

# The Introduction and Regulation of Network Approach in the Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract:- The need for early childhood education in the global society is not over-emphasized. Nations the world over strengthen and improve the quality of this educational bedrock. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has been critiqued for dwindling educational productivity with a view to maximize creative potentials and skills and, prioritize Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) now neglected to the private sector. However, the National Policy on Education (2014) is silent on the approach of regulating, care giving and administration of ECCDE. This study exhibited the status-quo of ECCDE in Nigeria, related comparative studies of other contemporary nations and, emphasizes the significance of ECCDE in Nigerian society. These are with a view to project a pragmatic model using Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) approach. The IECD was experimented and found practicable, beneficial and justiciable to introduce and adopt. The study recommended collaboration of professionals as antidote to learning challenges, health issues and effective care of Nigerian children rather than the cultured fragmentation strategy.**

**Keywords:- Centers , Collaboration, Integration, Private Sector.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) and its facilities have come into global educational platform fulfilling essential services and meeting needs and to stay; hence, childcare education provides human resources for the institution. The recent approval by the National Commission of Colleges of Education in Nigeria to foster Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a course of study in the Colleges of Education added to proviso in Universities' Faculties of Education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, in over a decade of varied observations and criticisms of her National Policy on Education (NPE) and its inordinate implementation resultant into dwindling quality and educational productivity, came up with refreshed educational policy in 2013. It was philosophically adopted that education is an instrument for national and social change, vital for the promotion of progress and unity. Education is as well believed to maximize creative potentials and skills of the individual for

self-fulfillment and general development of the Nigerian society (FRN, 2014). ECCDE, which is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children age 0 – 4years in a crèche or nursery, is subsumed under Basic Education and remained committed 'fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services (Section 2:10). The newest policy is silent on the approach or strategy of regulating childcare and education sector (crèches and nurseries) in Nigeria. This is added to the unfinished work on the teachers and caregivers in the ECE facility. The policy reiterates the national purposes to which every pre-school activity must be tailored for accomplishment to include:

- (a) Effect a smooth transition from home to the school;
- (b) Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- (c) Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the market, office e. t. c.);
- (d) Inculcate social norms;
- (e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, arts, music and playing with toys, etc.;
- (f) Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit;
- (g) Learn good habits especially good health habits; and
- (h) Teach the rudiment of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, forms etc. through play.

The jettisoning of ECCDE sector to entrepreneurs with least endeavor to set curriculum standard, supervise and control the institutions has perpetually endangered the system. Ijaiya (2011) asserted that, the defensive intention of focus of the Universal Basic Education Commission on children ages 5 and above at the detriment of 0 – 5 years old was to attach the children eked out to existing primary schools where one or two classrooms would be made available for their accommodation, the teachers and caregivers, include de-equalizing educational opportunities for Nigerian children – rural / urban dwellers; able / challenged children; stimulating the children's interest in school and attracting more girls to school especially in the rural communities of educationally less advantaged areas. Notwithstanding, Ejieh (2006) had earlier foresaw the unfinished negligence of the Nigerian children by their government exhibited in the failure to live up to coded responsibilities but surrendering the provision of 'bedrock' education to the private entrepreneurs. A three years observation and survey analysis (2013 – 2016) (unpublished) reflected no positive influence of new policy (2013) over its predecessors (1998, 2004 and 2007 draft).

The perception of private owners of ECE centers in relation to the introduction and regulation of ECCDE using Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) is investigated in this study. Teaching staff engaged in the private centers were also quizzed on the trainings and linkages with other professionals involved in childcare to which they were exposed. This was with a view to find plausible approach toward remediation of ECCDE sector from complete collapse and defeat of purpose.

The reality on ground in Nigeria reveals that early childhood care and education facilities are mostly patronized and needed by the middle-classed and low-income families of the society. These form the bulky majority of Nigerian population. The expectation from the IECD sector goes beyond the baby-sitting provision of childcare; it involves shouldering the responsibilities of improving the quality of life and increasing the morale of the children; instilling valuable education in the parents who lack parenting skills through initiatives, programs and projects.

However, for parents to fulfill the multiple roles entrusted on them in the lives of their children, as a primary caregiver, teacher, nurse, nutritionist, and moral guardian; some parents are unable to coordinate hence, seek for assistance from health, education, child care, social or other family support services institutions.

The overarching goal of the early childhood education and development therefore is expand, universalize and integrate interventions from various sectors in early childhood development for effective implementation and coordination of programmes that will optimize development for children age 0-5 years in Nigeria. Integrated early childhood development is thus poised to provide care, education and overall development for children within its jurisdiction and in collaboration with other sectors, meeting the health and safety standards and ensuring that access to facilities are available on equal basis both to high and low-income families, challenged and able-bodied members of the community alike.

Given that children's academic success is dependent not only on their cognitive development, but also on their physical, social, and emotional well-being, programs that coordinate responses across all these components are not the prerogatives of educationists alone but an amalgamation of efforts to produce better results. Adeleke and Adeleke (2009) emphasized the need for syllabication of the IECD policy from an implied to an explicit integrated child care and education policy with prescriptions of each stakeholder's responsibility and role to the child. These, they said, if put in place might produce more coherent experiences for children and better quality programs.

The benefits in IECD are not peculiar to Nigeria. The international community provided the legal framework having experimented and found IECD useful. The Republic of South Africa (2015) in her National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy indicated international legal and developmental framework / instruments endorsed by the

government and forming the basis for policy development. Nigeria equally ratified and/or endorsed same number of international and regional treaties that should form the basis of her policy improvement. Among these are:

- The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC);
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- UNESCO Dakar Framework of Action for Attaining Education for All (EFA);
- The UN World Fit for Children;
- UNESCO Moscow Framework of Action and Cooperation: Harnessing the Wealth of Nations (2010); and
- The Paris Declaration on Food Security and the Rome Declaration on Nutrition (2014).

Bennett (2011) recounted some countries that integrated their services under one ministry or agency as generally achieving more co-ordinated and goal-oriented services of a higher quality. He cited the Nordic countries where highly subsidized services are widely available to parents through municipal authorities or contracted providers. Services in the countries have so far avoided the weaknesses of the public early education systems. The Nordic countries that have transferred responsibility for early childhood services to education ministries – as was the case with Norway (2005) and Sweden (1996) – continue to open all year round on a full-day basis and practise low child: staff ratios that favour both individual attention from pedagogues and the agency of the child.

Kaga, Bennett and Moss (2010) examined five countries - Brazil, Jamaica, New Zealand, Slovenia, and Sweden - that have integrated their childcare and early education administrations. The study found the consequences of integration within education to be very positive generally. Access and enrolments increased significantly, the status, recruitment levels, training and employment conditions of staff improved, curriculum development or pedagogical work, results were also very positive.

In the United States, groups of early care and education (ECE) leaders utilize a Shared Services Management (SSM) approach to build financial sustainability and enhance the ability to deliver high quality services (Opportunity-exchange, 2011). This has helped to preserve two of the key strengths of ECE businesses – Autonomy and Diversity – while at the same time allowing providers to take advantage of the economies of scale needed to offer high quality services to children and families. It helps child care providers improve their bottom line by:

- Reducing operating costs through economies of scale in business functions;
- Enhancing revenue through increased automation, improved collections, enhanced marketing, high enrolment, and more effective human resource practices;
- Leveraging the professional management and economic strength of larger organizations, making it easier for small sites to meet quality standards, and offering a range of supports to children and their families;
- Reinvesting savings in program enhancements such as staff compensation and benefits to attract more stable and more highly qualified staff.

These studies could serve as precedents for Nigeria to pursue complete integration that is backed with necessary legislation for a positive future.

❖ *Import of Integration of ECCDE on Nigerian Society*

The African tradition responsibly sees childcare and socialization as responsibilities solely belonging to the child’s family of orientation while the extended families and

the community support. These groom the child in moral training, domestic chores, table manners and proper human relations in family and communal living. Physical fitness, introduction and initiation into the family business (crafts, farm-work, trade), customs and culture of the society make the child completely prepared for adulthood. Akinbote (2001) traced the history of nursery education in Nigeria to 1870 which was church based. The government then was uninvolved until 1977 when a turned policy saw nursery, pre-primary or pre-school education gaining a formal placement in the Nigerian education system. Its significance became registered as ‘the bedrock of any other type of education’ (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

Observed childcare settings in Nigeria are determined by the geography, culture and socio-economic background of the populace. Other determinants include literacy exposure of the parents and available care-giving institutions. The pie-chart below graphically presents the prominence of early childhood centers in southwest Nigeria (Fig.1)

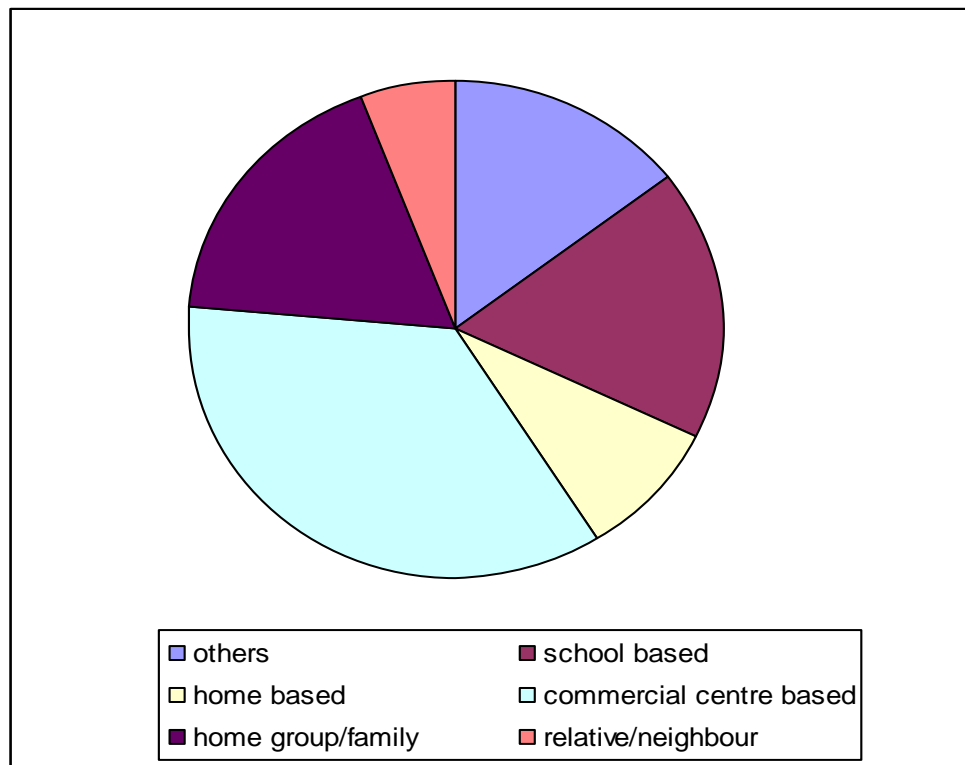


Fig. 1:- Typology of Childcare Settings in Nigeria.

The ‘others’ column includes women who, having no other choice, take their children to places of work, markets and farms. Others lock the children indoor at home while they fend for the family. Some parents compel a senior, elderly sibling to babysit while they work. The unavailability of accurate measures for these makes for the categorization.

Meanwhile, Okewole and Adeleke (2011) submitted that, the experiences of failure to measure up to the ideals and expectations of parents by existing childcare centers in Nigeria proves detrimental, resulting into among others, job loss. Figure 2 graphically summarize the consequences of un-integrated, substandard institutions for childcare practices in Nigeria.

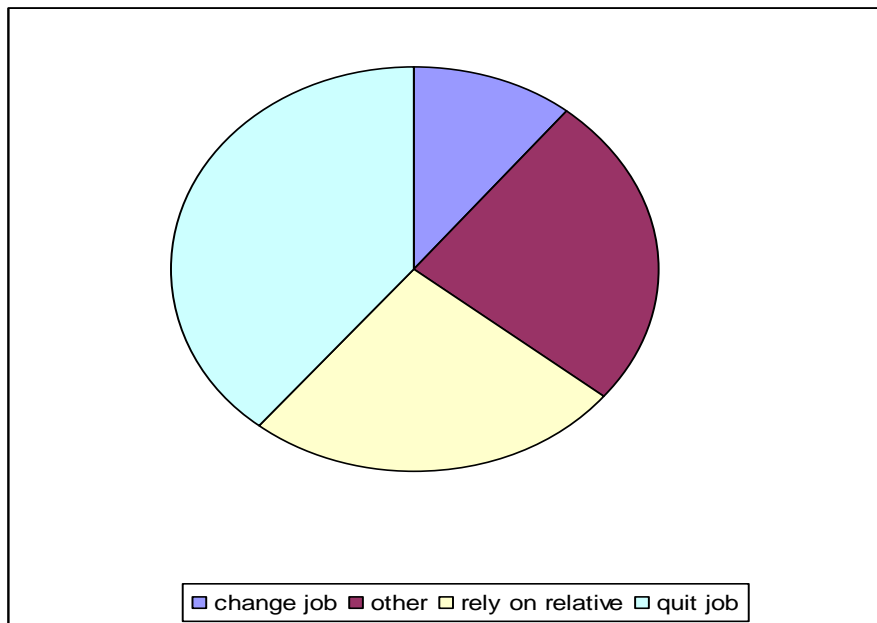


Fig. 2:- Effects of Un-qualitative Child minding

Quitting jobs on the part of nursing mothers was found to be on the increase. Incessant children's sickness traceable to inadequacy of care and some mother's change to less paying, part-time jobs for self and child's survival.

## II. STUDY RESULTS

The study investigated the perception(s) of private owners of ECE centers in southwest Nigeria in relation to the introduction and regulation of ECCDE using Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) approach. Teaching staff in the centers were also engaged on their pre-service trainings and linkages with other professionals for integrated approach pre and post training. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consist all ECE centers in southwest Nigeria. Purposive sampling was made of ten centers in each of the five states of the region. Fifty (50) proprietors of the centers and 374 teachers were sampled using purposive and multi staged techniques respectively. The teachers engaged in the study were those having educationally qualification as stipulated by national policy and, with five years' post-training experience in the teaching profession. The research instruments were Perceptions on Integrated Approach Questionnaire (PIA) and Questionnaire on ECE Integration for Sustainability (QEIS). The instruments were found to have content validity and reliable in a trial test prior the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically percentages.

The study found that, the adaptation of network or integration approach is preferred over the conventional fragment strategy of operation in southwest Nigeria. The proprietors agreed (58.3%) to the integrated approach as beneficial. 33% of the respondents totally submitted to the approach while only 8% expressed skepticism over possible loss of authority as proprietors. However, 91.3% were willing to participate on the systemic network of their

facility if required. Study also revealed that, pre-service trainings of teachers in Nigeria both at the Nigerian Certificate in Education level (minimum) and at the various university Faculties of Education degree training gave no orientation on linkage with other professionals for integrated approach at training. 87% of teachers were found bereft of idea on the subject. No in-service training encourages the teachers into such practice as 94% of the 65% that has participated in certified workshop, seminars and part-time, in-service trainings have no such idea introduced to them. It further showed that, the teachers were in the knowing of possibility of integration as a moral issue. 73.8% of respondents preferred to refer pupils with health issues to health facilities, pupils with learning challenges to social welfare and hospitals for identification and placement and unsatisfied parents to counselors.

### ➤ The Model

The integrated approach network model proposed for ECCE in Nigeria is based on Laslo (1972; 1986) General Systems Theory of Business. The theory advocated seeing the whole system as an interconnected, inter-dependent field continuous within itself. This man-made picture might battle against the intellectual divisions disguised by sectionalized and piecemeal engagements in existing bureaucracy. Observable advantages of this theory in IECD include, people learn about the work by job shifting (referrals), job sharing and job rounding through which workers learn other people's job as their own. The collaborative, co-creation approach of this theory is extracted to encourage the development of *cross-functional* and *cross-disciplinary teams* for childcare and education as a baseline for networking and collaboration. This approach can be leveraged to realize the benefits of collaborative founding, cross-functional monitoring and cross-disciplinary teaming for the overall development of the child.

Figure 3 shows the network web in the integrated childcare and education model and the fields of endeavor,

varied professional personnel networked into the web with the holistic development of the child at the nucleus.

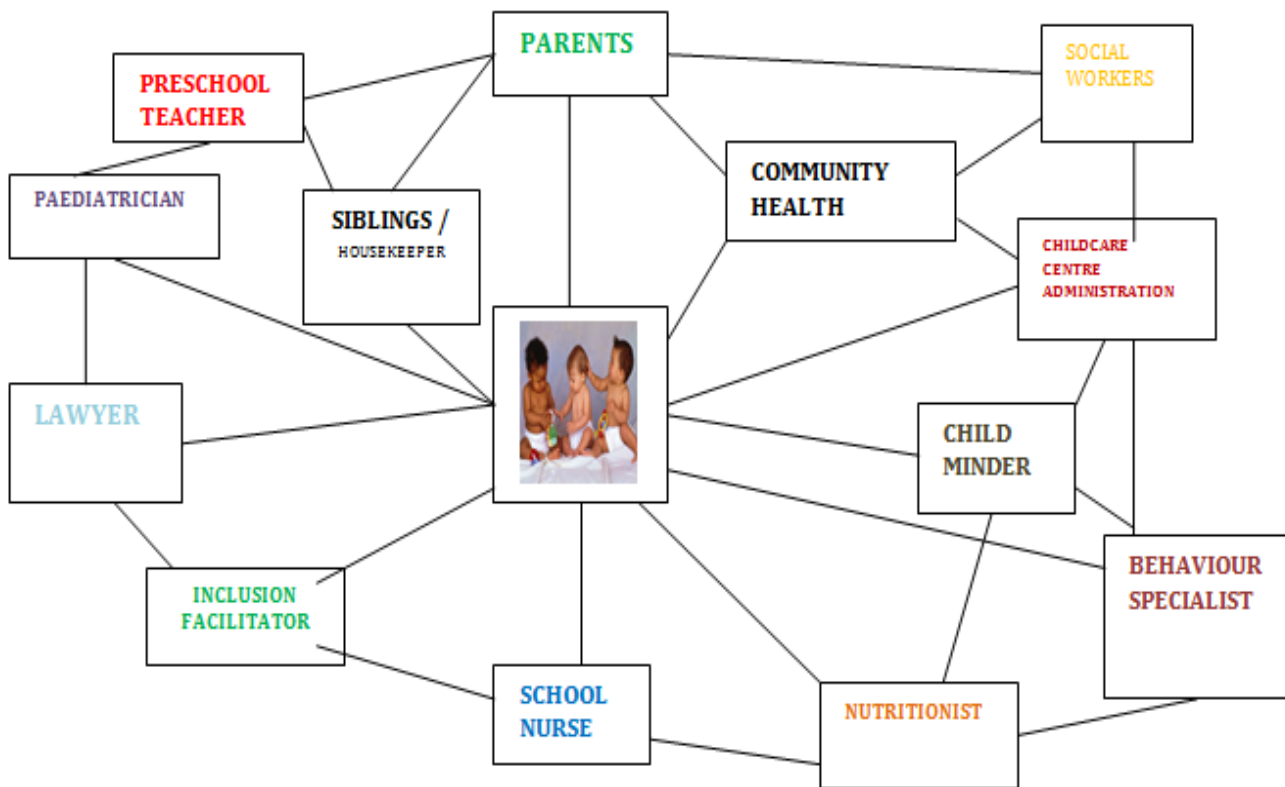


Fig. 3:- Integrated Early Childhood Development Network Model

An adaptation of this model and approach into the Nigerian ECCE situation could help the many fledging childcare centers and/or family child care homes within the society to share costs, administrative and program services. This will strengthen child care businesses so that they are more efficient, more financially sustainable and improve quality service delivery. This form of collaboration, structured to address the needs and characteristics of the particular community where the centre is domicile and taking into account the issues facing child care businesses as well as the capacities of organizations that can provide services and administrative consolidation will be sustainable, proficient and beneficial to parents needy of the essential services provided (Opportunity-exchange, 2011). A network of ECE centers and / or family child care homes to share professionals involved in program services within themselves is additional benefit wherein shortage of professionals exist. A listing of the mode of operation encompassing visitations, referrals and interactions between the personnel become necessary in this model and the goal is to: *provide satisfactory services within sustainable terms and grow equal with competitors.*

**III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study concludes that, Nigerian childcare centre which are mostly non-school based and commercially oriented threaten the survival of the ‘bedrock of Nigeria’s education’ and pose daunting challenges on educators. The stakeholders, especially and more importantly the private centre proprietors, on whom the national policy entrusted this sensitive sector of the national future were convinced of integration as a need to be supported rather than the conventional fragmentation strategy. In order to meet the critical challenges, institutions and stakeholders need develop competency which is not resident in a single profession but a collaboration of professionals. A firm understanding, subscription and execution of such regulative principle will aid success at no expensive cost to the institutions (long term merit) and to the benefit of the Nigerian child.

Teachers in the field, who are never exposed to integration, networking with other professionals right from the training periods therefore need advancements into what goes on in the other profession and develop appreciation for referral privileges. This move toward collaboration will advance the course of childcare in Nigeria and bring long term benefit to the nation and its teeming young population.

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