

## **DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET IN THE NIGERIAN CHILD THROUGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The answer to the aching problems of unemployment, criminality, insecurity, and economic crises ravaging the contemporary societies especially among the developing nations like Nigeria is entrepreneurial skills in youths and adults. Through critical review of the Psychosocial theory of development by Erik Erickson and Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the researchers clearly demonstrated that acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by youths and adults can only be possible if the enabling environments for development of entrepreneurial mindset were provided for them during the preschool years. Unfortunately with the modern family socialization pattern and the current trend of globalization and economic crises in Nigeria, parents are becoming increasingly alienated from their parenting roles. With such trends, the society seems to rely heavily on early childhood education. Through extensive review of literature, the researchers examined the policies and the implementation of ECE programmes in Nigeria. It was observed that there is a wide gap between policy and implementation of ECE programmes in the country. By implication, the present practices of ECE in the country are devoid of quality. Considering the attributes of entrepreneurial mindset, the researchers concluded that the only way out is to improve the quality of education and training provided for the preschoolers in Nigeria. With the above conclusions and with ideas from some developed countries, the researchers made some recommendations. The recommendations centred on the need increasing government involvement both at the public and private sectors which should be reflected in the following areas: funding, supervision, caregiver/teacher preparation, encouraging external supports and parent education. With these changes, ECE practices will be better aligned to the developmental characteristics and needs of preschoolers so that entrepreneurial mindset will be developed in them to equip them for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills needed to become a successful entrepreneur.*

**Keywords:** Preschoolers, Entrepreneurial Skills, Entrepreneurial Mindset, Early Childhood Education

### **Introduction**

The answer to the aching problems of unemployment, criminality, insecurity, and economic crises ravaging the contemporary societies especially among the developing nations like Nigeria is entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship equips an

individual with the skills to see difficulties as challenges which with appropriate skills can be utilized to chart a positive course for the future. According to Ikeme, Alex and Onu (2007), entrepreneurship is the act of using human courage to seek investment opportunities and establish profit-oriented enterprise. In the same vein, Eisemann (2013) defines entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunities beyond resources under one's control at the moment. From the foregoing, it is apparent that an entrepreneur needs to undertake the creation, organization, ownership, and management of business risks. This is in line with Ojeifo (2010), who defined an entrepreneur as the owner, or the manager of a business enterprise, who through risks and initiative, attempts to make a profit. Entrepreneurship therefore refers to the display or manifestations of the basic characteristics of an entrepreneur otherwise known as entrepreneurial skills. According to Pedro (2018), basic characteristics of successful entrepreneurs include creativity, critical thinking, risk tolerance and flexibility.

The entrepreneurial skills presented above can be regrouped into five which are: personal skills or mindset; communication skills; negotiation skills; leadership skills and sales skills. Of all these characteristics, mindset appears to be the most important attribute of an entrepreneur as the other four may be hinged on it. Entrepreneurial mindset refers to a specific state of the mind which directs human conduct towards entrepreneurial activities and outcomes. Individuals with entrepreneurial mindsets are often drawn to opportunities, innovation and new value creation. Also, Hack (2019), presents entrepreneurial mindset as a way of thinking that enables one to overcome challenges, be decisive, and accept responsibility for one's outcomes. It is a constant need to improve one's skills, learn from past mistakes, and take continuous action on one's ideas. From the foregoing, one can identify five basic attributes associated with mindset which an individual needs to become a successful entrepreneur and they are: decisiveness, confidence, accountability, resilience and humility. Developing these attributes has some theoretical undertones.

### **Theoretical Bases**

Developing these attributes of entrepreneurial mindset is a lifelong process that must start early in life. The psycho-social theory of Erickson (1980) elaborates this fact by presenting eight stages through which an individual passes on the course of developing appropriate psychosocial skills. The stages and the skills that must be developed in sequence according to Erickson are: birth to one year - basic trust ► one year to three years – autonomy ► three to six years - initiative ► six to twelve years – integrity ► 12 to 18 years - ego identity ► 20s to early 40s – intimacy ► 40s to 60s – generativity ► 60 and the end of life – integrity. On the contrary, the theory also presents in sequence and across the stages above eight anti-psychosocial skills that can be developed from adverse early childhood experiences as follows: basic mistrust

► shame or doubt ► guilt ► inferiority ► role confusion ► isolation ► stagnation and ► despair. It is apparent from Erickson's theory that entrepreneurial mindset is developed and not made. According to Hack (2019) it is all about dispelling the myths about entrepreneurial mindset, one of which is that entrepreneurs are not born but driven to it. In the same vein, Erickson believes that development of basic psychosocial skills has a pattern. To him, a child who develops basic trust in people and his surroundings early in life will most likely develop autonomy which will also help the child to take initiatives, become a person of integrity and one who has ego identity. These attributes which are developed early in life under normal circumstances are critical for developing entrepreneurial mindset. A child that developed autonomy and initiative at the appropriate stage for instance will ordinarily not doubt his or her potentials and will not find it difficult, believing in himself and others. Such a person will not hesitate in exploring the possibility of turning obstacles into opportunities which successful entrepreneurs are known for.

From the foregoing, one may argue that the rate of failed businesses and increasing joblessness among youths in Nigeria may be a sign that Nigerian youths lack basic entrepreneurial skills. Undiyaunday and Ekungu (2015) also observed that a large percentage of the Nigerian youths lack employable skills. Since employable skills are often a reflection of basic psychosocial skills, one may then further argue following Erickson's psychosocial theory that Nigerian youths lacked the enabling and responsive environment for development of basic entrepreneurial mindset when they were growing up. From the theory, children who had positive early childhood experiences will grow to become people with sense of ambition and responsibility and with high self esteem. These attributes engender the development of entrepreneurial mindset which the Entrepreneur (2017) identified as follows: resilience, innovation and creativity, industriousness, self confidence, curiosity, empathy, and optimism. On the other hand, children who had adverse early childhood experience and who never developed trust in people and objects around them will most likely become anxious, fearful and have low self esteem always doubting their vision and potentials. Such children will find it difficult taking initiative, and may become afraid of failure because they neither believe in themselves or in others. Since such children are also not good team players, they may end up being isolates as adolescents or even adults. In that situation, they may find it difficult exploring business opportunities to become employers of labour or even keeping a job as an effective employee. Therefore the problem of joblessness and criminality in Nigeria may continue to be on the increase if opportunities for developing entrepreneurial mindset are not provided for the growing children in whose hands, the growth, development and sustenance of the future of any society rests.

The need for quality stimulations in a safe, child-friendly and responsive environment for the growing child can also be explained using the Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In a nutshell, Piaget (1964) opined that children construct

meaning and knowledge through exploration by interacting with their environment. Piaget's theory is akin to this study as he emphasized preparing the child early. To him, cognitive processes involve assimilation, accommodation and equilibration on the part of the child. On developmental issues, Piaget maintained that cognitive development depends partly on maturation, and that maturation of the brain creates new possibilities for thinking and reasoning. However, Piaget went further to state that realization of these possibilities depends on the child's own activity – assimilation, accommodation and equilibration or responding to the disequilibrium that it causes. The theory is pointing to the need for stimulating and responsive environment for growing children to enable them develop critical thinking skill necessary for entrepreneurial mindset.

Considering the current changes in the family demographic characteristics in contemporary society, the responsibilities of providing enabling and responsive environment for development of entrepreneurial mindset in Nigerian children cannot be left for the family alone. The easiest and apparently the most reliable means therefore may be providing quality early childhood education for Nigerian children. Nigeria appears to have seen the trend and had gone ahead to incorporate early childhood education (ECE) in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). According to the policy, the purposes of early childhood education are: to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; to prepare the child for the primary level of education; to provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the markets, offices, etc); to inculcate social norms; to instill in the child the spirit of creativity and enquiry through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys; to develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; to learn good habits, especially good health habits; and to teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

The purposes of early childhood education are in tandem with the requirements for the development of basic entrepreneurial mindset. From the purposes, one can specifically identify such attributes of an entrepreneur as trust in the people and environment; opportunities for exploration; development of pro-social skills such as humility, self control, team spirit, adaptation to social norms, creativity, and good health habits, among others. These attributes were designed to be achieved within the early childhood stage by the preschoolers because of their peculiar characteristics and developmental needs. According to Galinsky and David (1991), preschoolers are highly dependent on parents and caregivers. The extent of trust, autonomy and initiative they develop depend to a large extent on the degree to which their basic needs were satisfied and the extent of opportunity for exploration provided for them, (Osanyi, 2012). This will eventually determine how ready the child will be for the primary level of education where the child is expected to develop scientific and reflective thinking skills. The preschool age is also critical as the preschoolers are highly inquisitive naturally with rapid brain development, energetic,

playful, imitative and emotionally unstable. To Galinsky and David, preschoolers should be handled with care as it is an age of incredible extremes, adoring parents and other significant adults with magical powers. To the preschoolers, parents and other significant adults are all-knowing, and all-powerful. And unfortunately, any experience at this stage whether positive or negative normally have lasting effect on the child.

Considering the need for quality experiences for the growing child, the policy equally articulated the modalities for the implementation of the policy stipulations. Among the responsibilities of the government according to the Policy (FRN, 2014), includes setting and monitoring minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities. From the foregoing, it is clear that providing quality early childhood education for the Nigerian child is the responsibility of the government, the school as well as the community of which the family is a part of. Unfortunately, the quality of involvement of these key players in early childhood education in Nigeria is highly questionable

### **The State of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria Progress So Far**

With joint effort of the government, individuals, communities and some nongovernmental organizations, a number of progress have been recorded towards achieving quality early childhood education in Nigeria. Some of the areas with positive scores are:

- **Provision/Access:** In 2004, the Federal Government of Nigeria directed that pre-primary education section be created in all the existing public (government owned) primary schools within the country (FRN, 2014). In addition to that, the FGN also approved the establishment of ECE centres by individuals and other nongovernmental organizations in all locations (urban and rural areas) within the country. By so doing, location is no longer a barrier to accessing ECE by any child in Nigeria. Suffice it to note that Nigeria had ECE prior to this period but it was left to the private sector, which either provided sub-standard services or charged very high fees, thereby making this educational provision inaccessible to some children.
- **Teacher/caregiver preparation:** The Government also approved the incorporation of early childhood education in teacher education programmes. To this end, many colleges of education and faculties of education in many Nigerian universities now offer programmes in primary and early childhood education.
- **Establishment of minimum standard for ECE centres in Nigeria.** The Federal Government of Nigeria through the effort of the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 2007 developed the National Minimum Standard

(NMS) document for Early Childhood Care Centres (ECCC) (Bosa, Ejesi and Aleke, 2016).. The major areas reflected in the NMS are:(i) level of enrollment (ii) classrooms (iii) play ground facilities (iv)classroom furniture (v) teacher qualifications (vi) availability of the Curriculum (vii) instructional materials (viii) school records, (ix) teacher-pupil ratio. The NMS for ECCC in Nigeria was developed to address the gaps and serves as guideline for operators and stakeholders so that both the practice and operation of ECC will become standardized across the country, thereby adopting an integrated and holistic approach for the care and support given to children from birth to five years. For quite a long time the pre-primary education according to Ugwu (2011) were left in the hands of private sectors without any major policy regulating this important system of education .

- School meal programme: A number of school children are served with meals from government sponsored food vendors once every school day. This has really alleviated to an extent the critical problems of hunger in some remote areas and crisis ridden communities. By so doing, children can participate actively in learning activities. This is a practical application of Maslow's theory of motivation (hierarchy of human needs where the lower or basic needs such as hunger must be satisfied before one can actually think of higher order needs such as participating in any form of learning experiences)

### **Challenges So Far**

Considering the objectives of ECE in Nigeria, one may conclude that it is a perfect tool that can enable preschoolers to develop the necessary skills for development of entrepreneurial mindset. However, early childhood education in Nigeria is far from perfection in terms of quality. It appears to have been seriously abused by all the key players and as such is saddled with a lot of challenges which can be summarized as follows:

- Negligence on the part of the government agencies: The Federal Government of Nigeria approves and encourages public and private partnership in establishment of ECE centres in the country (FRN, 2014). This has helped in terms of quantity (number of centres), however according to Ugwu (2011), little or no effort is being made to ensure that these providers whether private or public comply with the NMS. In that regard, a good number of ECE centres are very far from the stipulations of the NMS for ECE centres in Nigeria. Technically for school health services, officials from the Ministry of Education need to involve health officials approving any centre. Such health officials also need to offer routine health check from time to time. In reality, this rarely happens, so in practice, there is little or no quality control.

- **Inadequate trained teachers and care givers:** Since supervision on the part of the government is not satisfactory, (Ibiam, Ugwu, Ifelunni & Otti, 2015), a number of providers end up recruiting teachers and caregivers who are not qualified but who can manage peanut as salaries, all in the bid to maximize profit. Also, some centers especially those in city centres and urban areas employ few qualified teachers and caregivers believing that with large population of children, they would still make appreciable profit. In such centres which are often privately owned, the fees are highly exorbitant that only high income earners can afford it. On the other hand, in semi urban and typical rural areas, the story is quite different. Many of the school owners employ young school leavers who are preparing or waiting for university admission and such persons can take anything as pay and also do the work of care-giving as a pass time thereby wasting the children's time and energy. Even in government owned schools, caregivers are mainly grafted from the primary section. Many of such caregivers either lack the skill or the interest in handling preschool children.
  
- **Overcrowded classroom:** In many ECE centres especially in the urban areas, the teacher-child ratio of 1:25 is rarely adhered to (salami, 2016). A number of classrooms are highly overcrowded with more than 30 children under one teacher/care giver. Under such condition, the quality of care and education given to children may be better imagined than true.
  
- **Low motivation for teachers and care givers:** Teachers and care givers for preschool children need to be actually abreast with the basic principles of how children develop and learn. Unfortunately, many of the providers of ECE especially at the private sector are business oriented. As such, they do not border much about the welfare and motivation of teachers. Therefore due to poor motivation of preschoolers, many teachers and care givers take up the appointment as a waiting ground either to enter higher education institution or to enter one trade or the other. In this regard, retaining teachers for more than two years is a big challenge to many providers and this is not healthy for the socio-emotional development of preschool children who according to Ngwoke and Ngwoke (2019), need to develop strong attachment with teachers and caregivers to effectively participate in learning activities in school.
  
- **Non-implementation of language policy:** It is a common saying that children think and learn better in their mother tongue or the language of their immediate community. This informed the language policy for preschool education in Nigeria (FRN, 2014). Unfortunately, almost every ECE centre in Nigeria adopts English language as their language of instruction. According to Ugwu (2011) and Salami (2016), a number of factors have been identified as contributing to the poor implementation of language policy such as: lack of proper orthography of all Nigerian

languages; parental attitude where many parents show preference to schools where children are encouraged to learn with and speak English at will; non availability of basic texts in Nigerian local languages; urbanization where preschoolers come from diverse communities and teachers and caregivers are not conversant with the language of the immediate community.

- Poor home /school collaboration: Effective ECE demands active involvement of the family especially the parents. Unfortunately, many parents in Nigeria find it difficult getting actively involved in the education of young children due to their busy schedule. In addition to the government's lackadaisical attitude towards effective management of ECE in Nigeria, the family which ought to be one of the significant key players in ECE appears not to be playing its part well. Family socialization pattern appears to be adversely affected by the current trend of globalization and economic crises in the contemporary societies. According to Ngwoke (2011), economic, political and social systems are becoming more complex and sophisticated. To Ngwoke, one logical outcome of such globalization is an increasing demand on individuals to enter into more abstract human relationships to be able to effectively participate in the global economic and political structure. Ironically, in Nigeria, this development appears to be alienating parents more from their natural parenting roles. According to Ngwoke (2019), this has pushed a number of parents to developing unhealthy attitude towards ECE for young children in Nigeria. Rather than seeing early childhood education as a collaborator or a lift in the task of guiding children to developing the necessary life skills, parents appear to have relinquished the responsibility of parenting wholly to the caregivers in the so called early childcare centres. In specific terms, many of them extend the official school hour from 1.00 pm to as much as 5.0 pm. This they do by registering children in after school programmes partly to free themselves from the encumbrances of quality child rearing and to enable them attend to their busy schedule.

- Over reliance on digital resources. Quality ECE demands quality parent-child interaction. Unfortunately, with the security threat of kidnapping, child abuse and molestation by familiar persons in most parts of the world and Nigeria inclusive, young children are becoming more and more encaged and engaged with digital resources to keep them indoors and apparently safe. According to Ngwoke (2019), this practice in addition to parents' busy schedule is robbing children of the opportunity for quality interactions in the home which ought to supplement the effort of the school in developing life skills in children.

The consequence of this ugly trend is unwholesome and this has given rise to a number of developmental and learning problems among young children. And because development generally is progressive and systematic, it can be seen to be part of the reasons why the Nigerian youths lack entrepreneurial skills which is



threatening to launch them into perpetual joblessness. The big question then is: what is the way forward? To the researcher, the answer is ensuring quality in ECE.

### **The concept of Quality Early Childhood Education**

The purposes of early childhood education can only be achieved if quality is ensured through proper policy implementation. Quality in ECE according to the guidelines by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2019), is expressed in the following areas: relationships; curriculum; teaching; assessment of child's progress; health and wellbeing; staff competencies, preparation and support; family relationships; community relationships; physical environment; and leadership and management. Also Galinsky and David (1988) compressed the determinants of quality in early childhood education into three broad areas thus: a) personal interactions involving: interpersonal relationships, teaching relationship, the activities, disciplinary relationship and stability. b) Features involving: training, leadership/management, group size or caregiver- children ratio, physical layout, health and safety, nutrition and food, and evaluation. C) The linkages involving teacher – parent interactions. When these areas are properly taken care of, the programmes for children would have considered the major conditions of learning and development. Prominent among them are individual differences, role of environment, teacher and teacher factors, different learning styles, play in the life of children, home –school collaboration and the role of attachment.

These attributes of quality in ECE programmes when critically considered, helps children in developing the basic life skills which are needed for developing entrepreneurial mindset. Promoting quality interactions between the caregiver and the children and among children for instance according to Salami (2016) will enable children to learn about themselves and develop healthy self concept; and help children learn about figures and concepts which help them to better understand the world around them. It will also help them to understand better the processes of learning which will in turn help children to learn how to handle new learning experiences, how to organize their thinking and how to solve problems. Stability which relates to the idea of retaining caregivers for a period of time is also a critical determinant of quality. According to Ngwoke (2019), preschoolers, who are exposed to new caregivers very often, most often become at-risk for social and emotional problems. Stability therefore helps children to develop attachment with caregivers which in turn help them to develop basic trust. This is a critical step towards entrepreneurial mindset development. Unfortunately, the private sector is the worst hit in terms of instability of caregivers arising from their business sense employed in the management of ECE programmes.

### **Conclusions**

From the discussion so far, it is apparent that developing entrepreneurial mindset in preschoolers will prepare them for entrepreneurship in youth and adulthood thereby minimizing the problem of joblessness and criminal mindedness among them. It is also apparent that developing entrepreneurial mindset is a systematic and progressive process which also demands provision of safe, interactive, stimulating, responsive and child-friendly environments. In principle, ECE is designed to equip young children with entrepreneurial mindset. However, with the array of challenges facing ECE practice in Nigeria, the hope of achieving its purposes is farfetched and with that, Nigerian children will continue to grow and mature into youth and adult age without any hope of becoming a successful entrepreneur. Therefore there should be a rethink by all the key players in childhood education to improve the quality of education provided for preschoolers in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the above challenges and conclusions, the researchers make the following recommendations

- The quality of ECE programmes whether public or private should be improved. The government has to take the lead so that the private providers can be motivated to work towards improvement in service delivery.
- Emphasis should move from policy stipulations to policy implementation.
- Interpersonal relationships should be enhanced with little or no gender bias.
- Effort should be made to encourage ECE providers to ensure stability by employing caregivers who have the potential for staying a little long with the children. This helps to build the children's trust in them and in the school.
- Parents and caregivers should employ appropriate disciplinary approach in managing children's behaviours. This will help children develop self control, empathy, and other pro-social skills necessary for entrepreneurial mindset.
- Effort should be made for enhanced teacher preparation. As long as ECE continue to be an all comers affair, implementation of ECE curriculum will continue to be effort in futility.
- In clear terms, there should be improved government involvement in ECE through:
  - a) Funding - Early childhood education is quite cost effective. For ECE to be of reasonable quality, funds should be available for the major components – facilities, learning materials and learning centres, teacher preparation, health and wellbeing of learners and caregivers. As obtainable in many developed countries of the world, ECE need to be clearly and specially taken care of in the nation's annual budget. This will avert the problem of poor attention by the administrators of UBE programme.

- b) Improved supervision - Providing clear and robust policy for ECE in Nigeria without proper implementation amounts to effort in futility. Part of what is giving the private practitioners the impetus to operate ECE centres solely as a business outfit without recourse to quality and its impact on children in Nigeria is the attitude of the government towards public ECE centres. Government should strive to maintain quality in public ECE and by so doing, set example for the private school owners.
- c) Training package for ECE scholars and practitioners -Government should institute scholarships for ECE scholars and practitioners for professional training to ensure compliance to international best practices in the education of young children. By so doing, qualified personnel will be available for management of ECE in Nigeria.
- d) Quality parent education programme - Parents are significant partners in the education of young children. Government should therefore create programmes and opportunities for parents to be properly educated on the developmental as well as the learning needs of young children. This is especially necessary with regards to the health and wellbeing as well as the nutritional needs of preschoolers. The need for quality family interaction with children will also form part of the curriculum of such programme. This is most important in the contemporary society where the practice of latch-key kids or home-alone-kids is speedily finding its way into many families.
- e) Encouraging external support – Nigeria claims to be practicing free basic education. However according to Salami (2016), in most developed countries, providing quality education is not free. Therefore, considering the short and long term effects of quality ECE for the Nigerian child and the society in general, corporate organizations and individuals should assist the government in providing quality basic education to the Nigerian children. With that entrepreneurial mindset will be developed in Nigerian children early in life.

Finally, promoting early childhood experiences for the Nigerian child through quality ECE will equip the Nigerian children and subsequently the youths with the necessary mindset and skills for utilizing the various entrepreneurship opportunities in Nigeria rather than waiting aimlessly for the so called white-collar jobs that are neither here nor there and suffering the attendant impact of unemployment.

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