

Relevance of Demonstration Early Childhood Care and Education Centres to the Nigerian Education System

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Abstract: *This paper highlights the concept of early childhood care and education Demonstration Early care and education centres and what they entail. It examines the relevance, specification, funding, staffing, admission of children and method of instruction in the centre. It also discusses some challenges associated the establishment and running of these centres and some benefits of the centers to children, caregivers-in-training, parents, the college and larger community. It explains how children trained in a child-friendly environment and with child child-centred methods of instruction used in the centre are more likely to have holistic development. The training meets their present and future needs in a fast developing society. Recommendations that are useful in solving the problems highlighted are outlined. The paper is concluded by summarizing and discussing ways by which certain challenges could be stemmed within the Demonstration ECCE Centres, Colleges of Education and larger society.*

I. Introduction

An Early Childcare and Education (ECCE) Centers is a facility outside the home, set up to provide care and support for the development and education of every children from birth to the age of 5 years. It is a facility t help meet the basic needs of the child for good health care, nutrition, security, affection, interaction and cognitive development (FRN and UNICEF, 2008).

The Demonstration Early Childhood care and Education Centre or Pre-School is an instruction laboratory where caregivers-in-training could be exposed to practical skills and knowledge in care giving. Caregivers in-training are students studying early childhood care and education at various levels. The Demonstration Centre is established to meet the learning needs of caregivers-in-training by providing opportunities for the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge required for giving care and support to children.

It is a necessary complement to the theoretical courses in the NCE-ECCE Curriculum (NCCE, 2008). The practical knowledge and skills acquired are expected to complement the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom. This practical aspect is compulsory for all first and second year students of the ECCE.

Levels of ECCE centres include the crèche or day care centre for children from birth to two years; playgroup for children two to three years old and nursery school for children aged 3-5 years. Colleges of Education running NCE-ECCE programmes are expected to establish Demonstration ECCE Centres which may develop into Model Centres (FRN, 2013). A Model Centre or pre-school is a centre that provides an ideal environment equipped with basic facilities for care and necessary stimulation for total development of the child. Such a centre is expected to represent an achievable target for public and private initiatives in the area of ECCE.

Relevance and specification for Demonstration ECCE Centre's

Establishment of ECCE centres is an important strategy for implementing the NCE-ECCE Curriculum. Its purpose is to address the child's six development domains, (physical, motor, perceptual, cognitive, language and socio-emotional). The center is to serve as a demonstration laboratory for students' practicum with teacher/child ratio of 1:20 for 3years olds and 1:10 for 0-3 year olds.

Guidelines stipulated by NCCE includes:

- i. It must be within working distance of the ECCE department
- ii. Environment must be safe and secure, not bushy
- iii. Free from excessive noise and other hazards
- iv. Accessible but distant from heavy traffic
- v. It must be properly fenced
- vi. It must be located in a spacious environment

The center is owned by the college and should be managed by the EECE Department through the advisory/supervisory committee. Guidelines prescribed by NCCE must be followed and all necessary facilities

as stated must be provided. The College of Education must liaise with NCCE from time to time for accreditation and federal ministry of education for licensing.

II. Funding and staffing

The College of Education is responsible for funding through the annual budgetary allocation, internally generated revenue, contributions from parents, civil society organizations or International Development Partners (IDPs). There could also be contributions from other relevant government parastatals such as State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBE).

Caregivers with NCE qualification or retired nurses or other educated retirees should be employed. The caregivers and helpers should be mentally, emotionally and physically healthy. There should be cleaners and well trained security personnel. Staff should be relevant to the needs of the centres and should be integrated into the welfare ministry of the College in terms of remuneration, health, promotion and career development opportunities.

Enrolment of Children and Method of Instruction

Children are our common future. It is important that appropriate care and development of children is given utmost attention so that they grow well and become responsible adults (UBEC, 2014). It is necessary to ensure that every Nigerian child survives, thrives and develops to his full potential. This is in the context of international legal instrument and declaration such as the convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1990), Education for All (EFA, 2000), Goal 1 and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNICEF, 2008 and Rufai, 2013).

Every child irrespective of ethnic religious, cultural, gender, affiliations, and physical challenges has the right to be enrolled (UBE Act, 2004 and IECD Policy 2007). Method of teaching emphasizes effective use of play, practical demonstration, storytelling, use of songs, rhymes, discovery, inquiry methods and experimentation. Instruction at this level is generally activity based (NICECD, 2007).

Challenges

Some challenges associated with the establishment and running Demonstration ECCE Centres includes:

- i. Lack of awareness about the need to instruct children through play and other activities – some parents, staff and community members see this as waste of time and resources.
- ii. Inadequate number of caregivers and nannies – the teacher/child ratio of 1:20 for 3-5 years old and 1:10 for 0-3years old is difficult to implement due to required remuneration. Each caregiver is expected to have an assistant within the classroom for effective interaction with children
- iii. Lack or inadequate basic necessities in the centre – the centre should have basic necessities such as constant water supply, fencing and security personnel round the clock. Provision of health and sanitation facilities and items should never cease, but these are sometimes short in supply
- iv. Funding – regular supply of money for daily running of the center is a necessity. This is a major challenge as the procedure of acquiring funds from the college is tedious and prolonged.
- v. Caregivers in training may not get proper experiences – a centre that does not meet some requirements stipulated cannot provide the necessary training for caregivers. Children will also not get the best from caregivers and permanent staff sometimes leave their responsibilities for the student to handle.

III. Recommendations

Some of the challenges encountered during the establishment and running of Demonstration ECCE Centre can be tackled by:

- i. Enlightenment of parents and other stakeholders about the objectives of the ECCE Centre by the Colleges of Education through the ECCE Department. The community should be fully involved in school activities and any aspect that is not understood should be clearly explained. The department must ensure that caregivers put in their best to produce school children that will make a difference academically and socially.
- ii. Adequate number of qualified and dedicated caregivers should be employed by the Colleges of Education to meet the minimum requirement. if caregivers and nannies are overworked or overwhelmed by an uncontrollable number of children, the cannot put in their best.
- iii. Provision of health sanitation and security facilities cannot be overlooked. Colleges of Education that have such centres must put these on their priority lists, the most protected and valuable assets of the Colleges should be the ECCE centre because of the presence of the little children.
- iv. A regular amount of money should be earmarked for daily running of the centre. Proper record keeping and accountability is necessary on the part of the Head of Department and Head Caregivers.

- v. There should be proper and regular supervision of caregivers in training by ECCE Head of Department, Head caregivers and other staff. Instructional materials should be available, relevant and properly utilized while improvisation of non-available materials should be encouraged. It is also the duty of the Head of Department and Head Caregivers to ensure that permanent caregivers carryout their responsibilities well.

IV. Conclusion

The Demonstration ECCE Centre provides an ideal environment for children and caregivers to interact. Children are kept positively busy and are less likely to be instilled with wrong ideas and notions. The children are less likely to be drawn into social ills, moral and social skills are developed early and self confidence is also developed.

Children are protected from molestation that could happen to them at home or within the community when parents are away. They are well prepared for the primary level, exhibit no fear and are able to transit smoothly due to high sense of self confidence developed at the centre.

Caregivers-in-training get good quality training and they graduate with the required practical experience to take care of children. The problem of half trained and unqualified caregivers is minimized.

Proper supervision and need for record keeping and accountability which are mandatory in the centre helps to curb the problems of embezzlement and lackadaisical attitude. Community involvement in school activities also help to check some corrupt practices that may hinder educational achievement.

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