

Family and Community Participation in Early Childhood Education to Enhance Educational Attainment of the Nigerian Child

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Abstract

For a child to be functional and effective citizen, the school, family, and the community have to offer the needed atmosphere for the effective education of the child. It then requires that early childhood care and education have to be taken very seriously if the success of the child must be achieved. This research paper therefore seeks to examine the participation of the family and the community in early childhood education. The paper also considers the concept of early childhood education, its component, importance of family and community collaboration in children's education. Challenges were also discussed, which involves lack of proper commitment and intervention of the government, poor parental awareness, lower availability of preschools, poor curricular foundation and others. It is in the light of this that the paper advocates for the restructuring of early childhood education through development of expertise skills, building great early childhood education workforce and creating a positive climate by reaching out to the families and communities and providing structures for them to become involved in school activities. The result will be effective family and community partnership that will help children to succeed in school and become useful to the society in the future.

Keywords: Community Partnerships, Early Childhood Care and Education, Family.

Introduction

The African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' explicitly defines the major focus of this paper. Parenthood involves the skills, knowledge and attitudes possessed by fathers and mothers in child upbringing. The United Nations convention on the rights of the child (1989) stated that a child should enjoy the benefits of care by both parents; mother and father. The responsibility of child education in Nigeria lies with the parents but also with the family and community. This collective responsibility cannot be overlooked despite the impacts of rapid,

social, economic and cultural changes on childcare and education. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in Nigeria can strengthen the care for young children by promoting family and community participation in childhood education. Sociologist, Ene (2021) explained that the family is the basic instrument of socializing and educating the child. Thus, the family play vital role in the education and development of the child in Nigeria.

Partnership between families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of the young children. The wed of family and community is the child's anchor for early development because families are the first and the most powerful influence on the child's early development. Relationship between families and the community benefit children when those relationships are respectful of family structure, culture, values and knowledge (Epstein, 2018). This paper therefore attempts to understand the kind and extent of family's as well as community's participation in early childhood education.

Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Care Education or pre-primary children are pupils from birth to the ages of 5 years old who acquires nursery education that is aimed at providing solid foundation for pupils as well as smooth transition to primary school (Ayuba, 2018). In addition, Obiweluzor (2015) referred to Pre-primary or Preschool education as education given to juvenile before the time of enrolling in primary school (5 years). The National Policy on Education (2004) considers early childhood care and education (pre-primary) as education given in educational institution to children aged 3-5 years prior to their enrollment in the primary school.

From the forgoing definitions, it offers children from birth to five (5) years the experience that will promote their physical, mental, social and emotional need. It involves a set of activities that are intended to modify the behaviour of children prior to their entry into elementary school

Component of Early Childhood Education

Knowledgeable, responsive and skillful early childhood professionals are essential components of early childhood development (ECD) programme . These are caregivers and teachers. Their role cannot be over emphasized in the curriculum delivery. According to Patience, Awopegba, Oduolowu and Nsamenang (2013), the shortage of qualified professionals for curriculum delivery characterized most existing ECD settings even in urban centres and it is worst in indigenous and rural areas. Obiweluzor (2015) highlights early childhood education as having the following attribute:

- i. It should be built around a good learning environment with an effective, well-thought out curriculum;
- ii. It should begin at an appropriate starting age;

- iii. It should be in a physical space that is safe and one that has certain specialized facilities;
- iv. It should be given by professional caregivers, attentive to the individualized needs and progress of the child, and if possible, it should involve the parents.

Benefits of Early Childhood Education

Research evidences abound to support the benefits of this programme of education for children worldwide. These benefits include the following:

- i. **Cognitive gains:** child's exposure to high-quality early childhood facility will not only increase readiness for formal schooling, but also cause positive long-term improvements in the child's performances and social outcomes. Efforts to support early childhood education will promote growth in the cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social-emotional functioning during these critical years (Reynolds & Ou, 2004).

Aliyu and Garba (2012) revealed that "the well-being of children has direct link with the present time activities of the child, the government, community, organizations, parents, family members and etcetera. They further posited that fulfilling children's rights and values at early stage of childhood would certainly transform them to achieve their full potentials and to participate actively in the society.

- ii. **Economic gains:** according to Heckman and Masterov (2004) investment in early childhood education easily payoff over the time by generating very high rates of return for participants, the public and the government. They further argue that "spending money on childhood development programmes will yield more return to economic development, that investing in early childhood education is a sound fiscal policy which has a huge potential long-term payoff. Other economic benefits also include:
 - i. Increased earnings
 - ii. Employment potentials
 - iii. Family stability
 - iv. Decrease welfare dependency
 - v. Decrease grade repetition
 - vi. Parents, caregivers and families also greatly benefit in the programme.
- iii. **Social gains:** provision of early childhood education help in the development of children in a variety of ways. These include:
 - a) Improving socialization,
 - b) Inculcating of healthy habits,
 - c) Stimulation of creative learning process and
 - d) Enhanced scope for overall personality development.

- iv. **National gains:** today's children are tomorrow's elders and leaders. They are everything that every country needs; hence the foresight is in investing in today's children for healthier nation in the future.

The Family and Early Childhood Education

The role of the family in early education so as to enhance academic achievement of the child cannot be overemphasized. Family has an influential role in the development of a child. The family is the child's first contact with his society. His parents and other members of the family are his first teachers. Members of the family instill in the child values, social skills and societal norms and standards. Similarly, the foundation for the child's intellectual development is laid at home. The family evolves a number of activities to help the child grow intellectually. The parents and other members of the family help the child to develop language. They listen to his attempt to talk and encourage him to make progress by making sounds and calling names of persons or objects for him to repeat.

In most cases, lullaby is used to communicate to the child. Ishola (1999:322) speaks about the importance of this when he posits that:

"The intellectual development of the child begins in the early months of life when it starts responding to the first contacts with adults through sound and movement packaged".

Preparation for formal education takes place in the family. Though informal in nature it is an active agency for early childhood education. The culture of the family is always introduced by the family and also fulfills his need: physical, emotional, psychological, and social. The child gets fundamental education through interaction with others in the family. There is an atmosphere of congenial love, affection, sympathy and understanding in the family and this promotes mutual interaction and informal education which brings happiness in the family and an ideal place for the growth of the child's personality.

Moreover, through interaction and sharing in the family, the child understands in a practical way that he is not alone. With interactions from siblings, the child learns in practical manner the numerous self-denials and limitations that need to be imposed upon oneself, sharing is also learnt. These are all lessons that the child learn as he grows in the family.

Additionally, play has been identified by psychologist and educational specialist as one of the ways through which the child learns. Parents and other members of the family enhance and promote children's play through: treating a positive and safe place for play Respecting and encouraging children in play abilities. Providing a play environment that reflects attitudes and values of the surrounding culture. Encourage cooperation among children and allow them time

without scheduled activity. Relationship between Family and the Child

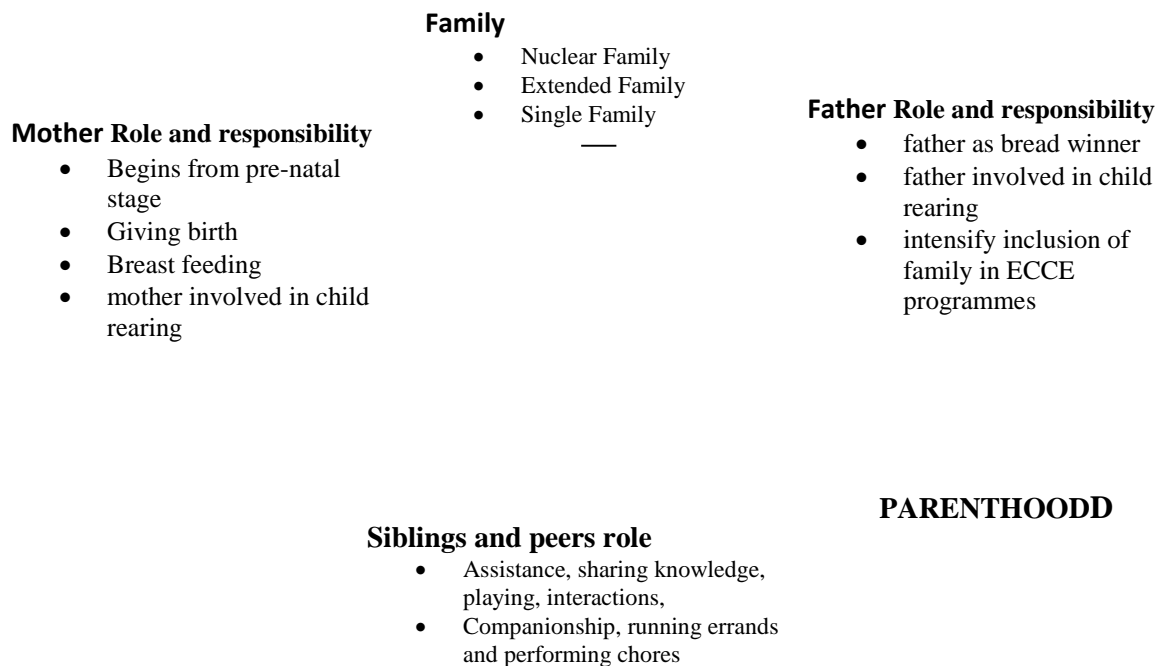


Figure 1: Relationship between Family and the Child
Source: Researchers 2025

The Community and Early Childhood Education

Marriage brings together two individuals to become family and communities. Children not only belong to families but also to the community. Oxford Learner's Dictionary, (2023) gives the meaning of community as all the people who live in a particular area, country, etcetera. Community therefore, refers to the immediate environment outside the child's home. It can be a clan, a village, a city, a tribe, school or nation. The kind of education which a child is expected to acquire is reflective in the needs as well as the prevailing circumstances in the community. This is so because, if the child is to be useful to himself and the community, he must learn what is relevant to the needs of the community.

The community plays highly significant roles in the educational development of children at the early ages and throughout their life time. Early Childhood Care and Education programmes can capitalize on the communal spirit in child rearing to enhance early learning and child well-being. Every Nigerian community is unique and varies in the way cultural values are placed on the child. Children participate in the community cultural and economic activities. Children progressively learn where different homesteads and their occupants are located. Interaction with community members is enhanced through initiation rites, festivals, community drama, kinship, language, neighborhood, activities and shared community facilities. Facilities such as learning centres, security and play grounds, safe water points,

markets, farming points, trading points, churches and mosque, grazing lands, clean healthy environment are very important in creating a child friendly environment.

In the school community, the teacher's primary responsibility is to focus on the children and attend to their academic, social, emotional and physical needs. Teachers have the responsibility and privileges of planning the children's activities on daily basis as they try to meet the needs of individual children as much as possible within a heterogeneous classroom. Also, he assigns the use of classroom space in the way that best facilitates the creation of a positive learning environment. The teacher also creates structures within which the children can explore, learn, thrive and create. He assists towards facilitating the development of problem-solving and interpersonal communication skills.

Community also enhance relationship with early childhood education through the birth of children, the family unit welcome a child through birth and naming rites. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) outlined a child's entitlement to a name and nationality from birth as a right. Communities can advocate for children's rights, demand child friendly services and mobilize resources to benefit children.

Relationship between Community and Early Childhood Education

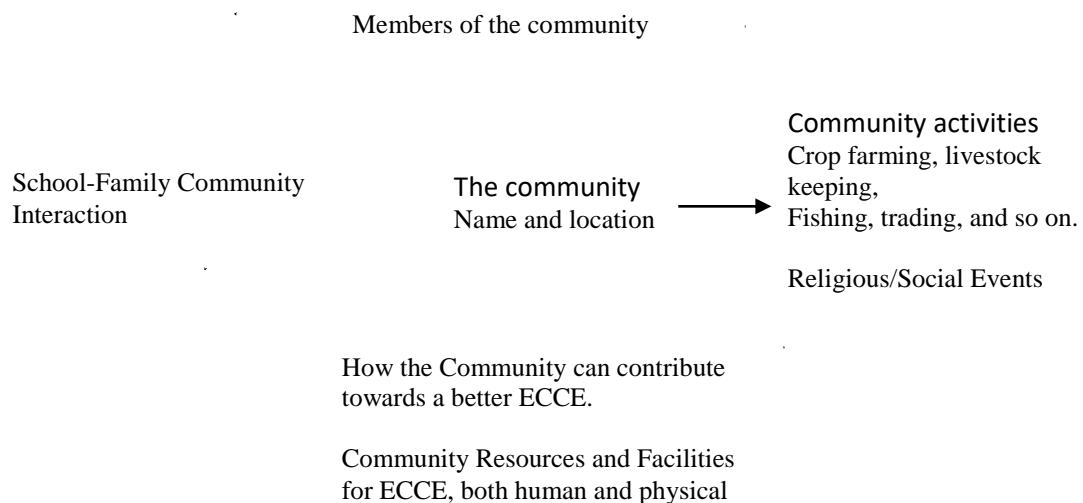


Figure 2: Relationship between Community and Early Childhood Education
Source: Researchers 2025

Benefits of Family and community participation in Early Childhood Education

The National PTA (2000), and the National Coalition for Parents involvement in Education (2002), have enumerated the benefits that can be gotten from family-school

collaboration. Some of these benefits are to the students, some are to the teachers, while some are to the school administrators, parents and society.

To the students, family-school participation would afford them more positive attitudes toward school, higher achievement, better attendance in school and in school activities, higher graduation rates at the primary and secondary school levels, higher enrolment rates in the post-secondary education and better school to attend. On the part of the teacher, effective family-school collaboration would lead to greater teaching effectiveness, higher expectation of students, increased ability to understand family views and culture, greater appreciation by parents, and improved morale.

Through effective family-school collaboration, the parents would also have greater knowledge of education programmes and school work, greater knowledge of how to be more supportive of children, greater confidence about ways to help children, more positive views of teachers. The society would also benefit from effective family-school partnership by having greater strength, greater impact of services through a comprehensive, integrated and increased access to services for families, and greater sense of community.

Challenges Facing Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

According to Eriba (2011), the educational system has been in a state of permanent crises that it has lost quality, efficacy and functionality over the years. Early childhood education in Nigeria is not left out in these crises which tend to make the gains of education less spectacular. The challenges which these problems have precipitated for the nation will be highlighted in few key areas so as to provide a framework for considered action by stakeholders in early childhood education. These challenges include the following:

- i. There is lack of commitment to the national policies on the international agreements and conventions. They are still only on papers, not implemented.
- ii. Lack of awareness and uncertainty of parents on the influence of early childhood education often lead them to place less ECE far from the top of education priority of children. This negatively affects what foundation that would have been laid for the strong educational development of the children.
- iii. There is low awareness of appropriate place for birth registration especially in rural and remote communities which invariably leads to dearth of statistics on accurate number of children to be planned for.
- iv. Lack of proper monitoring and supervision by the government.
- v. Lack of specialized teachers in the ECCE centres.
- vi. Inadequate funding. This is because the policies, programmes and budgets of the nation have not reflected the seriousness with which the matter ought to be addressed.

- vii. In addition, there is a lower availability of preschools in rural areas. Even if parents are willing to send their children to preschools, they are often not close to where they live.
- viii. Some preschool are not always willing to accommodate children with special needs. Even if accommodated, special attention is not always giving to them.
- ix. Unavailability of proper curriculum that would sufficiently integrate the child with his educational stimulation.

Conclusion

The importance of solid foundation in education is obvious. Early childhood education is where the foundation is laid for future learning and dispositions required in the pursuit of lifelong endeavours. The family by providing the values, norms and attitudes that the child cherishes and uphold, play a vital role. The community which is the immediate environment outside the home of the child also contributes significantly in ways of providing avenues and opportunities for the child to learn in order to become meaningful members of the society. A thorough knowledge of what, and how education is been handled at this level is imperative. Therefore, government needs iron determination to implement the strategies that will necessarily enhance quality and quality development of early childhood/preschools education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

For more positive result and advancement to safeguard and help our children learn better, the following recommendations are suggested:

- i. A more realistic and concerted efforts should be made by government in ensuring the implementation of the national policies on the international agreements and conventions.
- ii. The Nigerian communities (parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, local organizations, community members and leaders, religious groups and leaders) should provide favourable environment to enable total actualization of the government policy on early childhood programmes through the provision of resources needed such as land, manpower and others.
- iii. Parents should be made to show the birth certificates of their children before accessing government assistance in agriculture and other social facilities.
- iv. Government at all levels, community based development on education and concern parents should ensure foundational learning, social skills, and emotional development are provided in schools by early childhood educators .
- v. The Nigerian Resaerch and Development Council (NERDC), Fedral Ministry of Education and Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (Child Development Department) should improve on education policy so as to enhance the quality

- and strategies for preschools through the provision of finances for the training of staff and the establishment of well equip preschools centres.
- vi. Parents should not relent their efforts in sending their children to preschools so as to boost their social- emotional school readiness.
 - vii. The Quality Assurance Supervisors in State Ministries of Education should ensure that preschools operate a form of inclusive education where children with special needs would be mainstreamed into the general schools.
 - viii. The parents, religious groups and leaders in the communities should provide children adequate and balanced teaching on the word of God and accepted social value in order to rid the society of corruption and destruction.
 - ix. The Nigerian Resaerch and Development Council (NERDC), should review the ECE curriculum such that, it will integrate and provide sufficient care and involvement of family and caregivers together with educational stimulation.

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