

EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIGENOUS LITERACY SKILLS IN REPOSITIONING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a crucial role in shaping children's development and preparing them for future success. In today's globalized world, the integration of indigenous literacy skills into ECE programme has emerged as a promising approach to enhance children's learning outcomes and promote global competitiveness. This paper explores the effectiveness of indigenous literacy skills in repositioning early childhood education for global competitiveness in Nigeria. It was revealed that by incorporating indigenous literacy skills, such as the use of indigenous languages, cultural practices, and traditional stories, ECE programmes can preserve cultural identity and heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among young learners. Moreover, the integration of indigenous literacy skills has been found to enhance cognitive development, as children gain the cognitive advantages of bilingual/multilingual abilities and engage in problem-solving and critical thinking. To effectively reposition ECE for global competitiveness through indigenous literacy skills, collaboration with indigenous communities, professional development for educators and policy support are essential. It is crucial to recognize and respect the unique strengths and resources within indigenous cultures, involving community members in co-designing culturally relevant of ECE initiatives. Therefore, teacher training programme in Nigeria should include training in indigenous literacy skills and practices so as to equip pre-service teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning of early childhood care education.

Keywords: *Effectiveness, Early Childhood Education, Indigenous, Literacy Skills, Global Competitiveness*

Introduction

It is assumed in this current society that education is the key to national development. This therefore brings about a need to maintain every level of education especially the pre-primary stage; because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels are built. When a child misses the early stage, it is usually hard for the learner to get back to the basics. Early childhood education is a common practice in most societies, provision are made for early childhood education programs of various types for children below the official school age (usually 6 years) mainly to prepare them for the rigors of primary education and beyond (Obiweluzor, 2018).

According to The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) early childhood can be defined as a stage occurring before the age of eight, and it is during this period that a child goes through the most rapid phase of growth and development. Early childhood is a stage in human development; it usually includes toddlerhood and sometime afterwards (Obiweluzor, 2018). Some age-related development periods and examples of these years are quite critical because their brains develop faster than at any other point in their lives. In psychology, early childhood is seen as the time period birth until the age of nine to twelve years, therefore covering infancy, kindergarten and the early school years up to grades 3, 4, 5 or 6. In this period, development of cognitive skills, social skills, self-esteem, moral outlook and perception about the world occur (Obiweluzor, 2018). Therefore, early childhood education is a critical phase in a child's development that lays the

foundation for lifelong learning and success (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). In today's increasingly interconnected and competitive world, it is essential to explore innovative approaches to education that can equip young learners with the skills and competencies necessary for global competitiveness. One promising avenue is the integration of indigenous literacy skills into early childhood education programs.

Indigenous literacy skills refer to the knowledge, language, and cultural practices that are specific to a particular community or region. They encompass the rich linguistic heritage, traditional stories, and cultural practices that have been passed down through generations. By incorporating these indigenous literacy skills into early childhood education, educators have the opportunity to tap into the unique strengths and resources of a community, harnessing their power to enhance children's learning outcomes and prepare them for global competitiveness (Cajete, 2000). The aim of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of incorporating indigenous literacy skills into early childhood education in repositioning it for global competitiveness in Nigeria. We will explore the potential benefits that emerge from the integration of these skills, including the preservation of cultural identity and heritage, enhanced cognitive development, improved language proficiency, promotion of cultural diversity, and the transmission of sustainable practices and local knowledge.

In an era characterized by rapid globalization, it is crucial to strike a balance between embracing the opportunities brought about by global connectivity and nurturing a sense of cultural pride and identity (Cummins, 2005). By integrating indigenous literacy skills into early childhood education, we can create an educational environment that values and celebrates the diversity of cultures and languages, while simultaneously equipping children with the necessary skills and competencies to thrive in a globalized world. Through an exploration of relevant literature and research findings, this paper will shed light on the effectiveness of indigenous literacy skills in repositioning early childhood education for global competitiveness. By recognizing the unique strengths and cultural resources within a community, early childhood education can empower children to navigate global contexts with confidence, while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2019).

Concept of Indigenous Literacy Skills

Indigenous Literacy Skills refers to the knowledge, language, and cultural practices specific to Indigenous communities. It encompasses the unique ways of reading, writing, and communicating that are rooted in Indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews. Indigenous literacy skills go beyond basic reading and writing abilities; they encompass a deep understanding and appreciation of Indigenous culture, history, and values (UNESCO, 2021). Indigenous literacy skills are essential for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge, preservation of cultural heritage, and empowerment of Indigenous communities. They provide a means for Indigenous individuals to express themselves, communicate their experiences, and maintain a strong connection to their cultural identity (UNESCO, 2021). These skills often involve oral storytelling, visual communication, and engagement with traditional symbols, songs, and rituals.

Furthermore, Indigenous literacy skills are closely tied to the oral traditions and oral history of Indigenous cultures. They emphasize the importance of storytelling, where knowledge and wisdom are passed down from one generation to another through spoken narratives (UNESCO, 2019). This oral tradition not only contributes to language preservation but also allows for the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and historical accounts. It is important to note that Indigenous literacy

skills are not isolated from the broader context of language revitalization efforts and decolonization. They are closely linked to the revitalization and preservation of Indigenous languages, which have often been marginalized or threatened by colonial influences. By promoting and embracing Indigenous literacy skills, Indigenous communities reclaim their languages and assert their cultural rights (UNESCO, 2019).

Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) refers to the educational and developmental experiences provided to young children from birth to around eight years old, prior to their formal schooling. It encompasses a range of programs, activities, and approaches that aim to support children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development during their early years (Berk, 2017).

Early childhood education encompasses the care and education of young children from birth to age eight, with a focus on developmentally appropriate practices, nurturing relationships, and individualized learning experiences. Early childhood care and education refers to the arrangements made for the care and education of children between birth and the age of entry into primary school (UNESCO, 2012). Early childhood education refers to the learning and development opportunities designed for children from birth to age eight, prior to primary school (World Bank, 2019).

Concept of Global Competitiveness

To complete according to Enefu, Okolo and Okorocha (2018) is to try to be more successful or better than somebody else who is trying to do the same thing as you. They added that, to be competitive describes a situation in which people or organizations compete in order to be as good as or better than others do. Margenstern in Enefu, Okolo & Okorocha (2018) gave the meaning of competition as one struggle with others, of fight, of attempting to get ahead or at least to hold one's place. Competitiveness therefore pertains to the ability and performance of a firm, sub-sector or country to sell and supply goods and services in a given market, in relation to the ability and performance of other firm in the same market. (w.w.w.wikipedia.org). Also, the world economic forum (2018) global competitiveness as a set of institution, factors and policies that determined the level of productivity of a country taking into its level of development. Akinso in Enefu Okolo and Okorocha (2018) argued that competitiveness is not the same as productivity. In his view, competitiveness related only to the economic health of a nation's traded sectors. This implies that a nation could have high productivity in some sectors and still be economically unhealthy by not creating enough jobs. For him, economic health can only be defined in terms of the ability nation's economic sectors have to add value and thus create jobs. This view however, is supported by the International Institute of Management that, economic growth alone cannot determine a country's competitiveness rather, it is only one of the factors that contributes to competitiveness. It is in view of this that Onyemenam (2004) in Enefu, Okolo & Okorocha, describes competitiveness as the degree of superiority by which a firm or nation produces goods, services and other related functions when compared to peers.

Practical Values Instilled by Indigenous Practices

Indigenous practices lay more emphasis in the area of human development and character training. Children were made to cultivate the following qualities.

Generosity: The people were made to share with others what they had in form of giving gifts to children, youths and the aged or needy.

Respect: This was key especially for adult members and elders of the society, Age accorded status to members of the indigenous society and as such age was respected. Children were expected to be very respectful. Women showed respect and loyalty to their husbands. People regarded one another as brothers and sisters. Elders and seniors were not addressed by their own names. Every individual are expected to be respectful and responsible. Everyone in the family has his or her own obligation.

Diligence: Hard work was a fundamental principle of the society and every child was expected to imbibe this virtue

Ability to Keep Secrets: Children were trained and taught how to keep secrets considered very important to the family and also to the society especially in times of emergency and war.

Kindness: Children are taught how to run errands and be useful and serviceable to others (especially the sick, the aged and helpless) and the entire society according to their ability and age. Failure to do this resulted in the denial of certain rights and privileges. Laziness was detested because the society considered lazy people as likely rogues.

Uprightness: Indigenous practices has instilled and promoted uprightness in terms of morals, good manners, honesty, and credit worthiness. Destruction of life through murder, abortion and assassination was strictly forbidden. Greediness of all types was highly discouraged. Confidence, goodwill and truth were instilled, celebrated and compensated.

The Contribution of Indigenous Practices in Early Childhood Education

There is need to explore new ways of being responsive and accountable to the cultural communities where children are being cared for and educated. The reproduction and modification of culture through educational curricula and human service programming has been cited as a problem by many indigenous communities. One of the main avenues for suppressing indigenous practices to colonial culture and governance has been through the imposition of child care and education that has denied the legitimacy of thought, lifestyles, religions, and languages of the indigenous people. It is imperative to actively engage in multi-faceted efforts to revitalize indigenous practices, to assert the legitimacy of our culturally based values and practices as integral to the fabric of indigenous societies globally and to foster among children's positive identities with their indigenous cultures of origin. Indigenous practices contribute deeply to the development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive/ mental and physical needs in order to build a solid and extensive foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing (Magagula and Mazibuko 2019).

Social Development: The child is introduced to the values and norms of the society through the process of socialization. The child's education starts at home and extends to the whole society. Primarily, it was the responsibility of the parents to educate the child. Secondly, it was the responsibility of the community was the child was born and raised. The community could intervene when there was any sign of negligence in training by the parents. Everything learnt by the child from the beginning was meant to enable him fit for active living and service in the society.

Physical Growth and Development: As the child grows in stature, his mind and body also become mature. This means the ability to use the body for different purposes in different circumstances. The aim of indigenous practice is to see the child grow and develop physically; this is actualized when

the children participate in various physical exercises such as racing, jumping, climbing, swimming and also in some acrobatic dance.

Character Development: Every human race is sensitive to the qualities of the young people. In different indigenous societies children are expected to behave in certain ways. Uncultured children were disgrace not only to the family the child came from but also to the society where the child resides. The parents are expected to chastise their children thoroughly to become useful and effective members of the society. The children were expected to have respect for elders and also become brave men and women in future.

Mental Development: Indigenous practices in early childhood education have contributed deeply to the mental development of the child through language training. This occurs as the child began to make sense out of the world around him. It was through the learning of the mother tongue that enabled the child to make sense out of the world around him. Through the study of history, zoology, botany, geography, agriculture and astronomy, the child is enabled to expand his reasoning.

Cultural Development: Indigenous practices introduce the child to the culture of the society. Culture is the total societal beliefs, norms, skills, customs, arts and values. Transmission of culture to the child involved the transfer of vocational training and skills.

Indigenous Literacy Skills in Repositioning Early Childhood Education for Global Competitiveness in Nigeria

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for a child's lifelong learning journey. In the context of global competitiveness, it is essential to explore the effectiveness of indigenous literacy skills in early childhood education. Indigenous literacy skills refer to the knowledge, language, and cultural practices of a particular community or region. The potential benefits of incorporating indigenous literacy skills into early childhood education, particularly in terms of enhancing global competitiveness includes;

- i. **Preservation of Cultural Identity and Heritage:** Integrating indigenous literacy skills in early childhood education allows for the preservation and celebration of cultural identity and heritage. When children are exposed to their native language, customs, and traditional stories, they develop a strong sense of belonging and pride in their cultural roots. This cultural awareness fosters confidence and self-esteem, empowering children to navigate global contexts while maintaining a strong connection to their heritage (Cajete, 2000).
- ii. **Enhanced Cognitive Development:** Studies suggest that bilingual or multilingual children who have a strong foundation in their indigenous language show enhanced cognitive development, including improved problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creativity (Cummins, 2005). Incorporating indigenous literacy skills in early childhood education allows children to develop linguistic flexibility, enabling them to adapt to various communication styles and languages, which is advantageous in a globalized world.
- iii. **Improved Language Proficiency:** Early exposure to indigenous literacy skills helps children develop a solid linguistic foundation. Research shows that children who are proficient in their first language tend to learn subsequent languages more effectively (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017). Indigenous languages provide a strong linguistic base, facilitating the acquisition of additional languages and promoting language diversity in a globalized society.

- iv. **Cultural Diversity and Global Citizenship:** Integrating indigenous literacy skills promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity, fostering a global mindset among young learners. Early childhood education that recognizes and values diverse languages and cultures prepares children to engage in intercultural dialogue, respect different perspectives, and become global citizens who appreciate and celebrate cultural differences (UNESCO, 2019).
- v. **Sustainable Development and Local Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge systems encompass valuable insights into sustainable practices, ecological stewardship, and community resilience. Incorporating indigenous literacy skills in early childhood education allows for the transmission of this local knowledge, equipping children with a deep understanding of environmental sustainability, ethical practices, and community well-being (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Conclusion

The effectiveness of indigenous literacy skills in repositioning early childhood education for global competitiveness is evident in the preservation of cultural identity, enhanced cognitive development, improved language proficiency, promotion of cultural diversity, and the transmission of sustainable practices. By integrating indigenous literacy skills, early childhood education can provide a strong foundation for children to thrive in a globalized world while valuing their cultural heritage and contributing to sustainable development. Therefore, the relevance of indigenous literacy skills for effective early childhood education cannot be overemphasized for it is the foundation of education for child's active living and services, respect for elders, reasoning, culture, growth and development, self-reliance, respect for human life and property, togetherness, high ethical code of conduct could be used to solve the emerging problem of youth restiveness and other ills facing our country today.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

- i. The teacher training programme in Nigeria should include training in indigenous literacy skills and practices so as to equip pre-service teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning of early childhood care education.
- ii. Teachers already on the field should also be trained through organized workshops, seminars, symposium and conferences to expose them to the essential features of indigenous practices for effective early childhood education.
- iii. The western curriculum should be developed on an indigenous base at the teacher training institutions for early childhood education.
- iv. There should be sensitization of capacity building programme for early childhood education.
- v. Government should put the funding of all the resources needed for early childhood education in their priority list when budgeting for education.
- vi. Early childhood education department should be implemented in all the universities running programme in education

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