Need for Quality, Equitable and Context-Based on Early Childhood Care and Pre-Primary Education: Counselling Implications

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Abstract

The global challenge is changing, through the rapid growth in early childhood care and Pre-primary education, which shows that its quality affects children's development and learning. An early learning environment that offers children the possibility to engage in developmentally suitable, stimulating, language-rich activities can make amends for the risks for children from poor backgrounds by accomplishing their full developmental capability. It requires that young children to be provided care opportunities and experiences that lead to their all-around development of physical, mental, social emotional, and school readiness. The benefits of quality, equitable, and context-based extend to health and well-being, which helps instill healthy habits of eating and physical activity. It also helps to support children's outcomes later in life, including labour market participation, reduction of poverty, increased intergenerational social mobility, and social

integration.   The paper examined the need for quality, equitable, and context-based early childhood care and pre-primary education. The emphasis is based on what and how to ensure quality early childhood care and pre-primary education for all, its importance, and suggested approaches. The paper explored the implications of how to increase access provisions of quality childhood care and pre-primary education. The recommendations focused on counselling techniques and skills to work harmoniously with the teachers to realize the goals.

Keywords: Quality, Early Child Care, Pre-Primary Education, and Counselling Implication

Introduction

The effects of quality early childhood care and pre-primary education on children's development and learning have been well established in that process of quality is the primary driver of children's development. It is quality, equitable, and context-based and is beneficial for children's early development and their subsequent school performance in various domains, such as language use and emerging academic skills, early literacy and numeracy, and socio-emotional skills. It extends to health and well-being, by helping instill healthy habits of eating and physical activity. In addition, it helps to support children's outcomes later in life, including labour market participation, reduction of poverty, increased intergenerational social mobility, and social integration. An early learning environment that provides young children with opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate, stimulating, and language-rich activities and social interactions can compensate for the risks for children from disadvantaged backgrounds of falling behind or not reaching their full developmental potential.

It was emphasized in the Global education monitoring report that a great deal of evidence demonstrates the significant effects that quality, equitable, and context-based early childcare and pre-primary education can have on a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, growth, school readiness, and future economic potential. However, not all children in Nigeria participate in any organized early childhood care and pre-primary education before the typical enrolment age for Primary one. Such education is often only available to wealthier children, and is not of consistent quality, nor does it incorporate the local knowledge of learning processes that pre-school children should be exposed to before commencement of formal schooling (UNESCO, 2017). The focus of early childcare and pre-primary education must go beyond access quality, equitable and

context-based in terms of processes, stakeholder involvement and integration of local knowledge into quality programming should be included (Wadende, Oburu & Morara 2016).

Consequently, early childhood care and pre-primary school teachers need to understand the distinctive characteristics and natures of each child as well as be able to make comparative recommendations at any point of time. The creation of the appropriate classroom environment, amiable terms and relationships, social climate and pleasant teaching-learning methods should be created for all-encompassing development of the students for determined provision of solutions to their academic, vocational and personal social problems in nursery schools (Egbo, 2015). It can be stated that guidance and counselling services for nursery school students are rare since they are very young, but when parents seek assistance from professional counsellors, their guidance is primarily focused upon academic, intellectual, personal, social, and cognitive development of the children.

What is quality child care and pre-primary education?

In the opinion of Maulik & Darmastadt (2009), quality child care and pre-primary education in terms of resource availability, organization and management of learning processes, and the extent to which the early childhood and education programmes currently offered meet children's developmental needs as well as meet the expectations and requirements of stakeholders. Quality is a competent workforce with proper and standardized qualifications, supply and retention of qualified teachers, and system capacity to train and mentor these teachers, and assuring quality across providers.

In New York by Programme guidance for early childhood development calls for "safe, stimulating and nurturing learning environments", however, to provide access to quality childcare and pre-primary education, with access and quality considered simultaneously. While there is no single definition of neither quality or equity especially in the context of childcare and preprimary education, at minimum quality education must meet stakeholder expectations and comprise a child-friendly and rights-based environment where children's developmental and learning needs are effectively supported. The stakeholders include caregivers, communities, government agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations but have a common interest in ensuring that all children (including the vulnerable and marginalized), from conception to age of school

entry achieve their full developmental potential. Also, in New York with a human rights-based approach to education for all, focused on nurturing care and distribution of educational opportunities to all children to benefit from quality education irrespective of their gender, wealth status and ethnicity. The framework adopted multi-sectoral intervention packages that incorporate stakeholders' engagements in the provision of early learning, care giving, and child protection (UNICEF, 2007).

Emphasis on equitable quality as well as context-based childhood care and pre-primary education should thus be placed on the provision of an educational environment that is participatory, holistic, and incremental for instance builds on skills already acquired at home, relevant home learning is interrelated to institutionalized school learning, welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy, safe and protective. The provision of equitable quality education requires integration of school preparation skills with life acquisition skills creates room for leveraging of communal knowledge in the generation of expected learning outcomes, treats all children with respect; and actively supports children's play-based learning needs and human rights (Maulik & Darmstadt 2009).

 Dirks et al (cited in UNICEF, 2018), explained that the provision of such an environment should not be proven challenging. Often when childcare and pre-primary education is offered, it is delivered like education for older children, with children spending the school day sitting still and receiving rote instruction. Children learn best through play and hands-on experiences, with guidance from a caring adult. Thus, quality must be context-based in that children must have limitless access to materials that support imaginative and free-choice play.

Importance of quality childcare and pre-primary education

Rao et al. (2014), affirmed that there is substantial evidence from low and middle-income earners that low-quality early childhood education has limited or even negative effects on children's development. D'Angiulli and Schibli (2016) opined that poor quality early childcare and education environments can elevate children's stress responses in ways that inhibit the acquisition of higher-order cognitive and social skills. In contrast according to Lisonbee, Mize, Payne, & Granger (2008), in quality programming where children can develop supportive and trusting relationships with teachers, there would be lower and better-regulated levels of stress hormones. Jones & Boufard (1997), advocated for a positive and responsive caregiver to eliminate the effects of adversity and foster young children's positive development and learning in low and middle-income

earners. There is also evidence that a quality pre-primary education has a significant impact on developmental skills important to primary-level success and helps to ensure on-time enrolment in primary school. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable and excluded children.

Suggesting approaches for quality child care and pre-primary education

Spier, Oburu, and Yoshikawa, (2018), identified scalable and sustainable approaches for quality childcare and pre-primary education models which must address the very significant and pervasive issue of insufficient human resources at a cost that is affordable for governments. This includes:

1. Training local community members usually women with a secondary school to serve as childcare and pre-primary teachers. These models reach into underserved communities, where teachers with formal professional qualifications typically do not wish to work. These childcare and pre-primary teachers become much respected within their communities and serve as a community resource for child development.

2. Accelerated school readiness programmes train and incentivize existing teachers or community volunteers to provide a school readiness short course during the summer months when the classrooms are otherwise empty.

3. Process quality refers to the quality of teacher-child interactions and pedagogy, rather than infrastructure or staff formal qualifications.

4. Investing in systems development. A comprehensive approach to quality early child development encompasses. These include attention to community and stakeholder involvement in quality improvement; workforce development systems; data systems incorporating quality formative and summative learning assessments; robust financial systems to track expenditures; and links across national level that are not simply about compliance but about quality improvement.

How to ensure quality early child care and pre-primary for all?

Government of Colombia (2017) and Yoshikawa et al. (2018), identified and advocated on how to ensure quality early child and pre-primary for all; that there is a need to acknowledge limited attention to early child care and pre-primary education is a real problem, with real consequences for excluded children who already face significant risks for poor educational outcomes. These are:

1. Policymakers and other stakeholders will not change the status quo without a good reason to do so. There are roles for early childhood educator specialists and other international partners to engage in information-sharing and advocacy with those who have the power to drive system level change whether they are politicians, educators, families, the public, or all the above at national levels. The ultimate purpose is to reach a critical mass of demand for quality pre-primary education, so that once established, it cannot be easily taken away when the political winds change direction.

2. Beliefs and practices that perpetuate the low status of pre-primary education and educators should be challenged, both at the level of policymakers and among parents and the general public. What is required are creative solutions and innovative approaches aimed at understanding reasons for, and how to deal with, misinformation and inherent belief systems specific to the early childhood period. These approaches could include addressing belief systems that assume a lower status for women and children, and increasing male involvement in early childhood care and education to challenge gender stereotypes.

3. Pre-primary education must become embedded in larger systems if it is to receive the oversight, funding, and other resources required to reach all children. System support for pre-primary education requires national quality standards, leadership and data systems; local level training and monitoring systems to ensure programme quality; and national governance that can effectively coordinate between the national and local levels.

4. The nation needs substantial and long-term investment from governments and donors to address the current constraints to providing universally available, quality pre-primary education in the nation. There is a need to identify and adapt effective models that are feasible within the available or potentially available human resources, infrastructure, and material resources including within the context of low resource or marginalized communities. Adaptation should be responsive to the needs, values, and assets of children, families, communities, and educators. The process of implementing at scale requires the support of civil society organizations and researchers, along with partnerships with the public sector and policy makers. Concisely, there is a need for up-front and ongoing investment in capacity building for measurement and evaluation purposes. Additionally, there are need to invest in identification of best practices, adaptation to work at scale, and development of the necessary support systems to manage and sustain a quality pre-primary system.

Counselling Implications

For quality, equitable and context-based for child care and pre-primary education to be achieved, it is essential for guidance and counselling services to be included in the programme. The guidance and counselling services regarding the childcare and pre-primary school children do not take place on a frequent basis. This is due to immaturity in the thinking patterns of children. It is believed that the child is young and will understand as he grows older. This abundant fact adds nevertheless, to the responsibilities of the counsellor, who is expected to be selective in his counselling strategies.

To a large extent, the client centered theory at the elementary school level is treated, the reason being, the children can barely think authoritatively for themselves. Thus, behaviour modification strategies and techniques in operant, classical and modelling theories, observational techniques as well as play therapy techniques are entreated in counselling children. Behaviour among Pre-primary school children that are rewarded easily keep reoccurring, while extinction also can take place in an appropriate manner. The implication is that counsellors should device operative, effectual and related techniques to eliminate completely or lead to a decline in divergent behaviour (Egbo, 2015).

Conclusion

There is a strong need for quality, equitable and context-based for childhood care and pre-primary education in Nigeria. The desire for "quick wins" among governments as well as stakeholders perpetuates a focus on access, with easily-cited enrolment figures. The current focus on access alone is insufficient, and heightens the risk that large investments will continually be made in programming that does not benefit children. The tendency of stakeholders focus on the next exciting innovation also leaves little funding for bringing what works to scale (Robinson & Winthrop, 2017).

Therefore, Stakeholders and partners to governments can best help country improve their children's equitable access to quality early childhood care and pre-primary by focusing on building enabling environments and capacity rather than continuing to invest directly in programming. Establishing quality, sustainable early childhood care and pre-primary education systems requires societal level changes in beliefs and practices that perpetuate the low status of early childhood care and pre-

primary education and educators; longer-term investment, and a willingness to abandon quick wins in favour of longer-term gain. Children will not have quality early childcare and pre-primary education on a large scale without this shift in priorities, combined with investment in the development of strong systems to provide quality early child and pre-primary education for all.

Recommendations

The paper recommended counselling techniques and skill that are applicable to meet need of such categories of the children:

1. Observation technique characterized by watching what the child actually does and making an objective record of that observed (Olajide 1991).
2. Counselling skills are various methods and tools that a professional counsellor employs in the discharge of his/her duty to attain the goal of counseling which is helping individuals cope or adjust to any challenge or problem. This could be achieved due to Active listening, Affirmation, attending behaviour, Empathy, Encouragement, Focusing, Questioning, Rapport, Reinforcement, and Restatement (Akinade, 2012).

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