
Early Childhood Education as an Instrument for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined Early Childhood education as an instrument for good governance in Nigeria. Good governance, is a situation whereby those in power decides what is to be implemented or not without making the governed feel marginalized. Good governance requires certain characteristics before one can say it is good. Characteristics like accountability, vividness, responsive participatory attributes, effectiveness and efficiency in duties, follow up of all the due process of the law are needed. In Nigeria, Early Childhood education is an education given to children in a formal school setting. It starts from 0-8 years, which means that the child starts from crèche through primary three to acquire this education. At this stage, children are taught social norms and social skills like friendship, volunteering, sympathy, kindness, empathy, truthfulness and accountability. It has been observed that most developing nations are experiencing the problem of under-development economically, socially, politically and morally to mention but a few. This problem could be traced to negligence, non-challant attitude as well as unawareness of what good early childhood education entails on the part of parents and teachers. Since good governance is directly related to social and moral habits, good governance cannot be achieved if people being governed are socially and morally undeveloped, which may be due to the fact that they do not have good social skills due to lack of training at the early childhood stage of education. Therefore, the good governance characteristics for the future leaders should be imbibed in early childhood education. Hence, there is need for the government to encourage parents to enroll their children in early childhood education.

Keywords: Children, Early Childhood Education, Good Governance

1. Introduction

Study has revealed that the ranking of Nigeria in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (HAG) over the years gives food for thought. The HAG provides an annual assessment of the quality of governance in African countries under four main conceptual categories: safety and rule of law; participation and human right; sustainable economic opportunity; and human development. In the 2014 HAG report released recently, Nigeria ranked 37th out of 52 countries in Africa. This is an improvement over the 2013 ranking when Nigeria ranked 41st in Africa. The country scored 46% in overall governance index, 38% on safety and rule of law while on participation and human right, it scored 49%. The country was scored 43.3% on sustainable economic opportunity while it got 53% on human development. Overall, Nigeria was scored 52% on category and sub-category ranks and was placed 12th out of 15 in West Africa. Mauritius maintains its rating as the best governed country in Africa with 81.7%, a position it has occupied since 2007. Cape Verde placed second with 76.6%, Bostwana was ranked 3rd with 76.2%, South Africa 4th with 73.3% while Ghana was rated 7th (Business day, 2014).

Analysts argued that of all the problems, challenges and crisis facing Nigeria, the most disheartening appears to be ineffective leadership. They further argued that the reverberation effect of the failure of the leadership, corruption and bad governance are being felt across all sectors and segments of Nigeria (Business day, 2014). Based on this premise, the activists are of the opinion that the process of education which begins at early childhood education level can be used as an instrument for good governance.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) recognises the need to use education to achieve development. The policy stressed that the goal of the Nigerian education is to prepare learners for effective and productive life in the society. This implies that the Nigerian education is expected to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, attitude, values, skills and competencies which would enable them respond positively to the changing world in which they live and work. According to Osakwe (2006), education being an indispensable tool in nation building is a process of systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities which would enable an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of an individual; physically, socially, morally, intellectually and emotionally. The rigorous process of inculcating such knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and competencies is recommended at the early childhood education level. Early childhood education therefore, is the level at which the foundation of knowledge, attitude, values, skills and competency acquisition for personal and national development is laid.

It is at the early childhood stage of a child's life that basic skills to govern may be inculcated into the child. For one to govern right, one must have good leadership skills. Acquiring leadership skills make the child to live a controlled or disciplined life. With disciplined life, a child can become whatever he desires to be and actually pursue it to logical conclusion and make it happen (Penstate Extension, 2022) or actualize the desire. Good leadership skills make an individual to be responsible. Every opportunity to serve puts a demand on you to show a high sense of responsibility and in which one must not waiver. Every good leader is intentional with whatever he does. He sees to it that he makes a heady way with greater consciousness to succeed. The child who intends to be a leader must have been made to develop confidence in himself or herself so as not to be tossed and manipulated. He/she must have been schooled to be a problem solver with sound judgment and great vision. This means he/she must be visionary. He/she must not be doing things as it used to be or followed the status-quo. He must make a difference. He/she must be creative. He/she must also be able to work in a team. He must be team player that can relate peacefully and collaboratively with others. He/she must be able to think out of the box. Children by nature usually think out of the box. Children are trained to develop analytical and critical thinking during reading comprehension. They can be imaginative, innovative, make abstract connections, listen to others ideas, open-minded and satisfy their curiosity.

This study would be significant to the pupils, parents, teachers, the government, policy makers and curriculum planners. It would give pupils insight into what good governance entails. It would also develop children's interest in being part of decision making body and governance. Parents would be aware of how to inculcate morals into the children early in life, in order to display appropriate behaviour when they have the opportunity to be part of the helm of affairs (leadership position). Teachers need to be aware that when they develop needed social skills in children, it would impact the learners to become good citizens in future. With this position, the government would see the need to ensure that teachers in the Early Childhood Centres are properly trained. Specialist in the field of Early Childhood Education should be employed. Also, government should make sure that educators, care givers, centre heads in early childhood establishments must be well trained and certified. Lastly, the government should ensure that policy makers on children's education should be specialists in early childhood education. Curriculum planners should also allow the teachers to spend quality time at developing children's social skills in class.

2. Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that most developing nations are experiencing the problem of under-development economically, socially, politically and morally to mention but a few. This under-development could be due to citizen's socio-developmental defects resulting in lackadaisical attitudes towards moral and social skills development. This problem could be traced to negligence, non-challant attitude as well as unawareness of what good early childhood education entails on the part of parents and teachers. Parents could be the culprit when they fail to send their children to early childhood and care centres to develop the basic social skills. Also, when parents overlook correctable behaviours, it can result to unacceptable social and moral behaviours in the child. Furthermore, when value and morals have been watered down children misbehave. Teachers on their

part, may not be aware of the importance of harnessing the benefits that early childhood education can offer to develop good governance traits. The fallout is as a result of not employing specialists in early childhood education to teach at this level. The aforementioned therefore, informs the focus of this paper.

3. The Concept of Good Governance

There is no single and exhaustive definition of good governance nor is there a delimitation of its scope that command universal acceptance. The term is used with great flexibility. Good governance has been said at various times to encompass full representation of human right, the rule of law, effective participations, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, attitude and values that fosters responsibility, solidarity and tolerance (Business Day, 2014).

However, there is a significant degree of consensus that good governance relates to policies and instructional processes and outcome that are deemed necessary to achieve the goal of development (Business Day, 2014). According to Dugumar & Kompuok (2021) good governance stands for accountability, transparency in decision making, implementation of the rule of law and regulations, early response to citizens' need, equity and integration among interest groups and efficiency in using resources in the delivery of services approach. Good governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human right in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruptions, and with due regard for the rule of law (Business Day, 2014). Therefore, good governance is encapsulated in having the love of the citizens at heart and the putting in place everything that will make them to live happy and enjoy their lives.

4. The Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is seen as a branch of knowledgeable and essential components of all family and programmes arrangement for young children from birth to the statutory school age of six (Oduolwu, 2006). Pre-primary education otherwise known as early childhood education is the kind of education that provides young children from the cradle to the age of five plus with cognitive, physical, moral, social and emotional development. That is, it is a level of education that helps the mind to develop in term of moral, spiritual and emotional capacities. It covers all forms of organized and sustained centre-based activities such as pre – school, kindergarten and day care centre designed to foster learning, emotional and social development in children.

National Policy on Education (2013), defines pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten.

5. Purpose of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The purposes of early childhood education otherwise known as pre-primary education as expounded in the National Policy on Education (2013) are as follows:

1. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, offices and other places)
4. Inculcate social norms
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the environment, art, music and playing with toys and other non-dangerous objects.
6. Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habit and
8. Teach the rudiment, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play.

The aforementioned purposes places so much importance on Early Childhood Education as an instrument for developing good leadership skills in children early in life. It also demands being intentional about it.

6. The Place of Early Childhood Education in Good Governance

Early Childhood Education is designed to develop children's intellectual, social, emotional, language, physical development and learning from birth to age eight. From the foregoing, it is obvious that one of the objectives to be achieved during early childhood period is to inculcate social and moral habits in children.

Moral values refer to a set of principles that guide an individual on how to evaluate right and wrong. People generally apply moral values to justify decisions, intentions and actions. It also defines the personal character of a person. An individual with high moral values typically displays characteristics of integrity, respect, fairness, honesty and compassion. The basic foundation of an individual's character is developed during the early years.

Good Governance is directly related to social and moral habits. Good governance cannot be achieved if the people being governed are ungovernable, that is, when the people do not have the skill, potentials and abilities which would enable them to contribute efficiently to their personal and social development.

During early childhood period, children discover how to establish and maintain relationship with peer group (Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren, 2011). Hence the skills which would enable them develop healthy social competence later in life are acquired. These skills are embedded in social, emotional and moral domain of learning and they include peaceful co-existence, respect, love, care, tolerance, friendship, acceptance, cooperation, sharing, responsibility, helping, sympathizing, defending, rescuing, empathy, and conflict resolution among others (Bredekamp, 2011; Kostelnik, et al 2011). These skills would enable them later in life to establish positive relationship with others, live with the bonds of societal expectations, perceive, interpret and respond to situations positively. It is therefore pertinent to say that addressing the issue of good governance would take the commitment and involvement of many elements in the society, including early childhood education.

In the view of Bredekamp (2011), building positive social skills and healthy emotional relationship during the early years is more effective than trying to remedy problems later. A child's high level of social competence in our society means that such a child would exhibit responsible, independent, friendly, cooperative, purposeful and self-controlled behaviour (Kostelnik et al, 2011). All these explanations point to the fact that early childhood education is an institution for good governance.

7. Skills Acquired During Early Childhood Period

Olowe, Kutelu and Majebi (2014), gave account of the skills that can be acquired during early childhood period which can make children become governable and able to govern in future. The skills are pre-social behaviour, friendship skills, conflict resolution skill, emotional literacy and positive attitude towards diversity.

Pre-social behaviour or skill is a set of activities performed by one which are of benefit to the society as a whole. They include activities such as helping, co-operating, rescuing, defending, sharing, donating, volunteering, comforting, sympathy, kindness, giving, showing concern and taking another persons' perspective among others (Preusse, 2008; Kostelnik, et al, 2011). There is no doubt that these activities or skills would give room for enabling environment where there would be peace and where everyone can be loved and cared for (Olowe, et al, 2014).

Through friendship, children learn how to relate with others because they develop social skills. Children who have friends respond to conflict in positive ways, they are inclusive and more often express empathy and compassion (Stephens, 2007). As noted by Kostelnik, et al (2011), and Stephens (2007), friendship stimulates sensitiveness, alertness, responsiveness, flexibility, assistance, companionship, social comparison and affection. Within friendship, children can experiment with a number of social roles such as leaders, followers, risk takers and comforters.

The most complex aspect of peer relationship according to Kostelnik, et al (2011), is handling conflicts. Children's ability to deal with disputes in democratic ways include recognizing and taking account of other's viewpoint, compromising, bargaining, or suggesting non-violent solutions to problem which is highly indicative of the future success of a relationship (Epstein, 2009). In resolving conflict, children are expected to learn to express their rights, explain the reason behind the suggestion, and accept reasonable disagreement. (Kostelnik et al, 2009; and 2011).

The children, during their course of study, their care giver would have initiated a mediator role by stopping aggressive behaviour, solicit statements from each party, and define problem in mutual terms. Hence, they acquire conflict resolution skill. Joseph, Strain and Ostrosky (2006), submitted that emotional literacy is the ability to identify, understand and respond to oneself and others in a healthy manner. It means that emotional literacy has to do with having self-awareness and recognition of one's feelings and knowing how to manage them, such as the ability to stay calm when angered or reassure oneself when in doubt (Olowe, et al. 2014). It includes empathy that is, having sensitivity to the feelings of other people. This skill is acquired early in life through the use of songs and rhythms, plays, games and story reading during early childhood education programme. These skills enable them to appreciate that there are diversities in life.

This knowledge moderates one's attitude in relating with people who are different from one's self (Koselink, et al, 2011). Children's attitude about diversity have their roots in childhood, even before they are three years of age, they notice their peers physical attributes and begin to compare these features with their own. In early childhood education programme, children are raised to celebrate and value diversity and to be proud of themselves, their family, traditions, respect and value people regardless of the colour of their skin, their physical abilities, or the language they speak. This builds positive identities and respect for difference during the early childhood period. Thus, diversity is woven into the fabric of the child's everyday life.

Other basic skills important for governance include good communication skills. This is because such an individual must be able to articulate his views clearly and succinctly without ambiguity so that people may be able to understand his vision and run with it. Good governance demands trustworthiness, integrity, ability to apologise, consistency in behaviour and accountability. These traits are developed right from the childhood age. Additional traits include honesty, ability to delegate responsibility and define duties with confidence. The ability to show empathy, loving, caring, loving, humorous, guard confidence and meeting basic social needs are prerequisite to good governance. Emotional intelligence, matters most, he must be morally upright, reliable, respectful, stand for whatever is right and be thoughtful of others. All these emotional intelligences are developed from the childhood age.

A good leader listens to feedbacks and learns from the past mistakes and can trouble shoot to find solutions to problems. A reflective mind is needed to be able to govern well and children are taught to engage in reflecting to solve problem. Keeping

promises is what children love most. Children are initiative and get themselves involved and are focused, target based and may volunteer not for monetary gains. Being a leader entails becoming an independent thinker who understands how to work as part of a team as well as have effect on others around him positively (Natalie, 2022).

The word leadership are not explicitly states in early childhood standards but there are socio-emotional phrases such as “self-confidence, problem solving, pro-social and ability to make independent decisions and choices. Children are also expected to know and state independent thought and feelings and participate in new experience with confidence and independence Pennstate Extension (2022). All children have the potential to develop leadership skills. It is a lifelong process and children must be taught these skills so that they can take up leadership roles in future (Pennstate Extension, 2022).

8. Challenges

The development of basic leadership skills in children may be facing certain challenges. Parents and teachers need to adapt to making it a priority to develop leadership skills in children that would make them to govern later in life when the opportunity arises. Parents and teachers need to change within themselves and see that as much as children are seen they also need to be heard. The children must be given a voice. Development of self confidence in children must be encouraged by all and sundry. Parents may not allow their children to take certain decisions that could affect their lives. But they should be encouraged and given room to practice confident decision making. Parents are the major decision takers in the education, social as well as financial matters however, giving children money or allowance and allowing them to budget is essential. Although difficult they should be guided in taking the right decisions.

Parents, older siblings and elders in the community may find it rude when children want to negotiate and change decisions made by them. Children should be allowed to negotiate and buttress their points as this would strengthen their negotiation skills. Children should be allowed to do certain chores, doing such chores by parents would prevent them from being hardworking in the future.

Some parents do not allow their children to mix with others in the society. They feel they are lower in status than they. The ability to mix with the grass root, affords them the ability to know what the less privileged are going through. It makes them to identify with them and so when they get to governance they would be able to team up with people, work as a team and have the team spirit (despite their social status).

Ability to think critically, have a goal, plan on how to attain it and solve problem must be developed in children. Perhaps the issue of time management should also be developed in children. Punctuality is key. When parents themselves are punctual, children would also develop punctuality mentality. Going to function one hour or two behind schedule because you are the governor or head of a state should be discouraged and should be inculcated into children from childhood

This brings us to the problem of parents not setting a good example for their children to follow. Parents are expected to be the role model hence they must not be found wanting if leadership skills that would develop to governance must be instilled in children.

9. Implications of Acquired Skills in Early Childhood Education

There is no doubt that all the skills acquired through early childhood education programme would have great and positive impact on the Nigeria society. This is particularly true because the children would soon grow to become adults later in life and they would be the one to carry on the affairs of their society (Olowe, et al., 2014).

Pro-social behaviour acquired during early childhood period will enable a child to be ready to help and cooperate with others who have less opportunity. They would show kindness towards others, defend them, share resources with them and share their perspectives, in relation to good governance. A child who has acquired this skill and who find himself in a position of authority, such as political offices in Nigeria, would be ready to help the masses, cooperate with them, show kindness to them, defend them against external aggression and cooperate with others. This will result in good governance. The possession of this skills as a subordinate makes him governable.

Again a Nigeria child that has been taught friendship skills and emotional literacy during early childhood period would grow up to ensure that he shows love and affection towards others. He would ensure that conflicts are amicably resolved, exhibit and show respect for elders and those in position of authority because he would always show love and respect for those he is to govern.

In addition, the knowledge of conflict resolution acquired during childhood would enable them so deal with disputes in democratic ways. Recognising and taking account of differences in opinion, listening to and acknowledging other's rights, compromising, bargaining and or suggesting non-violent solutions to problems. In the same vein, a child who has the knowledge of conflict resolution and find himself in governance would be able to take into account differences in others points of view. This skill would help him to settle dispute in a democratic way. For example, if such a child is to handle the issue of Boko -haram, he would use the skill of conflict resolution to handle the issue.

If children are taught early during childhood years to appreciate diversity, they would be ready to celebrate, accept, appreciate and value others regardless of the colour of their skin, physical abilities or the language they speak, and if found in the position of authority, they would be able to celebrate, accept, appreciate and value others. This skill would enable him to

govern very well even as subordinate he would appreciate diversity in government and its representative. As a result he would be governable.

10. Conclusion

It is apparent that all the problems, challenges and crisis facing Nigeria are traced to ineffective leadership, corruption and bad governance. In order to address these problems, there must be commitment and involvement of many element of society, including early childhood education.

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