
MANAGING CRISES IN CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

In order to ensure effectiveness, judicious utilization of materials and resources, as well as reducing conflict, violence, and crises in the school system, the society and its components are the sole controller and determinant of the success and failure of the educational system. The role of educational agencies in managing crises in Early Childhood Care and Education is the focus of this paper. The paper examined various features of educational crises in ECCE, the role of educational agencies and how these agencies foster the achievement of objectives. However, the paper concluded that crises are bound to occur when roles and responsibilities are not recognized or when they are neglected. Thus, recommendations were drawn.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian educational system includes in its strategies of operation and functionality every member of the society. When plans are set up for a particular programme especially education, it is usually designed in such a way that certain groups of people in the society are expected to take charge and act directly or indirectly towards its implementation. It becomes obvious that the society as a whole for whom the program is planned has one or two roles to play for its success and goal achievement. However, the failure to recognize these roles by individuals in the society, in addition to corrupt practices in our environment that further poses threat and difficulty in the child's learning and development is what we refer to as crisis in education. NCCE (2006) while discussing the operation and functionality of ECCE in Nigeria, they said; UNESCO (1999) noted that, pre-primary schools in many cases existed side by side the primary schools, that, their existence had been acknowledged by successive governments, yet, they did not directly fund pre-primary education, they rather encouraged the private sectors to provide for pre-primary education for children between age 3 and 5 years plus. Following the above analysis of situations and issues, one will realize that, crisis came to existence as a result of negligence of responsibilities and inability to solve problems. Crisis therefore can be conceptualized to mean; a critical and challenging situation that results in difficulties and uncertainty in solving problems, it is the period of danger where the prevailing practices, operations and functions are not in order. The concept of crises in ECCE therefore manifests in areas of administrative difficulties, malfunctionality and lack of adequate and proper provision for the operation and running of ECCE programmes in Nigeria. However, it becomes obvious that, when people fail to do what is expected of them as being right, it results to crises. Thus, the role of educational agency becomes a very important issue to be looked into, these agencies as we acknowledged them in the society, occupy and play important roles in the educational development of children. They are significant to the

society as a whole. However, the need to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and improvement of ECCE programme drew our attention to view the role of educational agencies as paramount in achievement of ECCE goals in Nigeria. It is pertinent at this juncture to express objectively that, among all levels of education, the rate at which crises in education occur is high in the area of ECCE. As observed by Kabiru (2006), the educational structure in Nigeria does not however include daycare and nursery schools, so at the inception of that educational structure, it was envisaged that, Early Childhood Care and Education would be the responsibility of parents and private caregivers and proprietors of nursery schools. Thus, that level of education is still in crisis based on historical antecedence. This has impacted different policy issues on material/facilities, funding, recognitions and quality personnel. There are also issues of negligence, low rating, deprivation of opportunities and access to enroll in a well structured centre by children. Thus, the paper postulates strategies and remedies as parameter to solve the various educational crises at this level of education as well as promoting standard to lift the nation to the level of development and achievement of the millennium goals.

Features of Crisis in Childhood Education

Crises had invaded our educational system as a whole and its consequences drew our attention to viewing it as an obstacle to the achievement of educational goals. The features tend to manifest in the; general corrupt practices, embezzlement and vandalization of public properties, mismanagement of funds, ignorance about the task assign to be carried out by the employees, selfishness among the school administrators, lack of commitment to duties, bribery, favouritism, nepotism, negligence of duties and poor academic standard. These factors had in no small measure affected the progress of our educational system. According to the practices and mode of operation of ECCE programme in Nigeria, one can practically classify crises in ECCE into; Administrative crises, crises in procurement of educational materials and play equipment; crises of knowledge about the practices in the field; crises in research and development of ECCE programmes and crises of finance respectively. However, the above highlighted categories of crises can be paraphrased in turn as follows:

Administrative Crises: The administration of ECCE programme had been facing a lot of difficulties in the implementation processes especially the rural community based centres, these difficulties emphasize more on the disagreement in the child's right Act and Child Policy Issues that makes administrative decision making in ECCE difficult for school proprietors, caregivers and the school administrative heads, thereby affecting the progress of that level of education, buttressing this, David (2000) expressed that parents, guardians, educational administrators, teachers, the government and the students are well worried about the negative and destructive effects of crises in our society at large. However, crises in ECCE are not child friendly. Thus, children are cheated by not providing conducive environment for their learning as well as developing their talent to the fullest

Crises of Materials: In Nigeria today, one of the major problems facing ECCE programme is, inadequate provision of quality play equipment. Government have given ECCE programme

a recognition by publishing its existence in the various policy documents (National Policy on Education 2004, National Policy for IECDs 2007, National Minimum Standard for ECCE NCE programme 2009 as well as the UBE Act 2004). These documents make provisions for the integration of ECCE programme into the existing primary schools. The bone of contention here is when will the various IECDs centres be well equipped with sufficient play equipment and materials? We must recognize at this juncture that, ECCE emphasizes play and play equipment for children to develop their inborn skills and abilities through exploration of their environment, in this regard, we must come to understand that children play can only take place in a situation where play equipment and materials are available but, in a situation where these materials are inadequate, crises or difficulties in learning are bound to occur and this is what operates in our existing IECD centres in Nigeria. In support of this view, NCCE (2006) rightly stated that, "even though the National Policy on Education provides that, government will control the operation of pre-primary education and ensure that staff operating pre-primary schools are adequately trained and essential equipment are provided, there has not been regular conscious effort to monitor standards in the day care centres and nursery schools. Crises of technical know-how and Initiatives: from our observations during a visit to schools in Yola metropolis, and during monitoring of caregivers activities in Federal College of Education, Yola model school, in October, 2011, our interaction with caregivers reveals that, most of the caregivers in the public IECDs centres lack initiatives and knowledge about the use of toys, in some centres, after providing toys and play equipment, some teachers due to lack of initiatives on how to make effective use of toys for children's learning packed up these toys in the cabinet claiming that, children will spoil the toys if they are displayed for them to use for their plays. This goes a long way in affecting children and denying them of some rights. This is directly contrary to the philosophy and rationale behind ECCE.

The issues of educative and non educative toys, battery toys and manual toys is another important aspect to be discussed here, , they at times place children at risky, dangerous and unrest situation, they also exposes children to negative experience and when children are not comfortable, they feel upset, boring and discouraged, as a result, being denied of certain rights. Crises in the dearth of materials for research and development: Research as observed by Adegboye (2001) develops in people the interest in seeing new things happening and using new product that comes into the life of the people most often through vigorous work of researchers. Since research is an inevitable element in our life, its ineffectiveness and retrogression in quality is a serious danger militating against the future and progress of ECCE. Students find it difficult to relate information from the internet and text books for project report writing, this is because most of these materials are not locally available and this places the future of ECCE on danger. Abiola (2007) observed that, we are in a dynamic and research oriented society, people keep making progress in various aspects of life, and the quest for knowledge is insatiable, hence; people keep searching and researching. The point here is, most of the theories carried out in Childhood Education are foreign based, where at times, brings second thought and confusion in the mind of students on how practicable the theories and principles are when it comes to reality.

Crises of finance: As found among the various problems of education in Nigeria, UBEC (2005) observed that little or no running cost for LGAs, is an aspect of the financial crises in Nigeria. This penetrates to ECCE programmes and had affected its operation in no small measures. The UBE Act (2004) stated that, ECCE is allocated 5% of UBE funding allocation. However, most ECCE centres are not given imprest or running cost, this has resulted to parents being charged one form of levy or the other in order to keep the centres in operation, yet, the financial crises continues aggravating since such amount collected are inadequate. According to Alex (2010), the budgetary allocation to education remains constantly low as it does not meet the united nation's standard of 26%. According to his analysis and findings, the highest ever approved by the Nigerian government for education sector within 1999 to 2010 is 13% which is 50% of the 26% of the nation's total budgetary allocation yearly. The provision for crises-free ECCE programme lies on these allocations, thus, crisis is bound to occur as a result of inadequacy of the allocation. It is only when government takes full participation in making provision that can reduce crises in ECCE respectively.

Educational Agencies and their Roles towards reducing crises in ECCE

Considering the context of Nigerian education system and as referred to in this paper, the agencies of education include: the home/family, the school, religious institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, mass media and the community. According to Olajide and Yusuf (2004), Education as the transforming instrument for the helpless infants to move into a matured adult has made education a significant and remarkable factor of life that can be achieved through the contribution of various institutions and bodies that are referred to as agents of education. The home/family: According to Adegbija (2000) parents have the responsibility to give their children sound moral and educational training to enable them meets with the challenges of adult life. The child's first contact is the home, the child develops his/her theory of mind from the home, the home is the right place to teach values, sincerity, discipline, and being your brother's keeper, the above characteristics which if possessed by individual will guide one to manage public funds well is lacking in those that take responsibilities in managing finance today. Reducing or managing crises become the mutual responsibility of the family, the family will help in managing crisis in education when they stand to effectively teach sincerity that will enable Nigerian's children develop to become a promoter of fairness, and advocates of justice, this will help correct embezzlement of public funds. Thus, the role of family in arresting crises in ECCE is to give proper orientation to children from conception.

The School: The school in this context referred to the ECCE centre, by conceptualization, it is an institution organized to cater for little child (0-5 years). The FGN (2007) observed that, research evidence abound in many field of study that, the care and support received by a child in terms of good health, nutrition and psychosocial care as well as protection issues are crucial in the formation and development of intelligence, personality, and social behaviour of the child at the centre. Children interact and play with objects, receive and model instructions, attitudes, and other forms of life issues from caregivers/teachers and play

groups. However, if all these are effective, administrative crisis and crises in technical knowhow can be minimized if not eradicated completely through the school or IECD centres. Conducive and favourable environment is what makes child's growth and survival effective and these are all responsibilities the school assumes to carryout, the negligence of these noble duties in the existing IECDs or schools result to crises in ECCE. Religious Institutions: According to Daramola (2002) religion can be defined as a reflection of man's attempt to explain those aspects of his environment which he cannot understand except in terms of super-natural. One should recognize that, the various religious types we have today in Nigeria especially the two major types (Islam and Christianity) have done much in providing teaching and learning experiences to indigenes and are of great values, morals and intellectually upright. Akande (2001) postulated that, religious organizations count on the nation's quest for better socio-economic and intellectual order. In addition, NTI (2000) sees the mosque and church as the custodian of the spiritual needs of the society that teaches children to love God and humanity. Religious institutions therefore, can advocate the inclusion of religious studies in to the ECCE curriculum as it will discourage bad thoughts and corrupt practices through preaching of gospels to parents with negative parental style, caregivers who neglect the ethics that guide their operation as well as other administrators of ECCE.

Mass Media: Olajide and Yusuf (2004), after defining the mass media to comprise of the newspapers, radio, television, computer, internet and the likes, they stressed that, a child that is exposed to a newspaper and fond of reading stories on a particular column of the newspaper has the tendency to show interest in reading the newspaper and it is such habit the child develops for reading which is of academic and of educational value. Crisis can be managed by the media through putting programmes and activities that will help children develop good morals and skills, it will reveal ethical ways of doing things right, which can reduce aggression, misuse of resources in our ECD centres, thereby determine the future of children and counts on their development of theory of mind. The contents of media activities and how the contents are interpreted determine the child's action and behaviours. Thus, develop in the child some elements of competency, freedom to do things and self esteem. Community/governmental and non governmental organizations: Yusuf and Olajide (2004) postulated again that, a community made up of the right aggregate of emotionally balanced people, would have little difficulty in supporting educational programmes, considering their views, the society and the non governmental organizations play some intrinsic and extrinsic roles on the sociological and psychological experience of individual child, the community indoctrinates the child on cosmological experiences, economic experiences, political experiences, linguistic experiences and the monitoring of school activities and facilities through PTA and community based organization as well as school disciplinary committees.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Educational crises generally, stand to be destructive in all ramifications, crises appear and exist as a setback agent and it leads to difficulties in the operation of ECCE programmes in our society. Crises in education occur as a result of ineffectiveness in some practices by

parents, stakeholders and the community as a whole, including issues of inadequate materials. The roles of educational agents as regard parental styles, educative programmes, publication and promotion of values, as well as creating favourable environment for the child to survive, have a long way to go in reducing crises in our educational sector, it features that, despite the foundation nature of the educational level, crises still exist, however, crises in ECCE is an all-way-round difficulties that had invaded our educational system and has posted and still posting more difficulties to the educational system as there is no certainty on how and what the feature will be.

RECOMMENDATION

Having examined crises in ECCE and the role of educational agency in reducing crises, the following recommendations are put forward for improvement.

- The problems of negligence of duties and failure to accept the rules and provisions for ECCE programmes as contained in the policy document can be arrested through constant programme of enlightenment by the government and the mass media.
- Government should encourage the offering of ECCE as a course of study in all higher institutions by provision adequate facilities and equipment for effective running of the programme so as to help increase the production of qualify practitioners in the field who will run the system well to reduce the crisis of administration and technical-knowhow.
- ECCE curriculum should be restructured to have inclusive, the Religious doctrines, believes, and teachings as an important aspect of the learning contents as well as, developing strategies to measure and moderate the provision in child right Act to give equal opportunities to every child.
- Only trained personnel and counselors in ECCE should constitute those to recommend toys that are educative and non educative, types of public programmes in ECCE and the determination of suitable and friendly environment for ECCE programmes.
- Government should ensure adequate funding of ECCE programmes to be in line with the international standard of the 26% allocation to education which will serves as motivation, create a violence free environment and proper management of equipment/facilities for children to grow and develop.
- Every body concern should be up and doing in truthfulness, loyalty and success to be the order of the day in administering ECCE programmes.
- Furthermore, the government as the overseer of the educational activities of the country can through their authorities and power affirm the pronouncement in the various policies documents concerning effective implementation of plans of ECCE, this will go a long way in curbing the issue of crises in our educational system.

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