

Early Childhood Care and Education: Revolutionary and Functional Foundations for National Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Investments in human capital are the right directions for national development as those invested in today become the carrier of the genes that trigger the national development of the state and the right foundation for achieving this vision is through investments in early childhood care and education. Early childhood care and education is beneficial in many ways: learners who go through it develop receptive dispositions towards learning and education, in addition to quickly internalizing behaviours that are conducive and supportive of robust and vibrant academic pursuits and achievements. Regrettably early childhood care and education in Nigeria is exclusively in the hands of the private sector where its provision has become commercialized and elitist as not many parents can afford to pay the fees for their children. Using the philosophical methodology, this paper discusses the place of early childhood care and education in the national development of states particularly Nigeria and attributes Nigeria's neglect and lackadaisical attitudes towards early childhood care and education to be the root cause of Nigeria's national development predicaments and challenges. The paper makes recommendations, part of which is that the Nigerian state should adopt early childhood care and education as a

means of implementing inclusive and social justice policy and that private sector investors who provide essential service that government ought to provide like Early childhood care and education should be handsomely compensated among others.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, National development, Functional Foundations, Social justice and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Any community, society or state that is desirous of a sustainable future must make substantive investments in the education of her younger ones in addition to creating and developing a vision of such anticipated and envisaged community, society or state in the minds of the younger ones. Such vision of a sustainable future, can only be possible when the younger ones chart a road map and internalize the vision put in place by the elders and translating such into reality is one hundred percent dependent on the type of world and practices the elders leave for the younger ones. This points in the direction that communities, societies and states must make quality investments in the education of the younger people if the communities; societies and states dream of the future is to be achieved. Without any iota of doubt, real and genuine investments in the younger

ones are necessary conditions for raising the hope of the present generations in humanities' quest for bequeathing a sustainable and better future that can reflect and incorporate higher standards of living that are higher than the one being enjoyed by the present generation. In fact, investments in the younger ones hold the key for unlocking the numerous challenges of the ever complex and ever challenging, perplexing and changing 21st century and beyond. This is where the remark by Federico Mayor, Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) deserves special commendation when he writes that "the world's hope for the future rests with today's young people and their readiness to take up the challenges of the coming century". Instructively, this points in the direction that any investment in the education of the younger ones must be robust, creative, critical and must be of a higher quality in addition to such education being alive and receptive to addressing basic and fundamental needs of the society. What this means by implication is that such education must trigger and stimulate in younger ones functional skills, attitudes, metaphysical and axiological reorientations that can enable younger ones live active, productive and fulfilled lives in a world where knowledge economy is fast becoming not only a norm but the dictator and foundation of the rhythm of the survival of institutions and citizens of the state.

Any education provided to the people that meets all the requirements as stipulated above must surely guarantee quality human capital development and by extension national development. This is the focus and aspiration of states and the justification for the repositioning and priority that is given to early childhood care and education across the globe. The priority that is given to early childhood care and education derives justifications from multiples angles: any sound theoretical reflections coupled with robust observations of the growth and development of man reveals that early years

of any human being and what happens to any human being within this period is critical and foundational in determining and laying foundations for what the individual becomes all through the rest of the life of the individual. The benefits of investments in early childhood care and education is so enormous and phenomenal to the individual, parents, society and the sustainable development of the state. This awareness on the positive developmental effects of early childhood care and education is one reason why it is at the heart or centre of robust critical investment decisions and reflections of states that are conscious of their future. Responsible states that are desirous and conscious of introducing welfare measures and policies for improving the quality of lives of their citizens especially those that reflect and incorporate social justice simply embrace early childhood care and education as a formidable and reliable platform for achieving such lofty objectives. (Nwaokugha & Ndimele (2018). Where quality early childhood care and education is provided, its dividends to the individual, society and the state leave indelible impressions across all areas ranging from economic, environmental, political, hygiene, health, moral and social dimensions that carry the vectors and seals of developments. It is an open secret that those younger ones who are denied early childhood care and education experience manifest terrible and phenomenal deficits that impair their general developments and adjustment mechanisms in all facets of their lives.

On the bases of these, it is correct to say that it is in the spirit of promoting early childhood care and education that world leaders through the United Nations drafted and ratified sustainable Development Goal 4.2 that target to "ensure all girls and boys have access to quality childhood development, care and primary education". Be this as it may, a worrisome trend or development and a cause for concern is that despite efforts to sensitize humanity on the need for quality investments in early childhood care and education, some

countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive are yet to give early childhood care and education the right attention that it deserves. It is on record that Nigeria is one notable country of the world where her younger ones who are supposed to benefit from early childhood care and education experiences do not gain such experiences or pass through that level of education and Nigeria is one country where the state is not directly involved in the provision of early childhood care and education, rather that level of education is tightly and ingloriously kept in the hands of the private sector, where the provision of early childhood care and education is commercialized in addition to being an elitist provision that not any Nigerians can afford.

Without any iota of doubt, this unfortunate development is disastrous and detrimental to the manpower development and human capacity building aspirations of Nigeria. In fact, any country that ignores to lay solid foundations in the education of her younger ones or fails to invest qualitatively in them may have automatically missed vital and fundamental foundations in that country's journey, vision and desire for national development. This study is specifically undertaken to create national and global awareness on how quality investments in early childhood care and education can turn out to be revolutionary and functional foundations for national development in Nigeria. This study is important as it has potentials to bring about positive transformations that can sensitize members of the society, institutions and the state on the need to make right investments namely, investing in the education of the younger ones, who naturally are the carriers of the genes that can blossom and flourish into development. On the other hand, creating awareness on the education of the younger ones is in line with challenging and sensitizing the state on core policy mandates of the state namely supporting and promoting welfare issues, social justice, respect for persons and equality of access and opportunity for all persons. The study

can contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge in the field of early childhood care and education as well as the national development of Nigeria.

In fact, the study has all it takes to create the right awareness for change of gear in adopting the right policy reforms whereby the government of Nigeria can revise or revisit its educational support and welfare policies of supporting learners' education at the tertiary levels which accommodates fewer persons while neglecting to support and provide education at the early and formative years that accommodates more persons. Creating awareness for revising this trend and stressing the importance of educating the younger ones through providing education at the formative and early years of the child can be more empowering as through such initiatives, such learners who benefit from early childhood care and education can navigate their ways with ease into the formal education system. In all, such strong foundation at the early stage in the lives of citizens is a sure investment with robust and phenomenal implications for national development.

The theoretical framework upon which this study is based upon is social constructivism. Social constructivism invokes a meaning that revolves around the fact that human beings are the principal actors and agents that produce, generate meaning, build and construct knowledge, developments that suggest that no knowledge is ready made or manufactured anywhere, rather that knowledge grows and develops out of human consciousness through interactions, dialogues, manipulations and communication that systematically and logically derive from the day to day experiences of persons with others and institutions in the society. The process through which social constructivism as a theory of knowledge construction survives and arrives at knowledge is robustly and vibrantly highlighted by Nwaokugha and Abiakwu (2024: 167) when they write that:

Social constructivism as a qualitative research paradigm works out best when the learner is actively engaged and committed to breaking new frontiers of knowledge, is committed to solving problems and responding to the demands of change, is desirous of collaborating with others as well as exploring and exhibiting the highest form of creative and critical thinking.

The study, methodologically is a philosophical research and philosophical researches make wave in the world of knowledge as appeal to it by scholars testify. According to Angadi (2019: 37), philosophical research is a qualitative type of research that is known for its ability in “the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period in a naturalistic setting to gain insight not possible using other types of research. In their own contribution to the subject matter of philosophical or qualitative research especially in the field of education, Ishtiaq and Naz (2024: 10) write that:

Qualitative research is often exploratory aiming to uncover new insights, perspectives and understanding within educational settings. Qualitative research in education involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, case studies and document analysis. The aim is to generate in-depth insights, explore meanings and understand the underlying processes that shape educational phenomena.

A more detailed focus on philosophical research methodology is presented by Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016) when they write that philosophical research methodology incorporates the use of speculation, analysis and prescription in a research or study. Speculation enjoys a robust and vibrant usage in man’s quest and search for knowledge and a thing of interest about it is that it is a term whose spread cuts across interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross disciplinary epistemological territories. What demonstrates the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross disciplinary nature of speculation is the fact

that the term can be applied in philosophy and its applied disciplines, social sciences and the natural science. As a demonstration of the multiples areas in which speculation can apply, Swedberg (2021:46) writes that the word speculation has two basic meanings: “It refers to risky but potentially very profitable economic activity, and it refers to the making of conjectures without firm evidence”. The above reveals that one meaning of the term in a particular context or discipline may not be its meaning in another context or discipline. In this article, we shall restrict ourselves to the second meaning of speculation as indicated above.

According to Nwaokugha and Keri-Frank (2023), speculation as a philosophical or qualitative research methodology, enjoys a robust institutional and scholarly attention as scholars and institutions have one or two things to say about it. Cambridge Dictionary (2017) defines speculation as “the activity of guessing possible answers to a question without enough information to be certain” while Oxford Dictionary (2017) says it is the “forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence”. To speculate according to Odour (2010:97) is to wonder, conjecture, guess or to hypothesize and many other scholars discuss speculation from other points of view or angles. Aminigo (1999) and Agulanna (2011) writes that speculation is an attempt to find logical coherence in an entire realm of thought. In their discussion of the subject matter of speculation, Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016: 421) write that “the foundation of this method of enquiry is that the soundness or reasonableness of any proposition can be established through its rootedness in the science of logic or the various orderly sequences that leads to a conclusion”. In the same line of thought like the other scholars above, Nwaokugha and Keri-Frank (2023:39) write that the modus operands of speculation as a philosophical or qualitative research methodology is:

One in which a scholar who is favourably disposed to using it builds up ideas and carefully, sequentially, systematically and

logically shows how one idea is logically and systematically related to the other ideas in the whole systems of ideas.

Relatedly, Nwaokugha and Wogonwu (2023:4) write that:

Any keen and insightful observer of the modus operandi of speculation can notice that the whole idea of speculation as a philosophical research methodology revolves around a sense of logical unity, logical coherence and logical clarity about a presentation that is the subject matter of a philosophical discourse.

As a methodology that is highly superlative on reflection, logical orderliness and clarification of concepts, terms and assumptions, the effectiveness and success of speculation as a philosophical research methodology heavily depends on logic, effective and convincing manipulation of language in establishing facts, clarifying assumptions and demonstrating rigour of thoughts so as to create meaning and effects so intended. This means repudiation of clumsiness and contradictions, but embracing sharp, logical and orderly presentation of facts are key features in any meaningful and effective speculation, so much that there must be a relationship between a conclusion and its premise.

It is important we sensitize humanity or scholars precisely on one key feature of speculation namely the role of speculation in the knowledge industry especially when it comes to breaking new frontiers in some aspects of reality that do not have ready made and definite answers yet make or exert some influence on man and his society. Across the globe or the knowledge industry to be precise, there are realities that at first are ultimately unknowable and such ultimately unknowable realities constantly stimulate some forms of curiosity in man and what fulfils this curiosity through rationally and reflectively triggering conscious attempts to know, understand and explain such realities in practically comprehensible ways is speculation. In fact, it has been established that the more one speculates, the more one is likely to

breakthrough frontiers of knowledge. This unique contribution of speculation is a foundational root in the breaking of epistemological frontiers as any breakthrough in knowledge definitely owes its roots or origin to speculation. This is highlighted by Swedberg (2021) when he writes that people speculate when faced with realities that are ultimately unknown to them. One can add that people speculate when they are curious to have access to fact and to established facts. In other words curiosity to know the unknown leads or causes people to speculate and this accounts for why metaphysical and axiological issues and topics particularly political philosophy, aesthetics, social philosophy, ethics and ethical issues are best handled using speculation and the speculative method.

There are justifications why metaphysical and axiological topics are the focal flashpoints of speculation and this is highlighted by Nwaokugha and Keri-Frank (2023:39) when they write that scholars who show interests in metaphysics and axiology critically examine realities as they presently exist, which may not be in order and through speculation present what they feel should be the case. In fact, Nwaokugha and Abiakwu (2024:167) put it slightly different when they write that metaphysical and axiological topics hardly yield themselves to a one size fits all interpretation as they are always changing in time and space. Language and its effective use in communicating ideas, thoughts and persuading the audience is key in any meaningful speculation.

The concern of analysis as a philosophical or qualitative research method is the critical examination of words, concepts, terms and proposition with the aim of making meaning explicit. This means clarification of ambiguities, contradictions, absurdities and revealing of whatever meanings that may be associated with words, concepts, terms and propositions is at the heart of analysis. The emphasis on clarification of meaning by analysts derives justifications from the fact that almost all misunderstanding and almost

all conflicts in human affairs owe their roots or origins to faulty presentation and faulty interpretations of ideas and facts and on the reverse side, all sources of happiness and harmonious living owe their roots to correct or right clarification of words, terms, concepts and propositions. On the basis of this, every analysis is targeted at the resolution of conflicts, contradictions, absurdities, ambiguities, disagreements or bringing to the barest minimum behaviours and actions that can trigger, promote or stimulate crisis. It follows that analysis as a method of philosophical or qualitative research is the foundation for understanding reality and developing skills for understanding clarity of thought.

Instructively, analysis is of two types namely conceptual and linguistic analysis. According to Nwaokugha and Abiakwu (2024:167). Conceptual analysis is that type of analysis that is done to ascertain whether the meaning that is attached to a word, term, concept or proposition represents what that word, term concept or proposition stands for while any analysis that is focused on ascertaining if the meaning ascribed to a sentence is actually what the sentence stands for is linguistic analysis.

In the 21st century with its numerous breakthroughs across disciplines and other areas of human endeavour, analysis as a method of philosophical research occupies a pre-eminent position as modern trends in the pursuit of knowledge has become analytical and Nwaokugha (2021:160) calls attention to this when he writes that:

The advantage of analysis is that through it, meanings are clarified and ambiguities are resolved and this clarification and resolution of ambiguities helps members of the society to amicably address, resolve and bring to the barest minimum the occurrence of conflicts, misunderstandings, disagreements, violent confrontations and instability – inducing behaviours that make peace elusive by threatening harmonious coexistence and progressive development of the society.

The mention of prescription as a methodology of carrying out philosophical research invokes a multiplicity of meanings ranging from conscious attempts to set standards for making prescriptive value judgment or judging values to what Nwaokugha (2021:102) calls making autonomous value statements on how an issue that has been the focus or subject matter of a philosophical discussion can be resolved so that all the wrongs noticed in the course of the discussion can be harmoniously addressed. Following the above frame of mind, Oduor (2010:97) succinctly says it all when he writes that “to prescribe is to recommend or to set down as a rule or a guide” and this simply means that recommendations and suggestions in researches and other serious presentations or scholarly works are good examples of prescription. Hence prescription is key in any research because it is the frame or hub that contains ingredients or possible lines of actions for solving or resolving the problems(s) that are addressed in a study or research. What this points hands to is that every study that is worth the name must make prescriptive value judgments. The above general observation apart, any scholar whose area of specialization is axiology, particularly social philosophy, political philosophy, aesthetics and ethics must make prescription part and parcel of the fundamental and foundational tool for success in attempt and drive to proffer solutions to the problems of the society and the reason and justification for this is provided by Nwoke & Nwaokugha (2024:59) when they write that “values are constantly changing with time and circumstance and such scholars respond to the various situations based on the turnout of events and developments in the affairs of man and the society”.

The philosophical research methodology that is adopted for this study is excellent and satisfactory because according to Nwoke & Nwaokugha (2024), every branch of knowledge benefits from philosophical reflections and its rigour of thoughts, in

which this particular study is no exception. In fact, in recent times, the philosophical research methodology has become the trending paradigm (Nwoke & Nwaokugha, 2024) and a destination of choice for scholars and researchers (Nwaokugha & Abiakwu 2024) as the methodology is credited with challenging scholars and researchers into initiating researches and studies that result in the breaking of new frontiers of knowledge. Nwaokugha & Abiakwu (2024:168) say it all when they discuss advantages of the use of the philosophical or qualitative research method in these words:

The philosophical research methodology is credited with widening scholars' and researchers' investigative skills, boosts researchers' and scholars' confidence level as researchers and scholars see academic issues as solvable and resolvable, promotes collaboration that results in the breaking of new frontiers of knowledge as through it researchers and scholars summon up courage to investigate areas of knowledge which ordinarily are unmentionable and uncontentable and finally as the use of the philosophical research methodology engineers epistemological revolution that triggers phenomenal breakthroughs in knowledge, man's quality of life receives quality improvements through opening of more opportunities for man to benefit from his investments in research and education.

A common feature which researches and studies that adopts the philosophical research methodology is known for is a detailed focus on the key terms and concepts under investigation and to this we now turn.

Early Childhood Care and Education

The level of attention that is given to education as a human rights and the right of everyone to have it has made early childhood care and education a focal flashpoint nationally and internationally and the fact that it has become a focal flashpoint has made it a subject matter of interests to scholars and institutions. To be expected of

a concept that attracts the attention of scholars and institutions like early childhood care and education is a plethora and multiplicity of definitions and possible differences in name, duration and differences in modes of operations in different states. Part of what may constitute the difference may be different people's and different societies' conceptions of what constitutes early childhood. According to Anees (2024:379) "early childhood refers to the period from birth to the age of eight" and there are scholars and countries of the world who categorize early childhood as ranging from birth to age 13 (Zaslow, Halle, Madill and Forry, 2024).

One feature that early childhood invokes is that its mention must be linked to an identifiable context such as, health, education or other areas. In this particular article, the mention of early childhood is strictly linked to the educational context. Anees (2024:379) writes that education of early childhood generally refers to the period from infancy to kindergarten, which is the most important period in the child's life. In their own contribution Anagwo, Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2020:4) write that early childhood education refers to any educational experience that is provided to the learner prior to his or her enrolment into the primary school. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) writes that early childhood/pre-primary education as used in the National Policy on Education is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school and it includes the crèche, the nursery, and the kindergarten. A more inclusive and comprehensive definition of early childhood care and education is provided by Ghosh (2024:7260) when he writes that:

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) often known as pre-primary or pre-school education, typically involves educational instructions given to children aged three to six years. ECCE refers to a wide range of programs that aim to promote the physical, cognitive and social

development of children before they start primary school.

Any careful observation and critical scrutiny of all the definitions above can situate the meanings of early childhood care and education as revolving around consciously packaged behaviour modification and behaviours changing arrangements that are targeted first at safeguarding and protecting the infant from harm and danger as well as providing basic and minimal educational instructions to the infants who are yet to be admitted or enrolled into the primary school. We have earlier pointed out that centres or institutions that provide care and education to learners before they are formally admitted or enrolled into primary school go by different names, crèche, day-care, pre-nursery, nursery, pre-primary, head-start, kindergarten (Nwaokugha, 2016), and in the same way, there is no universally accepted name for early childhood care and education institutions as in some countries, within countries there are different names for referring to early childhood care and education and one particular scholar or institution can use early childhood care and education (ECCE), early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood education and care (ECEC) to refer to centres and institutions that provide infants care and educational experiences prior to their entry into primary school.

Care and education activities for the infant in early childhood care and education initiatives is targeted at enhancing the physical, social, moral, emotional, psychological and cognitive development of the infant as well as promote and accelerate other dispositions that can make the child ready and receptive to learning. This means that early childhood care and education incorporates social welfare programmes and policies, which at first targets the betterment of the infant or the young in the state and by implication is a social justice mechanism for progressively rewriting the developmental trajectories or narratives of the state and humanity in general. Any state that is desirous of engineering a revolution in the

form of quality development must make the right investments in the education of its younger ones and early childhood care and education promises to be the best platform for achieving such inclusive and comprehensive human capacity building, manpower development and national development agenda.

What is done in early childhood care and education centres is so inclusive and comprehensive so much that Nwaokugha (2016:244) calls them a conglomerate of activities that take place simultaneously for enhancing the growth and development of the child. Be this as it may, the starting point is care, which Nwaokugha (2016:214) describes as the surveillance of the adult over the younger one or the infant for the purposes of giving or providing him or her protection, security and keeping him or her away or safe from danger. The preoccupation of the care giver or provider is to look after those in his or her custody and this means that care is targeted at guiding, assisting and nurturing the younger person into developing some basic habits. This accounts for why Hayes (2007) writes that care is custodial in tone due to the age of the people who are involved. What obtains in early childhood care and education centres or institutions is transitional where what is provided first is care before education. To this end, Nwaokugha (2016:246) identifies children from 0-3 years as the main beneficiaries of care services while those from the ages of 4-5 benefit from education. It is important we note that care givers or providers play crucial roles in the cognitive, social, moral, psychological and cognitive developments of learners under their custody and one dynamic and multipurpose instructional strategy care givers usually resort to in the effective discharge of their duties is play. In fact, effective use of play helps to trigger behavioural and friendly emotional dispositions in those in the care centres and institutions to quickly and receptively develop moral and social responsibilities that are conducive and supportive of their

cognitive development and receptivity to formal educational activities in the school.

Care and activities of care givers or care providers can come in a number of forms. According to Elliot (2006), parents who engage the services of care givers or care providers can negotiate with such persons, institutions or centres on different terms ranging from day long care, family day care, in home care, outside school hour care services, vacation care services and Zaslow et al (2024) add to the above when they subdivide care providers into centre-based providers and home based providers.

Different scholars have different ideas and views about what education stands for in the context of early childhood care and education. According to Urban (2009), education in early childhood education discourse invokes a meaning that revolves around formalized learning and teaching in school-like settings while Nwaokugha (2016:247) writes that education in early childhood care and education context;

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 external environment.

In the same way scholars have been critical of the difference between care and education in the context of early childhood care and education so much that Gibbons (2007) categorizes care to be inferior to education and in his conception and imagination, even anyone without any formal education can provide care services whereas this is not so with education. Care is usually provided for people whose age range from 0-3 whereas education in the early childhood care and education context primarily targets cultivating in the child (infant) the curiosity and enthusiasm to quickly make the right adjustments that can facilitate the child's meaningful embrace of learning prior to entering the primary school

and the age of 4 to 5 is usually the period for laying this foundation.

All said and done, early childhood care and education incorporates many practices and activities and when viewed very critically, makes case for an integrated approach or the collapse of one into the other as the activities and practices in early childhood education discourse travel on the same road but at the same, according to Nwaokugha (2016:248) maintains different speed, rhythm, depth and more importantly do not target the same destinations.

The Concept of National Development

Across societies, any discussion that is focused on the concept of national development is usually attractive to scholars and disciplines and part of why this is so is that many other concepts pop up for discussion whenever the focus is on national development. What has become a tradition in any genuine effort to discuss, interpret and understand national development is to subject the concept to analysis, including first discussing the concept of development. Development is an axiological and multi-dimensional concept that has at its centre changes that are favourable, humane and desirable in the affairs of man and institutions in his society. Because development is deep rooted in desirable changes, any move by the state or development experts to initiate development must not jeopardize, undermine or bring about detrimental consequences or effects to the citizens who should be the beneficiaries of the outcome of development. This means for anything to qualify as development, it must have the potential to trigger or bring about qualitative improvements in the quality of lives of the people in the form of such development initiatives or endeavours leading to the unfolding of the potentials of the people or providing lee-way upon which a people can have greater access to capital, resources and other opportunities in the state. From the above, it is an open secret that development is a people oriented

concept that prioritizes the welfare and the empowerment of the people.

The focus and priority of development on the welfare, liberation, emancipation and empowerment of the people has not escaped the attention of scholars. Efemini (2012) forcefully highlights this when he writes that development is man-centred, qualitatively transformatory and emancipatory and must have the capacity and potential to offer its beneficiaries choices for sustainable living or the ability to create and recreate themselves in sustainable forms while Ezewu (1991) hints that a state can be said to be well positioned on the development stake, radar, track or lane when her institutions are functional rather than dysfunctional.

There is a fact that is so foundational in the empowerment, liberation, welfare and emancipation of people in development discourse and this is that the process of development must liberate a people from ignorance, deprivation, marginalization and slavery. In the same way, reform and transform a people into becoming autonomous and free thinkers where the people can critically, autonomously and creatively indulge in independent thinking for themselves and through this way shun or resist manipulation in any of its manifestations.

This is instructive because genuine efforts that target development of a people must be initiated by a people themselves and not a process that can be initiated for them by outsiders. Eboh (1998) draws attention to this when she writes that development is therefore, not a datum from outside but it is rather something that a people evolves with. This is an important revelation and a pointer that national development of any state must be a consciously drafted and consciously driven state policy, which a state can progressively attain or pursue through any of the multifaceted indexes for attaining national development. To this end Ezewu (1991) writes that national development is the level of attainment by a nation through the performances and efficiency of her

social institutions while Eboh (1998: 142) is more inclusive and comprehensive as she writes that “national development consists both in the qualitative growth of human persons and in the increase of modern infrastructure and facilities in view of creating much better living conditions for persons”.

The positions of the two scholars above are important but more weight and consideration in as much as national development is concern and in as much as we are talking about education, precisely, early childhood care and education, can be given to human capital development or investments in human beings in discussions of national development because human beings are the raw materials for development and correspondingly the carriers of the genes that translate into development. Put slightly different, it is upon the shoulders of the number of educated people that a state has that the responsibility to trigger the other indexes which some scholars consider are paramount in discussions that border on national development depend or rest. This is where we are one hundred percent in support of Eboh (1998:141) when she writes that “It stands to reason therefore that by developing the national of any state, that nation implicitly gets developed”.

The Reality of Early Childhood Care and Education in National Development

Globally, education is acknowledged as a provision and an institution that has the capacity to change, liberate, empower, reform and transform a people and their institutions as there is hardly any sector of the society, be it the political, social, economic, agricultural, social, cultural, environmental, scientific and technological dimensions that cannot benefit from the penetrating, cleansing, critical, insightful and analytic scrutiny of education for their effective reinvention, repositioning and sustainable quality service delivery to humanity. Any innovation that the state wants to introduce for improving the quality

of services that are the statutory responsibilities of the state must be routed through education. In fact, there is no greater investment and no greater wealth than well-educated human resource and on this note education is foundationally necessary for the construction and reconstruction of every institution and all the activities that take place in any state. This versatile role of education is one reason some scholars refer to education as a gateway to modernization and the foundation upon which the development of humanity stands. What makes this one hundred percent correct is the fact that any state that is desirous of national development must make quality investments in education before such aspirations can see the light of the day.

Because education functions in these multiple categories, most responsible states according to Shively (2005) make the provision of education a topmost priority among the social services that states provide. As obvious as this can be, there is a new direction in the power of education, which is that education is a trigger and a springboard for the national development of states. It has to be said and said very authoritatively that the level of education that is realistically significant and relevant in defining and redefining the power and role of education in real human capacity building and national development particularly in Nigeria is early childhood care and education.

Early childhood care and education as a level in educational provision has in-built mechanisms and capacities that can maintain and sustain in the young receptive and conducive responses or dispositions to learning and education that can permanently and enduringly trigger and stimulate positive changes and influences in the emotional, physical, social, moral, philosophical, psychological, axiological and cognitive development of the young. Any state where its young develop and cultivate a burning zeal and curiosity for the pursuit of knowledge from the early

childhood care and education phase has consciously laid foundations for epically, monumentally and phenomenally boosting the manpower and human capacity base upon which the infrastructural development of the state can be based. This means that there is no level of epistemological breakthroughs in any area of knowledge that such a state cannot conveniently handle in the near future. This assertion is real simply because early childhood care and education makes durable and lasting impressions in the psyche of the young in the form of receptively triggering the young into embracing learning and education, which systematically cumulates into inspiring the young of the state for active participation in formal education.

The zeal and interest to be in school which early childhood care and education triggers produces visible results in the education industry namely demonstration of capacity to reduce the incidence of student dropout of school early and repeat of classes to their barest minimum and the capacity of early childhood care and education to reduce to the barest minimum, the twin menace of dropout and repeat of classes is a pointer that academic achievement and performance of the young in educational institution across all the levels has come to stay in any state that prioritizes early childhood care and education. Mwamwenda (2014:1403) says it all when he writes that:

Children who have had (ECE) have the following advantages: less likely to repeat classes, less likely to drop-out of school and are less likely to be assigned to special need classes. ECE leads to higher achievement scores, higher completion rates in subsequent years of education, low correlation between such children and criminal activities.

The ability of any state to sustain the interest of her young ones in educational institutions early in the life of such young ones is an indication of real, committed and quality investments in human capital whose dividends can snowball into sustainable future for the individual and the state and

this in all honesty and sincerity is a recipe for national development, for the best conception of national development is that which prioritizes investments in human beings, especially at early stages, for human beings are the genes and engine blocks that construct and reconstruct development or national development in any of its configurations and ramifications.

CONCLUSIONS

Across the globe, the provision of early childhood care and education is the foundation upon which the national development of states depend and what makes early childhood care and education a flashpoint and arrow head in the national development of states is its focus on the early development of the human resources of states. It is a fact that cannot be doubted that learners who go through early childhood care and education institutions develop dispositions that are conducive and supportive of robust and vibrant academic pursuits and its corresponding higher academic performance and achievement. Such products of early childhood care and education institutions can hardly drop out of school, can hardly repeat classes and can hardly have issues bordering on maladjustments in the primary school and beyond. Such learners start very early in life to exhibit core moral values that are expected of products of the education industry. Sure, any state that starts her young ones on the philosophy upon which early childhood care and education institutions is based and constantly maintains it has consciously invested in a generation of her citizens that will in turn become the genes, pillars and engine blocks that can existentially translate into reality the national developmental dreams of the founding fathers of the state through organizing other progressive forces and indexes in the state into national development. Specifically early childhood care and education is a recipe and key for unlocking the vicious circle of intergenerational disadvantages and

inequality among citizens and correspondingly has revolutionary and radical potentials to ignite and initiate practices where durable, long lasting and sustainable social, environmental, economic and general advantages can become norms for citizens of a state.

As obvious as the role of early childhood care and education in the national development of states can be, Nigeria, the giant of Africa only plays peripheral oversight and supervisory roles without direct participation in early childhood care and education programmes. The responsibility of providing early childhood and education in Nigeria is the sole responsibility of the private sector and one can authoritatively say that the inability of Nigerians to muster the courage for initiating action for solving and resolving all the national development challenges that Nigeria faces irrespective of the abundance of natural resources is deep rooted in Nigeria's neglect and lackadaisical attitudes to early childhood care and education sector and in the same way a trigger that can reposition Nigeria so that it occupies her place in comity of states is robust investments in early childhood care and education sector of her education industry.

The decision of Nigeria not to participate and provide her citizens early childhood care and education is expensive and detrimental to her national development. In fact, the simple reason that the Nigerian state does not participate in early childhood care and education automatically makes education at this level elitist, a development that results in the denial of basic social and axiological beliefs to many Nigerians. The denial of educational opportunity to many young Nigerians who cannot afford it at the cost of its provision in the hands of the private sector is an infringement on the rights of such Nigerians. That many young Nigerians are denied early childhood care and education opportunities must result in the underdevelopment and under-utilization of the skills, talents and potentials of such Nigerians.

Cumulatively, any citizen whose skills, talents and potentials are under-developed and under-utilized may have nothing to contribute to the national development of his state and this is the predicament of Nigeria.

SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the neglect and lackadaisical attitudes of Nigeria towards early childhood care and education and its implications for national development in Nigeria, there is need to make some suggestions on the way forward.

Nigeria should initiate a revolution that can make the provision of early childhood care and education a responsibility of the Nigerian State.

Nigeria should massively invest in teacher education for the production of the right caliber of teachers who have the professional expertise to teach at this critical level of education.

Quality incentives should be provided to parents of the young who allow their children to attend early childhood care and education institutions or centres.

The Nigerian government should adopt early childhood care and education as a platform for implementing social justice policies and programmes in Nigeria

Lastly private sector investors who invest in early childhood care and education that is the statutory responsibility of the Nigerian state to provide for her citizens should be adequately compensated by the Nigerian state and not the present practice where they are over-taxed and over-exploited by the Nigerian state.

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