



SPORT, NUTRITION AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECCDE) CENTRES IN KWARA STATE. NIGERIA

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Abstract

The concept of 'Early Childhood Care Education (ECCDE) depicts the type of education which our children receive between the ages of 2years and 5years. The paper presented the enrolment patterns for ECCDE centres along the line of Local Government Education Authority, gender, private and public pre-primary education in Kwara State as of December; 2011. The paper examined the contributory roles of sports at the early stage of individual development. Skipping jumping, throwing, catching, kicking and swinging are some of the sporting activities suggested for this level of education. The paper also discussed some common accidents such as falls, dislocations, cuts and fractures at the ECCDE Centres. It enumerated some safety hints expected of caregivers and those responsible for the care and protection of these children at the ECCDE level. While the paper examined the significance of good nutrition for the children, it however advised the caregivers to discourage excessive consumption of sweets, biscuits and candies because of their effects on the gum of children.

Recommendations made on how to effectively run the ECCDE centres in Kwara State include ensuring good health, safety and nutrition of the children at the centres; comprehensive registration of the centres in the state and recruitment of qualified teachers and caregivers to ensure efficiency and effective management.

Keywords: *Sports, Nutrition, Safety, Caregivers, Management, ECCDE*

Introduction

The concept of early childhood education as used in this paper depicts the types of education which our children receive between the ages of 2years to 5years. Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) sometimes called Early Childhood Care Development Education (ECCDE) , focuses on the education that children receive during the early stages of their childhood. The early childhood is a very important stage for the overall developments. These developments manifest in the child's abilities and skills in cognition and learning, language and motor skills (Federal Government of Nigeria/United Nation International Children

Emergency Fund, 1993). The key factors required for adequate growth at this period are sound health, sanitation, participation in physical exercises, safety and social stimulation.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, (2004) in the National Policy on Education recognizes the fact that formal education of a child apparently starts from about the age of 3 years. Hence, the prescription of pre-primary education as contained in the policy document. It is strongly believed that economic prosperity and the reduction of global poverty cannot be accomplished unless all children in this country can at a minimum age complete a basic education of a good quality.

Early childhood education has been defined in many ways. Some of such definitions are given by Little, (226) as:

1. The education provided children between 0-3years of age in Day Care Centres and for children between 3 years to less than 6 years in Nursery schools.
2. A community-based, low-cost project for the holistic development of the child from 0-6years.
3. A comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to 6years of age, their parents and care-givers with the purpose of protecting the children's rights to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potentials.

Before the present political dispensation in Nigeria, government did not show much interest in the running of Early Childhood Day Care Development Education Level. This was left Exclusively in private control simply because the demand for this level of education, in the formal sense, was limited to the minority elites living in urban areas particularly those having working class wives. The management of the system was with low input from the government. The private proprietors provided the staff and admitted building was easily converted to either a day care Centre or a nursery school. Some of these Centre's are characterized by leaking roofs, bad floor, poor sitting arrangement, inadequate toilet facilities and lack of sufficient space for playground. Each proprietor freely designed the curriculum which mainly include singing, poetry, rhymes, playing with toys, story telling and sleeping time. prior to government interest in ECCDE, these private non-formal early childhood care centers littered most town and village in Nigeria. Some of these Centre's are run by women or individuals who are neither economically empowered nor in any way cognitively prepared for such a job (Fagbulu, 2003).

In an attempt to stop the proliferation of unlicensed Centre giving poor quality education to our future leader giving poor quality education to our future leader, the federal government of Nigeria in its national policy on education (2004) spelt out clearly the objective of early childhood care and development education in Nigeria. This level of education is aimed at a smooth transition from home to the school with a view to sensitizing the child for primary education. The objective is, partly, to provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.

The curriculum should inculcate in children the social norms, spirit of enquiry and creativity through play way, nature study, art, music and playing with toys. All these activities are geared toward developing a sense of cooperation, good habit, acquiring rudiments of numeracy, literacy, colour, shapes and forms.

To adequately take care of the development of a child's physical potentials, health, safety and nutritional need (which impact positively on his cognitive, emotional and social development) there is the need to incorporate appropriate sporting, health and creational activities into the ECCDE programmes.

There is also the equally important need for effective management of these activities to prevent hazards for those young children as well as toward achieving their overall development.

Sports in ECCDE Centre's

The significance of play as an essential part of every child's life has been acknowledged by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Article 31 supports a child's right to rest and leisure, and to participate in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child (Office human rights, 1990). Yet, visits to most of the ECCDE Centre's revealed inadequacy in facilities (space, materials and personnel) for safe and meaningful play.

Outdoor plays provide opportunities for children to learn and gain competence in a vast range of motor skills. This is particularly importance during the early childhood year, a period hallmarked by significant development across all domains. Outdoor play provides occasions for children to develop and learn basic locomotors skill including walking, running, jumping, climbing, hopping, skipping, sliding cycling; manipulative skills such as throwing, abilities including balancing, stretching, swinging, twisting and beam – walking (Gallahue 1993). Children need space for active, spontaneous movement as they consolidate and gain mastery over a range of fundamental movement skill (Bilton, 2002; Gallahue, 1993). It cannot be assumed that this space as available in their home environment. Parent and teachers need to be aware of the hazard of outdoor play and take all necessary steps (Henniger, 1994), and to have adequate staff ratio to support physical play (Lam 2005).

Researchers such as Henniger, (1994); Biddle, Gorely & Steensel, (2004) have found that regular participation in physical activities during childhood and adolescence:

1. Help to build and maintain health bones, muscles and joints.
2. Help control weight, build lean muscles and reduce fat;
3. Prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps to lower blood pressure in adolescent with hypertension ;
4. Lowers risk of cardiovascular diseases, and
5. Reduces feeling of anxiety and depression.

Research also show that children and youth who are less physically active tend to at higher risk for obesity, type II diabetes disease, disability and motor skill deficiencies (Biddle, Gorely&Stensel, 2004).

Safety in ECCDE Centre's

Safety in the most general sense is the condition of being free from harm. It may also be define as the active endeavor taken by the individuals or groups to promote precautionary measures against possible injury or accident. The primary purpose for motivating safety is to intelligently regulate and control activities do that injuries can be eliminate or reduced. Safety education may also be seen as a planned programme to provide knowledge, skill and attitude to adopt certain practical measure to enable an individual to live in safety and avoid accident. Safety education is the education for safe living.

The need for the caregivers and the classroom teachers to ensure the safety of children in their care cannot be emphasized; this they must acquire through safety education. This is because the knowledge of safety education will help significantly to prevent avoidable accidents and their attendants' incapacitation and absenteeism from school. Some of the common accidents in schools include falls, cuts/wounds, fractures, dislocation and poisoning. The caregivers should ensure children are not unnecessarily exposed to any form of accidents while in school by observing the safety hints in their centres. This is because many of the accidents that occurs at home and in schools can be prevented.

Safety Hints in ECCDE Centres.

The following are some of the safety hints in ECCDE.

- Through supervision of children is important all the time.
- Proper sitting arrangement in ECCD centres is important.
- Removal of all broken chairs, desks and others sharp or pointed objects away from the children is vital.
- To avoid friction, always keep the floor clean and dry, remove banana peels and other objects that can cause friction for the children.
- Do not engage children in activity when they are tired or indisposed.
- Do not allow children to play with knives, razor blades, forks and nails that can puncture their skin.
- Adequate ventilation and lighting should be provided in the ECCDE centres.
- Develop positive habits and attitude in the toward safety consciousness.
- Assignment of tasks for work according to competence and physical capacity of the children in ECCDE centres can help to reduce or prevent total occurrence of accident that might render the affected person useless to the society.
- Caregivers are expected to identify promptly and report children with ailments to the class teacher and head teacher. They should also be ready to accompany a sick child to the school clinic or the nearest hospital for medical treatment.

Nutrition in ECCDE Centres

Nutrition is important for the optimal growth and development of the child. This is because inadequate nutrition (mal-nutrition) which may be over-nutrition or under nutrition constitutes serious problem for physical, mental and emotional health of the individuals, especially the children. Hodges & Krehi (1965) were of the opinion that adequate diet will help to prevent nutritional deficiency diseases among the children such as rickets, scurvy, kwashiorkor, marasmus, night blindness, pellagra, nutritional anaemia.

As part of the nutrition related health roles of the care-givers and the class teachers, they are expected to make sure that children are supervised and make sure that children eat their foods. They should make sure that they observe good table manners while eating. This will go along way to develop and modify the health behaviors of the children. In the state where school mid-day meal is practiced, they should make sure that the foods are properly cooked, tested and prepared in good and hygienic condition.

Care-giver should discourage excessive consumption of sweets, biscuits and candies because of their gums. They should also protect children's food from contamination and ensure safe storage of water. Care-givers should maintain optimal hygienic condition of the ECCDE centres by washing hands of the children with soaps, ash and water after contact with feces and before handing food.

Children with nutritional health problem should be identified; their parents should be counseled how to improve the quality of family foods with less expenditure. Hold & Syderman, (1991) observed that children with nutritional health problems should be reported to the hospital for necessary care. Care-givers should also endeavor to make appropriate follow up visits to improve the school and community relationship. Care-givers should as much as possible discourage over eating because of its implication on the health of the children. For example, an overfed child will always sleep in the class, gain excess body weight and may possibly develop obesity. Children's nutrients should contain essential but available proteins, vitamins and carbohydrates.

Effective Managements of ECCDE

There are 767 public pre-primary schools and 730 private pre-primary schools in Kwara state with total enrolment of 88,119 pupils, Out of this figure, 43,335 (49.18%) of the children are female (Kwara state Ministry of Education, 2011). To ensure effective managements of the ECCDE in Kwara state, the following areas must be critically examined.

- a. Provision of access to EDCCE in all Basic Education Schools in the state.
- b. Training of caregivers at both public and private EDCCE in the state.
- c. Registration of all private EDCCE centres and nursery and primary schools in the state.
- d. Training and recruitment of teachers with specialization in pre-primary education in teachers education programme.
- e. Provision of standard curriculum, syllabus and instructional material at the EDCCE centre and schools in the state.
- f. Proper monitoring of the EDCCE centres and schools in the state.
- g. Adequate funding of EDCCE centres and schools.
- h. Provision of adequate physical facilities.

The issues of registration of all private day care centres, nursery and primary schools is very crucial to effective management of EDCCE in Kwara state. If the private providers are registered, the government agency in charge of monitoring operation would be able to keep track of their operations and ensure they maintain a good standard in terms of their curriculum and facilities. There seems to be lack of accurate information on the number of both EDCCE Centre and pre-primary schools in existence. This is because most of the centres and schools are unregistered. The table below present the enrolment in public EDCCE and pre-primary education by Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) in Kwara state (Table 1); enrolment of primary education by LGEA (table 2) and public and primary school enrolment by sex and LGEA (Table 3);

Table1 Enrolment in Public EDCCE and pre-primary Education by LGEA.

LGEA	Kindergarten			Nursery		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Asa	659	710	1,369	867	842	1,709
Baruten	284	294	578	642	650	1,292
Edu	157	153	310	390	310	700
Ekiti	512	587	1,099	0	0	0
Ifelodun	1,140	1,106	2,246	522	470	992
Ilorin East	493	433	926	470	417	887
Ilorin South	126	111	237	1,028	843	1,871
Ilorin west	437	485	922	1,839	1,748	3,587
Irepodun	458	417	875	817	819	1,636
Isin	305	307	612	259	284	543
Kaiama	230	222	452	237	159	396
Moro	1,260	1,229	2,572	1,010	1,040	2,050
Patigi	168	390	782	244	251	495
Total	7,758	7,679	15,437	9,184	8,907	18,091

Sources: Kwara State Ministry of Eductaion 2011.

Table 2: Enrolment in private ECCE and pre primary Education by LGEA.

LGEA	Kindergarten			Nursery		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Asa	283	312	595	780	748	1,528
Baruten	517	434	951	1,121	1,058	2,179
Edu	841	652	1,493	1,620	1,445	2,065
Ekiti	60	78	138	195	217	412
Ifelodun	202	207	409	466	436	902
Ilorin East	1,216	1,153	2,369	2,246	2,131	4,377
Ilorin South	1,534	1,496	3,030	3,315	3,348	6,663
Ilorin west	1,740	1,637	3,377	3,164	3,124	6,288
Irepodun	714	640	1,354	1,161	1,155	2,316
Isin	116	95	211	121	133	254
Kaiama	600	622	1,222	671	658	1,399
Moro	543	462	1,005	885	757	1,642
Offa	845	850	1,695	1,683	1,716	3,399
Oke Ero	82	83	165	195	177	372
Oyun	211	191	402	296	298	594
	84	93	177	335	343	678
Total	9,588	9,005	15,437	18,254	17,744	35,998

Source: Kwara State Ministry of Education, 2011.

Table 3 Public and Private Pre-Primary Enrolment by sex and LGEA

LGEA	Public				Private			
	No. of school	Pupils	Girls	% girls	No. of schools	Pupils	Girls	% girls
Asa	90	3,078	1,552	50	40	2,123	1,060	50
Baruten	25	1,870	944	50	34	3,130	1,492	48
Edu	25	1,010	463	46	50	4,558	2,097	46
Ekiti	31	1,099	587	53	8	550	295	54
Ifelodun	98	3,238	1,576	49	25	1,311	643	49
Ilorin East	55	1,813	850	47	78	6,746	3,284	49
Ilorin South	42	2,108	954	45	130	9,693	4,844	50
Ilorin West	54	4,509	2,233	50	132	9,665	4,761	49
Irepodun	71	2,511	1,236	49	65	3,670	1,795	49
Isin	43	1,155	591	51	9	465	228	49
Kaiama	15	848	381	45	29	2,551	1,280	50
Moro	87	2,595	1,283	49	31	2,647	1,219	46
Offa	41	3,622	1,803	50	63	5,0942	2,566	50
Oke Ero	24	762	382	50	7	537	260	48
Oyun	40	1,277	641	50	19	996	489	49
Patigi	26	2,033	1,110	55	10	855	436	51
Total	767	33,528	16,586	49	730	54,591	26,749	49

Source: Kwara State Ministry of Education, 2011.

To ensure effective management of ECCDE in Kwara State, there is the need to ensure constant monitoring of the operation of ECCDE centre's and schools (both public and private) in the state. This function of monitoring the centre rest squarely on the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). The monitoring unit of the SUBEB should work out a scheme of visiting the centre (unscheduled visits) at twice in a term. This would keep the teachers and the caregivers alert in doing their work well.

The issue of funding is also very important in promoting effective management of ECCDE. The private providers should be encouraged to fund their centre adequately based on some prescribed minimum standards while the public basic schools are to be managed by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) through funds provided from the 2% of consolidated federal revenue and matching grants provided for the state and local governments. Since the ECCDE is being integrated into the normal Basic Education schools, there is the likelihood of improved funding in the new dispensation.

The provision of adequate physical facilities is also a necessary condition for effective management of ECCDE centre. A collaboration education centre in Nigeria as by FGN/UNICEF, (1993) reveals that 22.4% of the centres are in rented flats, 17.8% operate from abandoned buildings, 15% operate in single room apartments 16% use churches and mosques' corridors, 1.6 % operate in garages while 2.4% make do with open spaces. None of the centre were found to have full complements of play facilities needed by the children.

Conclusions

The health of the child is important if the goals and aspiration of ECCDE is to be achieved. Adequate attention should be paid to his general wellbeing, his safety within and also around the school

environment. Special attention should be given to the nutritional needs of the child. The caregivers should closely monitor what the children eat, what time they eat, and the short and long term implications of what they consume. All these will help to contribute to physical, mental and emotional health of the children.

The other central message in this paper is that Kwara State has a population of about 2 million people with about 47% of these as children aged 0-14 years (NPC, 2006). Access to early childhood education is still beyond the reach of many children. There is still the need to establish more centre and schools across the state, train more caregivers and teachers, widely disseminate the prescribed curriculum and guidelines and monitor closely the operations of the schools and centre for quality assurance.

Recommendations

1. The Stakeholders should ensure good health, safety and nutrition of children at this level of their education.
2. The government should ensure and monitor quality control at the ECCDE level.
3. The government should establish more early childhood care and pre-primary schools in all local government areas of Kwara State to provide sufficient access for all children.
4. The Ministry of Education should design a sound, comprehensive and culture-friendly curriculum for this level of education.
5. Early childhood care and development education teachers should be properly trained and monitored to ensure efficiency and effective management.

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