



Public Day Care Centers as a Functional Approach to the Care and Education of Toddlers in Nigeria: A Proposal to Nigerian Government

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Abstract

The paper admits that in the past there were alternative approaches for the care and education of the child. It recognizes that at present the most functional approach is the day care. It points out that there is no functional public day care in Nigeria and that the absence of public day care has led to private sector dominance. It attributes none attendance of day care by children to the high fees and charges imposed by investors. It points out that toddlers are the highest group of children who are sent to day care. The paper therefore explains that day care is a vehicle that conveys overall development to the toddler. It identifies the different forms of day care and highlights the advantages of day care to the overall development of the child. It regrets private sector dominance because it has scared many children from benefiting from childhood care and education. It therefore advocates a situation where government can float a functional day care. The paper advances reasons why government should make public day care functional by recommending that the government can charge some tokens affordable by all parents so as to have a financial base for funding day care services; since the day care centers owned by government cannot be accessed by all, the government must endeavor to establish more centers at close intervals; and is not in contest that those who serve as care givers at public day care centers resume and close at hours that cannot encourage the patronage of parents, the government should introduce a work shift system to ensure that the public owned day care centers can attract patronage.

Keywords: Toddler, Day care centers Public day care

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INTRODUCTION

Since creation, the care and education of children have attracted many approaches. The approaches change from place to place and time to time. It is on record that early philosophers propagated different approaches suitable for the care and education of the child. A Philosopher like Friedrich Froebel in 1837 at Bad Blankenburg Germany commenced the first kindergarten school as a play institute. One major tenet of his theory is that children should be brought to a place which he described as garden. In the garden the emphasis was the use of play to teach children (Kindergarten, 2011). John Locke another philosopher among other things proposed the establishment of private schools (Anero, 2018). Socrates in his criticism against payment for education advocated that the child's education should be free (Osaat, 2006). The proposal and adoption of different approaches to care and educate the child seems to be endless. Currently, the use of care centers appears to be the most functional. Its usage or adoption may not have completely ruled off the hope that in future another approach may evolve. This prediction is based on the fact that each approach surface to suit the trends of events at a given time. Recently, there is a common phenomenon of insecurity in most communities; such that if the trend continues, there may be need to invent another strategy of caring and educating the child which will not require taking the child far away from the home. In this paper, attention is not directed towards determining if a new approach may emerge or not; so the focus of this paper shall be to determine the extent how the use of care centers suits the needs of the time.

In attempt to buttress the rationale why care centers are best described as a functional approach for the care and education of the child, there is the need to define care center as a place where children are kept and cared for the purpose of training them attain overall development. It is also known as a place where children are prepared for school and adult life. In Nigeria, observation indicates that there are three strategies to care and educate the child. The three significant strategies are:

- **Child care at the parents' home:** Care at the parents' home can also be described as in-home care. The care giver under this arrangement attains to the needs of the child in the child's place of abode or the parent's house. Under this arrangement, the care provider is paid a token or sometimes rewarded in kind. The care givers are untrained most times. They could be neighbors or hired personnel who may spend sometimes caring for the child until the parents are back from the day's business.
- **Care provided by relatives:** The care given to the child under this arrangement is provided in the child's home. It is the traditional form of care where Siblings, Sister In-laws, Parents or Close Relatives are dedicated to the care and education of the child.
- **Center-based care:** Center based learning is a care arrangement where the child is taken to a designated place known as a care center. Those who care for the child at the centers are deemed to be trained and well paid. In Nigeria, there are two forms of center-based care. The two are private and public. Private is owned by individuals, companies, churches and agencies. Due to the fees and charges paid by beneficiaries, not all can afford to pay. It is important to point out that they are more in number than the public owned care centers. The other is the public owned ones sponsored by the state. It is designed to be accessed by all and all staff are paid from the state coffers.

Considering that not all parents can afford to pay the high fees and charges demanded by private care centers, the onus therefore lies on the government to operate a robust or elastic day care system that can enable all parents' access day care education for the toddlers. This proposal is one thing and the other is its rationalization and actualization. This paper therefore is designed to justify and propose ways of actualizing the provision of day care by Nigerian government so that all children shall benefit. In attempt to provide the grounds for this discussion, the following shall form the template upon which the discussion shall hold:

- Who is a toddler?
- Why day care is deemed a functional approach for the care and education of the toddlers?
- Day care as a panacea for the overall development of a toddler?
- Reasons why government should make public day care functional?
- Proposal to government on how to provide public functional day care
- Conclusion and
- Suggestions.

WHO IS A TODDLER?

The word toddle is said to mean to walk or move in an unsteady manner. The child at the stage of walking and warbling is called a toddler. The toddler stage therefore marks the period when the child begins to learn how to walk. It coincides at age one. Defining the toddler in terms of age, Raleigh-Beckett (2016) explains that toddler years are ages one to three. The period age one to three represents the period when the child is expected to enroll in a day care center. It is important to point out that the toddler's ability to walk and engage in other activities makes the toddler child perceive himself/herself as separate individual from those around him. Consequently the toddler begins to attempt to do things for himself/herself but most of what are done are danger prone and highly distractive to the activities of others around. Following this distractions imposed by the activities of the toddler, parents and guardians the world over engage in measures to take care of the child. It should be noted that a good care of the child at the toddler stage acts as a catalyst to the overall development of the child while an improper attention of the child at the toddler stage mars or stunts attainment of the child's developmental mile stones. An effort to take care of the child has attracted many measures. Significant among the measures is the day care approach. Adopting the day care approach is one thing and making it functional such that the generality of the Nigerian child can benefit is another. It is on this premise that this paper is designed to call on government to operate a robust day care system that can be beneficial to all.

Day Care as a Functional Approach to Care and Educate the Toddlers

The nature of toddlers and infants as derived from the definition indicates that it is not easy to care for toddlers. Most parents and those around them may be too busy to spare time to care and educate the toddlers. In recent times, the most effective means of caring for toddlers is taking them to day care centers. This day care approach appears to be a common practice or otherwise the national life of Nigerians. The issue at this point is why is it that the generality of the people take to this option? It is commonly observed that most parents in both urban and rural areas undertake the pain of dropping and picking children at childhood care centers. This view

corroborates the idea of Simon and Ulrich (2017) who explain that on daily bases American parents undergo the ritual of dropping their children at care centers or preschools. This practice is not only synonymous with the Americans but Nigerians and people of other nations. In Nigeria, one can say that it is a new culture but it is spreading very fast to all the nook and cranny of the nation. Since it is gathering momentum on regular bases, it is important to justify why it receives the high patronage. In doing so, attention shall be given to two basic features of day care centers. The dimensions are namely the nature of the day care centers and the other is parental factors.

Nature of the Day Care Centers

It is not in doubt that most day care centers possess certain features that make the children feel at home. In this connection, it is important to acknowledge that one of the early philosophers in the person of John Heinrich Pestalozzi observes that the home is the child's first point of call and that the school should replicate the attention and care given to the child at home. This is to say that the school should act as a medium of transition from home to society (Anero, 2018). In the bid to make the centers look like the home, the care givers and teachers provide basic things that the child finds at home. Some such things are toys, games, televisions, beds, chairs, different objects with different shapes and colors, eating rooms, sand corners, water corners, play grounds among others. In the centers, the teachers and care givers are conceived by the children as parents. This is to say that the absence of parents in the centers are not felt by the toddlers because both the things and people they see around them make them feel as if they are at home.

Parental Factors

The global adoption of day care center as a functional approach for the care and education of children is traceable to parental factors. In recent times, most parents are not traditional house wives or fathers which they were in time past. The change in parental status is attributed to parental gross engagement with different forms of economic ventures which impede their time such that they have limited time to spare for the care of their children. In acceptance to this view, Narayana, Sajid and John (2007) explain that following the new trends where parents will spend more time working and little or no time for the child, there will be significant influence on the overall development of the child. This is to say that by the time the child is not cared for, the child is bound not to attain the expected developmental mile stone. Speaking further on this, Baker, Psych, and Farrow (2009) explain that the more time children spend in any non-maternal care arrangements within the initial four and half years (4.5 years) predicts the occurrence of deviant behavior by the child. Some such problem behaviors are unnecessary exhibition of assertiveness, disobedience to those in authority, violation of rules/regulations, exhibition of aggression among others. Considering that, non-maternal arrangement may include taking the child to day care center, one is poised to ask if the day care centers are grounds for the upbringing of children such that they manifest problem behaviors? Truly, the sincere answer is no! Incidentally observations have shown that a good number of well-behaved children undergo day care centers. So, it is arguable to accept the position of Baker, Psych, and Farrow.

Day Care as a Panacea for the Overall Development of Toddlers

The toddler stage marks one significant period of crisis in human development. Most children encounter accidents that may maim them for life. Some are shocked by electricity, burnt by fire, encounter hot water injury, eat or drink poisonous substances, encounter falls, suffer cuts from sharp objects, walk away and get lost and many more. The things listed appear to accommodate some physical harm that the toddler may suffer but it did not include social and emotional harms. Socially and emotionally speaking, the toddler exercises restraint over strange things and people. They cry to express hunger, anger and can easily be upset. However, the toddler can smile or laugh to express pleasantry or satisfaction. Within the toddler stage of life, the child begins to show case intellectualism through language acquisition. The child begins to call names of people and objects around as well as respond to stimuli. To list the things the child can do Jess (2016) identified major characteristics the toddler as follows:

- They prove to be stubborn;
- They toddle or move from place to place;
- They reduce in intake of food;
- They are good in imitating whatever they see or observe;
- They wish they can do things themselves;
- They can urinate or defecate at any time and point; and
- They are engrossed with play.

No doubt, considering the various forms of characteristics associated with the toddler, one can infer that the toddler cannot be cared and educated by all and at every place. The trained and retrained care givers and teachers stand the best chance to care and educate the child. The reason for accrediting them with this responsibility is the fact that they understand the philosophical and psychological state of the child. Beyond these, they are trained and retrained with the methods and strategies of how to care and educate the child. The day care centers are also known to possess features that make the child feel at home. The features are already listed under the nature of day care centers. It is due to these considerations that this paper describes day care as a panacea for the overall development of toddlers; in-fact the most functional approach to the care and education of the child at the toddler stage.

Reasons Why Government Should Make Public Day Care Functional

Considering the benefits of day care, no one should be exempted from attending day care as a preparatory ground for children to face school and adult life. Besides, if there is effective public day care system in Nigeria, parents and guardians can face their daily business without incurring distractions generated by children. The fact that they send them to care centers make parents feel that their children are in safe hands. The reasons why the Federal Government must take the business of providing day care at the door steps of all and sundry are many. Some such reasons shall be discussed from the succeeding line paragraph of this paper.

Provisions of the National Policy on Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) through her National Policy on Education in section 2 item 15 among other things admitted to among other things do the following:

- Ensure that children successfully transit from home to school;
- Ensure that the child is cared for, supervised and secured while the parents or guardians are away to work; and
- Ensure that the child acquires good habits.

In the bid to attain these goals, the government in subsection 16c of the policy accepted the responsibility of encouraging efforts of communities and private participation to establish Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) centers. The rationale of government declaration is to ensure that ECCDE is liberalized such that its services can be accessed by all. Rather than observe a situation where all Nigerian children access ECCDE there is a situation where the sector is highly commercialized and expensive for the children of the poor to acquire. If the goals of government must be achieved, the government must either establish her own ECCDE centers as she has begun to do and demonstrate seriousness by ensuring that they function as well as monitor the activities of the private ones by setting standards and ensure that the private operators keep to the standards.

The economic life style of Nigerians

There is a significant change from the traditional to the present form of economic life style among Nigerians. The traditional way where the husband and wife are known to operate an economic system convenient to them such that they care for their children is almost not obtainable in Nigeria. Presently, husbands and wives engage in white collar jobs or businesses such that either one or both of them are constrained to take care of the child. Following the pitfall of the current situation, the government ought to act beyond the proposal table by not merely formulating policies but need to establish and manage ECCDE centers such that the services are at the door steps of all Nigerian families.

Disintegrating Nature of Nigerian Families

Traditionally speaking, the Nigerian society is known for operating an effective extended family system where all perceive themselves as one. Recently the cultures where Nigerian families hold firm to the affinity of family bonds are almost eroded. In the past, the child in the family is strongly believed not to only belong to the biological parents alone but all members of the family. The family members therefore contribute both in cash and kind to care and educate the child. Contributing towards this, Isiuago and Uche (1999) explain that the rationale behind the practice, is that the child as a member of the family belongs to no one rather than the family as a whole and that all children in the family constitute to the strength of the lineage. Today, the family has witnessed high level of disintegration such that no one from the family takes the responsibility of caring and educating the child. What this means is that the parents and guardians have the choice to fall back to the most available option which is the patronage of day care services. In affirmation to this, Anero (2012) concludes that the disintegration of the

extended family system in Nigeria can be held accountable for the high patronage of day care in Nigeria by Nigerians and aliens in the country. This phenomenon may not end in a short while. Therefore, government as the highest manager of the state, should not seat on her oars and allow the provision of day care to be toyed with by the investors; she must as a matter of necessity establish and manage day care services.

Cost of day care in Nigeria

Another reason why the government must do something to provide day care centers to all Nigerians is to reduce the high fees and other charges imposed by private day care operators on Nigerians. It is not an issue that demands empirical data to support this declaration. This is true because it is observer-able that the fees charged by the day care merchants are not only outrageous but has scared the larger population of Nigerians from sending their children and wards to day care centers. The cumulative effect of this denial is that a good chunk of Nigerians will miss the compulsory course of day care and education attention. This exclusion accounts for the malfunctioning of individuals and the society at large.

Poor state of public day care centers

In recent time, the government embarked on the establishment of public day care centers in existing public primary schools. The state of those centers does not attract parents to send their children to the schools. This observation simply suggests that the careless attention given to public day care centers as in integral part of the public school system does not worth any commendation. The government therefore must as a matter of urgency devout significant attention to day care centers so as to enable parents send children to the centers; where this is not done, no one will count the existence of public day care as an achievement of government.

Accessibility

The concept of accessibility in this context is used to refer to distance and carriage capacity of the public day care centers. The scattered points where the public day care centers are situated shows the unwillingness of government to provide day care as an essential service to the people. This Judgmental statement is made because the distances between one public day care and another and the teacher pupil ratio among the public centers depict a show of none commitment by government. Consequently, Nigerians are not all admitted or do they all access the services of public day care and when they do, the quality of services do not reflect the prescribed standard. The government therefore has the task to establish day care centers as close as possible and also monitor the operations such that set standards are not neglected.

Positive effects of day care on the overall development of children

It is important to point out that children, who undergo day care, are known for attaining development in all areas of human development. The believe that day care helps to prepare children transit into school and adult life is one significant reason why government must ensure that all and sundry undergo the experience. This view is supported by many Simon and Ulrich (2017) support this view by affirming that it gives advantages or benefits to children who

participate in high-quality early learning programs. Since this paper is not designed to determine what a high or low quality ECCDE is, it may not bother to deliberate on that. It will rather infer on a general note that exposure of children to early learning programmes is of a significant advantage for the overall development of the child.

PROPOSAL TO GOVERNMENT ON HOW TO PROVIDE PUBLIC FUNCTIONAL DAY CARE

The world over, day care is understood as one of the best approaches that are adopted to care and educate the child. Following this understanding, most countries take the business of day care serious. In Nigeria, day care is abandoned for investors as a means of making money. The charges imposed by the entrepreneurs are so high that most parents can't afford to pay. Following the high cost, they refuse to send their children to day care centers. By so doing, millions of Nigerians do not benefit from the foundations it lays for sustainable of the child and the society at large. Considering the multidimensional roles played by day care, the government as the chief umpire of all activities can do much more than what it has done in providing day care at the door steps of Nigerian children. The things they can do include:

- The establishment and management of day care centers in close distances;
- They need to re-strategize or reorganize the work hours of day care givers by engaging the care givers to work on shift bases as it is been done in hospitals by doctors and nurses, since most parents and guardians remain at work till 4-6pm. If this is well handled it will inject in them a sense of safety on the part of their children and confidence on the part of the care givers and teachers;
- The present situation where the public day care givers in public centers terminate their services as soon as the normal school period closes is a discouraging factor that prevents parents from patronizing public day care centers;
- Outside these reasons, the public day care centers are accused of not operating in an ecstatic environment. So the onus lies on government to improve the environment of the centers.

CONCLUSION

Day care as an approach for caring and educating the child has come to stay in Nigeria. It is patronized by Nigerians irrespective of marital, economic, political, social or educational statuses. It does not also recognize parental religion, ethnic, cultural, occupational practices nor does it consider parental settlement or place of residents. Despite the willingness of a significant proportion of Nigerians to patronize day care; one observes a situation where not all can afford to pay for its services. Inability of parents and guardians to pay stems from the fact that the sector is private driven and charges outrageously such that only parents who consider it a priority can afford to pay. This trend is indeed dangerous because the family bonds which was helping Nigerian families to allow close relations and siblings to care and educate toddlers has almost been disintegrated. And now the families resort to sending of their children to private day care centers. Unfortunately, the government and its agencies as the chief regulator of all activities within its jurisdiction has remained mute and allow investors exploit Nigerians and has not provided a platform to offer a worthwhile day care services for the citizenry. Considering the

dividends accruable from day care, the government needs to consider the provision of a functional day care as an unavoidable venture because it accelerates the overall development of the child. If the government must be accredited with the provision of a functional day care, she must among other things establish and manage day care centers in close distances, re-strategize or reorganize the work hours of day care givers by engaging the care givers to work on shift bases as doctors and nurses do so that their services can cover the entire day and make the environment of public day care centers have good ecstatic look.

Suggestions

The paper contends that day care is crucial to the overall development of the child but not all Nigerian children undergo day care due to private sector dominance. It therefore suggests as follows:

- peradventure, government's unwillingness to establish and manage functional day care centers is traceable to funding, the government can charge some tokens affordable by parents so as to have a financial base for funding day care services;
- since the day care centers owned by government cannot be accessed by all, the government must endeavor to establish more centers at close intervals; and
- is not in contest that those who serve as care givers at public day care centers resume and close at hours that cannot encourage the patronage of parents, the government should introduce a work shift system to ensure that the public owned day care centers can attract patronage.

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