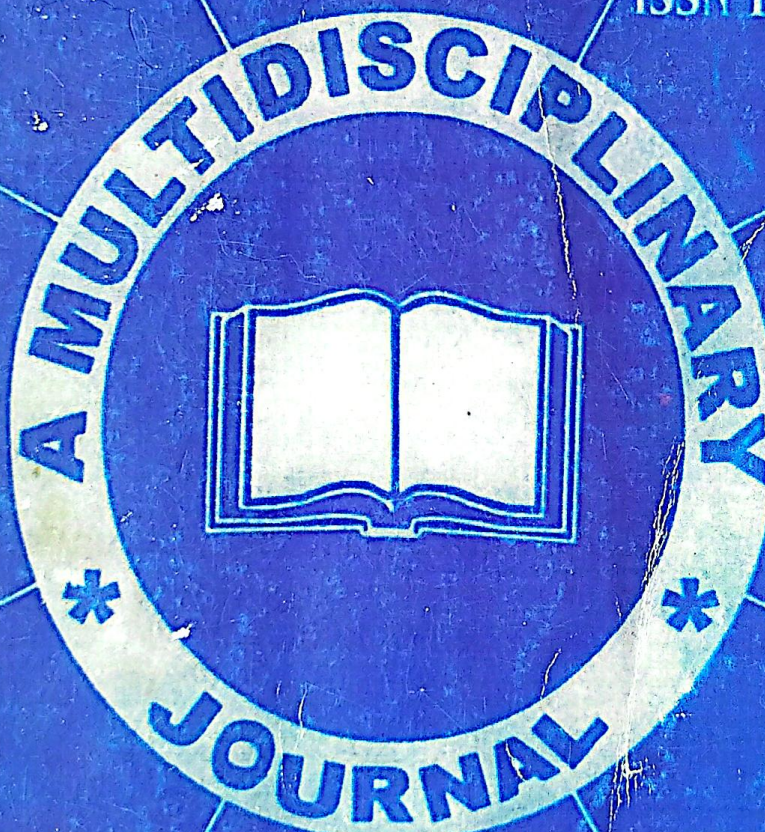


# KNOWLEDGE REVIEW

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# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A VERIFIABLE TOOL IN ACHIEVING NATIONAL INTEGRATION

*Mr. Olusi F. I. And Mrs. Edobor R.I.O.*

## Abstract

The highlights on some of the factors which influence dis-unity were given. These factors have great influence on the adults who have wrong conception of the definition of education. Education was therefore re-defined. The writers noted that science and technology education has method/principles, which are capable of changing and moulding societal values. Hence they encourage it's implementation in the early childhood education, so that the future generation will be able to imbibe it's virtues. The nature of the curriculum design at this level was given. Lastly the writer notes that despite the advantages of science and technology at this level there are challenges and therefore identified them and the way forward.

## Introduction

To ensure national integration, concerted effort should be made to sustain our young democracy. Every organ of the society can be harnessed into a formidable homogenous entity with a common destiny when the dividends of democracy are allowed to ripe and reaped. This is what is sustaining the developed nations of the world like the United States of America and Britain. Every member of Nigerian society should be able to live free in any part of the nation and be able to contribute to the development of such a place of abode without any fear of molestation.

However, over the past the adults of this nation have failed us. It is true that there is lack of unity among Nigerian citizens. The cankerworm of ethnicity, tribalism, religious intolerance, cultural difference to mention but a few has eaten deep into the fibre of the members of the society.

Successive military governments in the past before the present civilian regime have contributed in no small measure in worsening the situation. These views were supported by Imobighe (1987) and Iweibor (1990) who identified the followings dialectical approach as necessary measures of ensuring integration and national unity:

- i. The establishment of unity schools in each state.
- ii. Introduction of free primary education.
- iii. Introduction of the principle of federal character
- iv. The creation of more states and local government councils.
- v. Establishment of national mass media agency and radio and television.
- vi. National reconciliation rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Looking from the above it will be agreed that all these measures has been fully implemented, yet the desired national consciousness is not achieved. We hear of Aguleri and Umuleri crises in the East; Modakeke and Ife/Hausa and Yoruba crises the West; Jukun and its neighbours in the Middle Belt; Ijaw and Ishekiri in the Delta region; the list is endless. The question that may arise is what are the causes of these problems? These writers strongly identify the wrong conception of national basic education among other things. According to the Conference of Ministers of Education of African member states in Lagos (1976) basic education is a type of education (ranging from formal to informal) which is linked to development of the minimum provision of knowledge, attitudes, values and experience which should be made to every individual and should be common to all.

Hence to be able to change the orientation of the Nigerian society effort should be focused on the type of education given to the child/youth, since they are the future of the country. It is the opinion of these writers that there is the need for early childhood education in science and technology in Nigerian schools for obvious reasons. Science and technology has method/procedures which helps the individual to imbibe the following virtues: critical thinking, honesty, unbiased/objective individuals, and truthfulness which are discussed in detail in this paper.



### **Historical Development Of Early Childhood Education**

According to Makanjuola (2001) from Comenius through Rousseau and from Pestalozzi to Froebel and Dewey there has been a consistent and reoccurring call on educators to respect the right of the child to education and to place early childhood education at the centre stage of the educational system. He lamented that only when education is seen as a commercial venture are we sensitized to the need for nursery/kindergarten schools as a vehicle for early childhood education. Early childhood education is not simply a service for children but a vehicle for changing attitudes which is vital to the whole development process of nation. It ensures adequate stimulation of the child and aims at the holistic development. The programme therefore serves the children, their parents and indirectly the wider society. Early childhood education is life itself and education opportunity before the start of primary school.

The welfare of children and their educational needs have been a great concern to a large group of adults at different times in history (Charles et al., 1978). Plato (422 – 347 BC) was the first person to clarify education into formal levels as we now know them. He commented on the status of childhood education for children from birth to age six. He also noted that learning should be internal and that their education should be a sort of amusement.

In same vein Oduolowu (2001) believed that early childhood education was important and argue that children have varying talents and skills which are to be enhanced. According to Quintillian (35-97 AD) in order to produce young adults of good character education must begin at the age of ONE. He said that responsible parents and tutors as well as carefully chosen companies are important in the life of children because they set examples and speech patterns. He noted that what the child learns while young would have life long implication on him. In other words the inculcation of the spirit of scientific method in early childhood education have high implication to the future life experiences of the child. This fact is true because at this age all the factors such as ethnic/cultural differences, religious fanaticism economic/capitalist tendency, political difference which influence the adults and tend to divide us have no hold on these categories of children. Hence catching them young with these methods of knowledge will encourage careful observation, effective thinking, creativity in the learner, developing sound attitude to life and living, furnishing the learner with knowledge and understanding of man and nature in order to live as useful citizens, and assists the development of manipulative skills which are embedded in science. Therefore for effective integration of an heterogeneous society like Nigeria the need for early science and technology in the child's education becomes imperative.

### **Science And Technology Curriculum Conception, Planning And Execution In Early Childhood Education**

Science and technology element of early childhood education relate to its methods, hence content should encourage careful observation which aids inquisitiveness, and effective thinking. Ability to synthesize, predict and making useful guesses. Olusi and Okecha (2001) have noted that the guiding principle for science and technology in early childhood education is to improve content, method and material, also improve training science teachers not for intellectual reasons or in order to accumulate scientific facts, but to give children experience of discovery while at the same time developing technological skills. They observed that technology can be imparted at this level through the use of educational toys, which stimulate children's creativity and ingenuity. For example chessboards, building blocks, scrabbles, use of sound trays, abacus and computer games.

In the words of Olorode (2001), the aim of introducing science and technology to the early childhood human will be to increase his awareness of the elements of the physical world and their relationships and the relationship of these elements to their use by man. To achieve this aim curriculum needs to be based on what the child has to do (activities involving large and small motor skills and basic biological needs and (b) activities that are incidental to the acquisition of motor skills, and satiation of biological needs. At the same time the curriculum should be based on a mission to enhance the child's creativity.

### **Other Advantages Of Science And Technology in Early childhood Education**

The following are some other advantages science and technology can bequeath a child in early childhood education (Olusi and Okecha, 2001).



Science education can help children to think in a logical way about everyday events.

- 1) Science and its application in technology can help to improve the quality of peoples' lives. Science and technology are socially useful activities with which young children should become familiar.
- 2) As the world becomes increasingly scientifically and technologically oriented, it is important that future citizens should be equipped early enough to live in it.
- 3) Science if well taught especially through discovery can speed up children's intellectual development and increase their easy exploratory ability.
- 4) Science can positively assist children in other subject areas, especially in languages and information technology in which deductive reasoning is required.
- 5) Pre-primary school is the first formal school and should create opportunity to explore the environment in a logical and systematic way.

However despite these numerous advantages of science and technology, early childhood education, there are challenges to be overcome.

### Challenges/And Way Forward

Although early childhood education is included in the Universal Basic Education of the present democratic government. Yet their emphasis is on primary and junior secondary levels in education. Olorede (2001) noted that in the national education programme, the foundation of early childhood is the weakest for the large majority of our children. There is therefore the need for the government to shift attention to this group of the nation education.

According to Okebukola (2001) the challenges facing this level of education include the following health factors school related factors.

### Health Factor

The Situation And Policy Analysis (SAPA) 1993 reports revealed that attendance in early childhood education institutions is hindered by ill health. Diseases such as malaria (93.5%), measles (65.5%), cough (62.2%), diarrhea (46.3%) and skin diseases (32.4%) are predominant among children and these reduce the number of enrolment in pre-schools (see table 1). Also, inadequacies in water, health and sanitation facilities in the school feature prominently (Oduolowu, 2001).

Government effort in the area of eradicating poliomyelitis in children by engaging in house immunization is worth commending. However effort should also be intensified in the areas yet to be faced. The various private sectors in education of this set of children (large schools) should be encouraged to have professionals in children's health in their employment or ensure that there is close health service near the school.

**Table 1: Projected Enrolment of Pre-Primary Education 1993-2000**

| Year | Population of children under age Six years, in within | Expected No. Enrolment | No. Enrolled in Million |
|------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1993 | 23.3  | 7.21                   | 1.7                     |
| 1994 | 23.9  | 9.71                   | 2.3                     |
| 1995 | 24.5  | 12.21                  | 3.0                     |
| 1996 | 25.1  | 14.71                  | 3.7                     |
| 1997 | 25.7  | 17.21                  | 4.4                     |
| 1998 | 25.4  | 19.71                  | 5.2                     |
| 1999 | 27.0  | 22.21                  | 6.0                     |
| 2000 | 27.7  | 24.71                  | 6.8                     |

Source: FME and YD (1993).

From Table 1 it is evident that there was low enrolment of children in pre-primary school. When the enrolment of primary and pre-primary was compared, from 1993 - 1997 see Table 2.



**Table 2: Difference in Enrolment in Pre-Primary and Primary Education**

| School      | 1993   | 1994   | 1995  | 1996   | 1997  |
|-------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Pre-Primary | 1.7%   | 2.3%   | 3.0%  | 3.7%   | 4.4%  |
| Primary     | 15.9%  | 16%    | 16%   | 15%    | 17%   |
| Differences | 14.20% | 13.70% | 13.0% | 11.30% | 12.6% |

The differences in enrolment within the two levels of education in significantly show as 14.20, 13.7, 13.0, 11.30 and 12.6 percent respectively.

### **School Related Factors/Learning System**

The Universal Basic Education blue print (2000) identified the followings,

- i. Poor teacher preparation.
- ii. Irregular in-service training and re-training of teaching and non-teaching personnel.
- iii. Inadequacy of relevant instructional materials and guides
- iv. Large number of untrained and unqualified teachers in these areas.
- v. Generally poor learning environment.
- vi. Lack of reliable education data for effective planning etc.

**General Poor Learning Environment:** Studies of Imogie (1996), Okebukola (2000) both reveal that learning environment of most schools are unfriendly. This is occasioned by the inadequacies in the basic requirement of learning environment like adequate land scape, classes and teaching aids. According to Odunolowu (2001) churches and mosques serve in some areas as accommodation, so also motor car garages and open spaces. The organized private sector who are largely involved in early childhood education must be supervised by the government authority to ensure standard of learning environment. The government should as a matter of urgency wake up to its responsibility by focusing its interest in the provision of early childhood education to its citizenry – according to Olusi and Okecha (2001) government in its attempt to encouraging the private sector in the running of early childhood education, completely left its responsibility to the private sector who are only interested in this aspect of education because of the financial benefits.

Lack of trained and qualified teachers in early childhood education is occasioned by the fact that most of these schools are run by the private sector who do not pay remuneration as compared to government schools. Student teachers shy away from taking professional courses in this area of study.

Inadequacy of relevant instructional material and guides was noted in studies carried out by the federal government of Nigeria and United Nations International Children Education Fund. They listed the percentage availability of facilities in pre-primary schools as follows. See table 3.

**Table 3: Facilities in Pre- Primary Schools**

| Instructional Material/Equipment | Percentage Availability |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Play ground                      | 42.3                    |
| Slides                           | 40.7                    |
| Ladder                           | 58.8                    |
| Sand boxes                       | 25.6                    |
| See-saws                         | 41.7                    |
| Merry go round                   | 42.4                    |
| Hoops                            | 40.3                    |
| Skipping ropes                   | 35.7                    |
| Pesting cots                     | 10.8                    |
| Doll                             | 40.6                    |
| Fantasy Equipment                | 45.8                    |
| Building blocks                  | 38.5                    |
| Puzzles                          | 38.7                    |
| Musical equipment                | 27.8                    |
| Radio                            | 26.3                    |
| Television                       | 8.3                     |
| Video equipment                  | 7.0                     |
| Chart posters                    | 3.5                     |
| Computers                        | 3.5                     |



From the foregoing it is clear that facilities are inadequate in most schools. Hence there is the urgent need by both the private sector and government to intensify effort in the provision of these requirements considering the important role these materials/facilities will contribute in enhancing the teaching and learning process at this level of education. Hence creating a friendly learning environment.

#### **Lack Of Educational Data For Effective Planning**

The failures of government and private sector in the provision of adequate materials in the past is occasioned by the inability of government to extrapolate the number of school age children from the national population figures. Reasons include:

- i. That the national population census have been over politicized and figures inflated.
- ii. There is a great deal of imperfection and lapses in existing published educational statistics, with the result that they can not be of good use in planning.
- iii. The technical capacity for data collection and analysis in terms of equipment and know-how still leaves much to be desired.
- iv. Lack of data awareness, the need for updated record keeping at all levels and lack of awareness of the importance of data collection for planning by the mass.
- v. The issue of discordant data this arises due to variety of sources of statistical data collection in Nigeria. There is wide variety of sources and approaches data collection by researchers.

To overcome this problem the government should carry out a general survey on the spot assessment of pre-school enrolment in the country. The local government education board should be mandated to submit report of the number of enrolment yearly.

The government should ensure that fresh hands are given the work to do yearly to check fraud.

#### **Conclusion**

Government effort in resolving these challengers should involve a wholistic approach, providing these provisions from the pre-primary to other levels of education. Government and private agency effort should be directed at inculcating science and technology virtues in all levels of education. This can be achieved by following up it's directives of admission quota of 60% science and technology and 40% to non science related courses studies in the higher institution.

The government should intensify all efforts to create national consciousness and unity of the nation. Hence effort placed on the early child will be an investment worthwhile in achieving the desired national unity and integration.

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