to determining if the government can influence the recruitment of teacher in early childhood education institutions that exist in structures that are not meant for educational purposes, and where the interest of the private investor who owns a school is on profit, can he or she in the event of availability of trained teachers recruit them in the right number for his school? As a business outfit, the power to recruit staff lies with the owner of the school and the ability to recruit the right number of teachers depends on the profit the owner of the school makes. The point is that the aura of a social service may be overtaken by the desire for profit.

Anyone with the least sense of analysis can easily understand or come to the conclusion that Nigeria's unwillingness to invest in early childhood education when it recognizes the instrumentality of the sector in the overall educational development of the Nigerian child can be government's effort to consciously allow the private

sector to be in charge of education at the level. True private investors dominate in the ownership of education at this foundational level and this development is not without consequences.

The desire to make profits and not to provide essential social service is the motive for the involvement of investors in early childhood education. The attraction of investors to invest in the early childhood education sector is due to the huge opportunity the sector avails investors. In axiological terms, there is no parent that is not desirous of giving his son or daughter the best foundations upon which he or she can excel in his or her academic pursuit and in economic terms, early childhood education is a market waiting for investors to explore. The economic potentials associated with early childhood education can be exposed in this revelation by Nwaokugha (2015:75) where he quotes Nigeria Television Authority Network News of September 2013 as reporting that 10.5 out of 31 million out of school in sub-Sahara Africa are in Nigeria. This figure signals doom for the future of Nigeria and consequently should be an issue of serious concern to any responsible state.

One trend which the business spirit among investors in early childhood education has foistered, introduced and promoted in Nigeria's educational system is the practice of passing every student in examinations. In other words, no student fails any examinations, repeats or drops out of school as a result of not performing academically. The underlying issue here is that learners in schools owned by private

investors pass their examinations with ease, not on the basis of quality instruction or superior infrastructure but through some fraudulent and sharp practices whose motive is to prove to parents and members of the public that their patronage was not in vain. Under this circumstance quality and contributions of such learners to national development is sacrificed.

Because early childhood education institutions are now run for profits, the majority of Nigerians can no longer afford to send their children to such schools. This means that early childhood education institutions in Nigeria are fast becoming elitist. That early childhood education institutions are elitist and consequently symbol statuses suggest that unconsciously Nigerians are being stratified into camps that may have positive or negative implications for access to the scarce resources that the Nigerian state can afford. It is possible that the opportunity to access such scarce resources can be open to a selected minority due to their sound foundations brought about by their participation in early childhood education and the majority can be left out with nothing other than antagonistic relations which may turn out to be a source of instability and a threat to national security and national development. One negative development that is sure to happen in any state where some citizens have a headstart above the others in terms of good foundations for educational pursuit is inequality. This inequality occasioned by historical antecedents of what had happened in early childhood education is a time bomb waiting to explode. Part of the strategy to avert this time bomb is for

government to compulsory adopt early childhood education as a measure for equalising opportunities.

Admitted that early childhood education institutions are run as business outfits by investors where parents and members of the society pay huge fees and charges, investors hardly recruit the right calibre of personnel. To compound matters teachers in early childhood education institutions hardly receive any living wage and Nwaokugha (2015:79) is right in the reaction from teacher that follows when he observes that a percentage of teachers in private schools (early childhood education inclusive) are birds of passage who anticipate leaving their employment with time to more lucrative areas". All these happen and are still happening to the foundation level of the education industry in Nigeria. It can be very difficult to contemplate that there can be teachers on standby in early childhood schools who can assume duties in the event of a teacher withdrawing his or her services in an establishment that is run for profit. What this means is that learners can remain for weeks or months without a teacher to teach them and only God knows the quality of foundation or ideas that can result to development that learners can generate. Again neither the state nor parents monitor effectively the quality of instruction learners receive in early childhood education institutions in Nigeria.

It is self-evident that the future of any state where the foregoing obtains can be bleak as all the transformation, empowerment and emancipation that come with education can remain a distant dream. The

aspiration to use early childhood education as a platform for making social justice a norm in the society may remain a mirage where the majority of the citizens do not have access to early childhood education. Any state that is conscious of the instrumentality of early childhood education in enthrone welfare and egalitarian policies must make early childhood education inclusive and accessible by all the citizens (Osaat and Anagwo 2018:276).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Early childhood education is any educational provision in a formal setting for the young learners prior to their sixth birthday or admission into the primary school. The age bracket of learners who benefit from early childhood education are children from the ages of 0-5 years. By its structure early childhood education consists of care, precisely for learners under the ages of 0-3 years and education for those under the ages of 4-5 years. Part of what educators target to develop in learners at this phase is to provide care, protection and security for children whose parents are at work, farm or office, inculcate in the children good sanitary habits and to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school among others. Investment in early childhood education has become a global trend and what justifies it is the recognition that children are a part of humanity and consequently are supposed to benefit or partake in the sense of right, sense of awareness, sense of justice, sense of humanism, sense of equity, sense of fairness, sense of empowerment, emancipation and sense of

critical consciousness that education brings about.

A guiding principle in the education of the young prior to entering primary school is to lay solid and sound foundations that can potentially sustain the interest of the learner especially in the learner's drive or endeavour to enter primary school and consequently sustain such spirit in the entire educational pursuit of the learners. This is premised on the assumption that the better the foundation, the better the structure. Most states the world over take education at this stage very serious because of its potentials and promises in being instrumental in influencing positive changes and in impressing into the minds of the young ones the desire of the state to institute or initiate egalitarian, human rights, norm of social justice, democracy, civil and civic mindedness, tolerance or any other empowerment or humane concepts that a state may deem appropriate to introduce.

Regrettably, the Nigerian state only exercises supervisory and oversight functions. Educational provision at the early childhood level is private sector driven where the motive is for profit and not as an important social service. As an undertaken with profit motives, early childhood education in Nigeria is basically elitist; hence, can be affordable only by the rich.

One can be correct to say that a state that exercises supervisory and oversight functions in a sector that is fundamental and critical in bringing about a turnaround in the general wellbeing of a state and its people may not be sincere to itself and its

people as it may be losing grip of core and fundamental areas through which good governance and improvement in the quality of life of the people can make inroads in the state. Ideally, a concept that is loaded with humane and egalitarian principles such as early childhood education should be and ought to be an area a responsible state can focus on in view of the empowerment, liberation, emancipation, etc that people and their state can derive from it. That Nigeria exercises supervisory and oversight functions in early childhood education implicates and stimulates a sense of lop-sidedness where a state ignores or neglects what it should provide or what it should take as primary.

Early childhood education as a global trend has come to stay and Nigeria can be guided to do the needful so as to catch up with the global train. Consequently, some suggestions for improving the state of affairs in early childhood education in Nigeria are deemed necessary.

It can be suggested to the government of Nigeria to completely take over all early childhood education institutions in Nigeria in full and not continue to play its present supervisory and oversight functions in a sector that is critical in turning matters around in Nigeria's interest. When Nigeria takes over all early childhood education institutions, it can facilitate the catch them young mentality where the foundations laid can, in addition to enhancing the learner's educational pursuit beyond the primary school also help in driving the mind of the children in directions that the government may need. It is possible that

the catch them young mentality can address many issues of child trafficking, child labours and other anti-social practices that bring national disgrace and national embarrassment to Nigeria. In fact, where Nigeria takes over all the early childhood education institutions and makes attendance in them compulsory, a new window of opportunity for achieving social justice may have been opened.

As educating every Nigerian is a responsibility that Nigeria owes every Nigerian and this responsibility has shifted to private investors, Nigeria can make conscious efforts to support these private investors who render this crucial service that Nigeria has refused to render. The cry and lamentation that the quality of services provided by the private investors has been below standard can receive a boost when they receive some support from the Nigerian state.

Part of why many Nigerians that ought to be admitted into early childhood education institutions are not there is the level of hardship and poverty of their parents, a development that results in parents' inability to pay the high charges by private investors. Efforts of the government to provide parents with some economic palliative can revise the trend. In other words, this trend can change when parents have something to do. In fact, any measure that targets improving the lot of children that fail to address the needs of parents must fail before arrival.

As a way of ensuring that there is adequate manpower for early childhood education institutions, government can direct all teacher education institutions to

compulsorily mount early childhood education teacher education programmes. When this is done, government can come up with a legislation that can ban quacks and non-professionals in early childhood education from teaching learners in that sector. Suggestions that quacks who ply their trades in early childhood education institutions should be stopped when there are no qualified hands can amount to a suicide mission and the deliberate and conscious killing of early childhood education in Nigeria.

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