
PARADIGM SHIFT IN CHILD CARE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Child care today has attracted a lot of attention from the global perspective in view of recent happenings in various societies. This paper made an attempt to examine efforts that had been made in the past, as regards child caring, that some considered as inadequate and unavailing in producing a well-rounded child, socially, physically, intelligently, emotionally and culturally. Consequent upon the inadequacies, efforts have been made and are still being made to improve on the quality and quantity of care being given to the child. This paper, therefore, discussed the paradigm shift in child care and also considered the implications it has on the early childhood education.

Key words: Child care, early childhood education, early childhood education centre.

Introduction

Early childhood care and education has assumed a wider global attention shortly after the Second World War. The agonising and pathetic hang-over effects of this coupled, with economic hardship, made the mothers abandon their responsibilities at home and join the economic struggles for survival. This therefore prompted the

mothers to look elsewhere for assistance from those that could help in taking care of the children. The care giver then came on board to stand in for the mothers while away to search for ways of improving the economic lots of the family.

The early life of every child, whether in developed or developing nations, is very critical to every aspect of a child's development. The quality and quantity of care, nutrition and education a child receives at this stage obviously determines the type of person such a child will be later in life. This, therefore, makes it imperative for those in the early childhood education and/or care to devise ways of improving the lot of the child, taking into consideration the social, physical, intelligent, cultural, emotional and moral (SPICEM) development of the child. This trend, in early childhood care and education, starts from when the child is in the womb to when the mother is delivered of the baby to how, where and when the child is taken care of adequately, so that 'SPICEM' aspect of child's development can be achieved.

UNICEF (2008) has observed that a great change is coming over childhood in the world, generally. Today's rising generation is the first in which a majority is appending a large part of childhood in some form of out-of-home care. At the same time, neuro-scientific research is demonstrating that loving, stable, secure and stimulating relationships with caregivers in the earliest months and years of life are critical for every aspect of a child's development. This paper will examine the paradigm shift in child's care and its implications on childhood education.

Statement of the Problem

Right from conception, the foetus (baby) in the womb is expected to be given adequate care through the carrier of the pregnancy (i.e. the expectant mother) which is expected to be well nurtured and adequately nourished through regular ante-natal and post-natal treatments. Literature has established that not less than 70 percent of expected mothers in Africa and in Nigeria, 60 percent of these women do not regularly and adequately have ante-natal and post-natal treatment. The treatments or care given to the child after birth by some families in Nigeria has been described by some health authorities as outdated, worrisome and inadequate both in quantity

and quality which has been responsible for the high rate of child and maternal mortality in the country. It is on this premise that this paper explored the modern technologies of child care that are considered more efficacious and thus improved the quality and quantity of the child's life

Objectives of the Study

Child care, all over the world, is assuming phenomenal changes in quality and quantity of child care and education. Local and international organizations that are concerned with child and maternal health as well as other professionals have been making frantic efforts towards having high quality child care strategies and programmes that can engender rapid growth and development of the child. It is on this premise that this paper will provide answers to the following questions;

- (i) What are those methods of child care that are inadequate?
- (ii) What are the modern strategies or technologies of child care that are considered to be better than the old ones?
- (iii) What are the implications of these new strategies or technologies of child care and education to early childhood development?

The Concept of Care

The term 'care' has been and is still being given different definitions or descriptions. However, whichever definition or description given, CARE is seen as a process that results in the creation of an enabling environment which can support child's optimal development. Care includes what adults or significant others in the child's life are able to provide, such as healthy and safe environment, supportive and affectionate interaction, appropriate modelling, stimulation, protection and time. In other words, care is the integrated set of actions that ensures children synergy of protection and support for their health, nutrition, psycho-social and cognitive aspects of development. Child care involves the needs of the child which includes, protection from physical danger, adequate nutrition, adequate health care, immunization against six childhood diseases, oral rehydration therapy in case of diarrheal, environmental and personal hygiene, prevention from accidents or poisoning, burns electrocution as well as screening

for abnormalities (Prentice & McCracken ,2004; Esimai, 2015).

Care of a child begins right from the womb or conception. In the time past, it was very rampant for pregnant women to totally neglect ante-natal care where health professionals and practitioners would offer services and aids on how to treat and care for the foetus before being delivered (Esimai,2015). This resulted in avoidable death as research has shown that over 10 million under five children die in low and medium income countries of the world. 70 percent of these deaths are due to just preventable and treatable conditions: pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, measles and malnutrition. The majority of the women did not realise the need for them to go for ante-natal care and thus compounded the health problem of the child.

Esimai (2015) asserted that everyday, millions of parents seek health care for their children worldwide. Literature reveals that many of these expectant mothers, when faced with health problems, are either not properly assessed or not properly treated or that they are poorly advised by quacks. In first-level health facilities in developing countries, it is very obvious that paucity of diagnostic support and drugs are the order of the day. Irregular flow of patients is also common as well as few practice opportunities for doctors. The aforementioned factors make it difficult to provide quality health care for children in these settings. It therefore calls for a new strategy to address this problem.

Moreover, in the time past, it was very common for the parents to embark upon traditional practices of child care. The use of traditional medicines and other practices rendered many of the children incapacitated as drugs taken had no specific standardized measurement thereby leading to drug abuse. And many of these children including their mothers have been decimated. This ugly trend could have been averted should they strictly follow the modern trend of child care which shall be discussed later in the paper.

Children illnesses were often tied to one spiritual cause or the other which in the real sense might have been utter neglect or ignorance of the parents as a result of their traditional superstitions or beliefs which they held tenaciously. These beliefs have sent many of these children to their early graves. Certain diseases are tied to the wrath of certain gods which in many cases, the end result of such

health issues were always tragic.

The feeding practice is another issue. McCuaig, Bertrand and Shanker (2012), asserted that because of the fact that most of the expectant mothers especially the illiterate ones would not visit hospital for ante-natal or post-natal care, it became difficult for the expectant mothers to take adequate care of the baby in terms of nutrition. If such mothers were to go for ante-natal or post-natal, quality health services would have been rendered to them, and if professional advice given is strictly adhered to, the mother and the child would be better for it health-wise. Moreover, children's rights are often being trampled upon as most parents believe that 'children are to be seen and not heard'. This therefore makes the right of children to be easily violated. Children are abused physically, emotionally, sexually and otherwise (Peters, Nelson Petrunka, Pancer and Loomis, 2010)

The Traditional Methods of Child Care

In Nigeria, in particular, and some other developing nations of the world in general, the cost of child care right from pregnancy often makes most of the pregnant women to avoid visiting hospitals to have intrapartum and postpartum treatments. This attitude makes the pregnant women result to patronising quacks or embark upon self-medication. They, sometimes, use traditional medicines. Concoctions that have not been certified fit for human consumption. Some will not even use anything. This attitude of the would-be-mothers is not only dangerous to the mothers but also to the baby in their wombs. It has been established in the literature that mortality and morbidity rate get higher in developing countries as a result of negligence, poor economic conditions and inaccessibility of health facilities.

Many expectant mothers are ignorant of the significance of high quality nutrition. The deficiency in this area affects both the mother and the baby, either before or after delivery. Some of these women do not bother about balanced diet. They eat and drink whatever is available. The minimum duration of breastfeeding baby is often not strictly adhered to by the mothers in most of the developing nations, thereby denying the children some nutritional values.

The Trends in Child Care Today

No sooner a woman realizes that she is pregnant than she begins quality care for both the baby and herself. At the early stage of the pregnancy, the expectant mother is taken to the hospital for antenatal care where health or medical practitioner gives pieces of advice that would make the foetus in the womb to be hale and healthy as well as keeping the mother too in good condition. Information on the types of food to eat, when and how to go about the feeding, the quality and quantity of food in-take are prescribed or recommended by the health workers. The expectant mother visits hospital regularly to check the condition of the baby as well as her own health status. This is the early care the mothers give to their children, unlike before when some might not have visited the hospital or maternity clinic before delivery, thereby increasing the rate of child and/ or maternal morbidity. With this trend, research has reduced drastically as a result of regular visitation to the hospital for proper and adequate medical attention and treatment (Cleveland and Kranshinsky, 2012)

It is a global practice now to see virtually all areas that are not developed initiating and utilizing the promotional activities in early childhood development. Areas where hospital or health centres are either established but no adequate drugs and equipment or such hospital or health centres are non-existing, feasible interventions exist which can be practised in such communities. According to Esimai (2015), as corroborated by Corte and Peters (2015), one of the strategies that was developed to meet the health care of some of the communities is the Integrated Management of Child Illness (IMCI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF in 1996, to combat these problems and improve child care.

The IMCI strategy, according to Esimai (2015), focuses not only on diseases that cause childhood mortality directly but also gives attentions to early childhood development, emphasizing the psychological and intellectual growth of the child. This strategy has three phases, namely; improving family and communities practices which involves care seeking nutrition home case management, adherence to recommended treatment and community involvement in health planning and monitoring. The second phase is that of improving health system through district planning and management,

availability of IMCI drugs, organization of work at health facilities, quality improvement and supervision at health facilities, referral pathways and services, and the likes, while the third one is improving health workers' skills such as case management and standards, training of facility-based public health providers, IMCI roles for private provide and maintenance of competence among trained health works. Frankly speaking, this strategy has tremendously improved the health care of children and thus reduced child mortality and morbidity, globally (Prentice,2007).

Today, child care emphasis is also noticed in the area of feeding. Exclusive breast-feeding is being given much premium on account of its significant effects on the child's overall development. Expectant mothers are being enlightened on the necessity of mothers breast feeding their children adequately for a minimum of six months without introducing and complimentary feeding items(s). McCuaig, Bertrand and Shanker (2012) and Esimai (2015) revealed that shortly after this period,mothers are advised to introduce appropriate complementary feeding as well as micronutrient supplement.Such food supplements are listed for mothers who visit hospital or health clinic regularly on the quality and quantity to be given to their children.

Furthermore, Okewole (2009) observed that the environment where the child is kept now is more scintillating, safe, stimulating, educating and homely, such that the child can move freely without being injured, parents can leave their children at early childhood centre without entertaining fears. Such are the graphic pictures of most of our E.C.E centres today in Nigeria. Lots of competitions are going on among the centres so as to have more enrolment.Conducive environment plays a significant role in the life of the child. His/her early experiences in life at this early stage shape his/her further competitive, social and physical as well as emotional development, subsequently. This is what galvanizes the centres operators to always provide a conducive learning and safe environment.

Globally,it was observed that children were being abused and neglected by parents, relations, and the society at large. Hence, the United Nations Organization set up a committee on the Right of the child (CRC),and issues discussed on the right of the child include the followings the physical and emotional needs of the child as well

as rights, ranging between right to live, right to education, right to name, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to private and family life, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from discrimination, right to dignity of the child, right to parental care, protection and maintenance and host of others were articulated and endorsed. To further ensure the well-being of the child, prohibition is made on the imposition of corporal punishment as well as provision of separate legal representation. (Akinwumi, 2010) All these are to ensure that the child is well protected, catered for and provided the needed necessities of life in order to become a responsible citizen in future.

Closely related to the care and protection of the child was the creation of the Millennium Development Goals which came into being in the year 2000 where leaders of 189 countries met at the U.N.O. Headquarters in New York and endorsed the Millennium Declaration all of which has care for the child. Examples are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve material health, combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. All of these are geared towards having a better life for the child and the society at large.

The recognition given to early childhood care and education by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is noticed in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013) which spelt out government's and private individuals' as well as corporate bodies' responsibilities in the management and administration of this sub-sector. The recognition given to it is a pointer that the government at various levels attach significance to the early development of our children through the early care and education of these young children so much so that quality foundation of survival and development skills that enhance and engender meaningful growth and development. Considering the policy statement enunciated in the NPE (2013), it is very ostensible to note that commitment of the government such that every E.C.E centre in any area located has a legal framework with which it operates unlike what obtained before the issuance of the policy statement.

For better and quality service delivery, professionals or practitioners that are to provide the needed care and education are now available as virtually all the colleges of education in Nigeria run early childhood education as a course and further gained entry into some universities for example; Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, University of Calabar, and a host of other universities. These institutions help in training and building human capacity that would ensure better and qualitative early childhood education. Unlike in the past where most of the staff working at the E.C.E centres in Nigeria were untrained and unqualified. E.C.E, personnel such as caregivers, teachers, nurses or doctors and nutritionists and the likes are now being trained in these institutions. These professionals spend some years in the college of education or university receiving training and acquiring skills on how to impart knowledge, care and skills to the children at this level, with a view of making them responsible citizens in the future.

Most parents are now being trained and enlightened on how to administer medical care as first aid to their children without necessarily rushing to the health clinic/hospital. For example; immunisation practices where mothers are enlightened on the need to take all infants for vaccination at nine months old, and other related vaccines at various stages so as to ensure good health condition for the children. Others are home health practices where parents are educated on the need for their children to have prevention measures against infections, ensure children sleep under treated net, wash hands with soap at appropriate times, family are enjoined to use iodized salt, as well as for parents to continue to feed and offer more food and fluids when their children are sick, and also take appropriate actions to prevent and manage child injuries and accidents.

Moreover, to ensure adequate care for the child, nowadays, parents are advised to space their births through family planning which is in various forms. Parents are now being advised to choose anyone they preferred as a family. Spacing child birth is a practice that will ensure quality care for the child or the children instead of the old practice of giving birth at irregular periods, having family planning will be of great advantage to both the mother and the child. This new

culture is in line with the global 'Survival Strategy', with the following objectives to reduce infant and childhood morbidity and mortality through prevention, early identification and to promote physical, emotional, psychological and social growth and development of children. This strategy will result in a healthy and economically productive populace.

One of the recent trends of the child care is that of growth monitoring and promotion, where the growth and development of every child is expected to be carefully monitored. Under this practice, it is important that the child be seen at the clinic regularly during the first 5 years of life. Also, the mother is expected to be guided on matters concerning the child's health and safety.

It is worth noting that modern technology is contributing to child care. Nowadays it is possible for the mothers who are far away from home to be monitoring their children's welfare. Mothers can use the Global System for Modern Communication (GSM) and other technological media to provide needed care for the child, using these media to communicate with the caregivers or nannies. For instance, mother can provide recipe on certain food preparation through the use of SMS, Whatsapp, SKYPE and other means. Distance is no longer a barrier to effective child care

Implication of Quality Child Care on Early childhood Education

Quality care has a lot of significant effects on the child's early childhood education and development. A child that is given exclusive breast feeding, as has been revealed in literature, has a high degree of immunity against diseases. Such a child stays healthy. A child that is exclusively breast-fed has healthy life that increases his/her life-span. The immunity acquired through exclusive breast feeding makes the child to be cognitively more developed than a child that was not given exclusive breast feeding.

Adequate nutrition has been linked to overall development of the child. If adequate care is given to a child in form of adequate nutrition, such as a child is bound to be socially, physically and cognitively more developed. A child that is not properly fed suffers from malnutrition and its associated ailments. A child that is well-fed listens to the caregivers and/or teachers at the centres with rapt attention as hunger

does not affect or distract him/her from the activities at the centres. As it has been established, the amount of training/education received is dependent on the quality of care in the area of quality nutrition given to the child. A hungry child does not have the time, strength and sustained attention span to do exactly what the caregivers or other professionals directs or guides the child to do at the centres. When this happens, such a child begins to develop negative attitudes as a result of his/her condition.

Besides, a quality care given to a child in form of formality, a policy on the pre-primary and primary education, makes the professionals and the government to be committed to the overall growth and development of the child, such as, the quality assurance, the medium of instruction the teacher-pupil ratio, the orthography that is expected, the effort to be exerted by the government on the supervision and inspection at the centres to ensure quality care and education is given to the child. This policy is a new trend that is designed to promote and entrench quality education and immense care for the child.

To ensure good quality life for the child, the trend now is to protect the child through rules and regulations of dehumanization that the societies are subjecting the children to. Hence, the formation of the Committees on Child's Right (CRC) by the United Nations. The child's right, as aforementioned in the previous pages were to promote security, human dignity, quality life and total well-being of the child. According to Taguma (2009), a child that has no basic means of acquiring education is now being guaranteed basic education up to junior secondary level. The rights protect the child from being abused in all forms of ramification. This trend ensures that every nation that is a member of United Nations is bound to follow suit in this regard. With this move, every child is given the opportunity to live a free life.

With this new trend in child care, both parents have now realized that both the father and the mother have immense responsibilities of nurturing and caring the child. Gone are the days when mothers were left alone to the care and education of their child. Parental involvement of child care starts nowadays from conceptions to when the provision basic life amenities for the child is the sole responsibilities of both parents such provision includes : food, basic education, clothes, shelter, and other comfort of life.

A well-cared child is seen to be healthy and ready to engage in any meaningful task both at home and in school. A responsible parent will see that the need to meet the needs of his/her child care entails of lot things that parents provide for their wards/children. The services rendered by parents to their children/wards serve as vital and fertile ground for subsequent efforts and care given to the child.

There are lots of things and facilities the school augment to ensure adequate care. The school complements the efforts and care given to the child at home, when such a child is enrolled at the E.C.E centre. The school ensures that such child does not suffer from nostalgia. It makes efforts providing all the needs of the child while the parents are not around. The activities the school provides includes the following ; sleeping facilities when the child is feeling sleepy, provision of food when hungry, allowing the child to make use of the facilities that will enhance the physical and social development, interaction that occurs among the children provides opportunity for children to acquire and develop some positive social values such as patience, tolerance, honesty , industry and lots of others too numerous to mention. The provision of basic literacy through play-way method at the early childhood period serves as a good foundation to lay subsequent academic endeavours.

Mention must be made that personnel at the E.C.E centres are now trained and educated to ensure that quality care and education is given to the child. This effort made by the government is noticed in its policy statements and directives where all colleges of education are enjoined to inaugurate and incorporate 'Early Childhood Education' as a course. Some of the universities in the countries are also offering this course to their students. With this trend, qualified personnel are sure to be at the E.C.E centres to provide quality care and education that will engender total development of the child. Personnel, such as caregivers, teachers, nurses, nutritionists and host of others who have been trained, will enhance the provision of quality care and other related services for the child.

Furthermore, with the provision of school vans by schools, children who are living far away from the centres are provided the opportunity of getting to school without tears. This provision of care for the children does eliminate the thin division between the

children of the rich and poor. This also reduces inferiority complex that may arise from economic difference. Consequently, children see themselves as one, thereby promoting healthy environment for social development. Besides, the children are safe with the use of the school van. This care given to the children promotes their safety and punctuality at the centre/school.

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