



CHAPTER 51

TEACHER PREPARATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION IN HIGHER INSTITUTION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

Grace Ngozi Adama, Ph.D.

University of Nigeria

Introduction

Early childhood special education is a specially designed service or programme provided for children with special needs from 0-5 years and families. The services are carefully planned with experts as a concern for provision for children with special needs. The programme is also seen as designed services for infants, toddlers and families with special needs (Heward, 2009). Surprisingly, not much of the impact of this great innovative programme (early childhood special education) has been felt in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. This assertion may be due to behaviours observed such as increase in the out of school children (0-5 foundation stage) and increase in street children that has turned them into street beggars among others. Concurring, Beckley (2017) observed some abnormal behaviours in the classroom dictated in many early scholars. This trend calls for re-focusing and timely intervention in teacher's readiness for early help from 0-5 years.

Early childhood special education (ECSE) could also be called early help. It is also referred to early intervention and both are used interchangeably to describe special education services provided to children from birth to age 5. The activities involved are carried out early in life to prevent or reduce disabilities Adama and Onu (2021). Early childhood stage is a period of incubation of elements that will form or mold the individual to adulthood. It is a critical stage of child's life, irrespective of condition of the child. It is a stage of developmental changes. This stage is affected by the experiences and environments of early life which sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior and health.

In agreement with the above, researchers pointed out that behaviours portrayed by children could be managed early enough to avoid lasting negative effect. The foundational stage of life is therefore very critical. Hence, this stage demands the need for competent hands to render early childhood special education that may alleviate the challenging behaviours of special needs later in life. However, Massachusetts (2022) from the department of elementary and secondary education and early childhood special education families and districts support agreed on three strategies which will guide instruction and caring of the early special needs. Such strategies include first, improving systems to engage effectively with families. Those families with special needs are provided with services at no cost through early child special education programmes in public schools. Secondly,



improving systems to assist transition from early intervention to Pre-kindergarten and from Pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. This is said to include the services rendered in early schools from creche and nursery (birth to 2 years). The third strategy suggest improving instruction to increase educational outcomes in; social/emotional skills and social relationships; acquiring and using knowledge and skills and taking appropriate actions to meet such needs.

The emphasis then is on improving system which centers on educating the teachers. Getting teachers ready to facilitate knowledge and skills to recipients of early childhood special education (0-5 years and families with special need children). Teachers' preparation which enables the advocacy for the unborn child through antenatal clinics, and involves also the teaching on right behavior of pregnant women that might reduce the incidence of disabilities. Not only that, meeting such needs may include medical care; childcare; nutrition and family supports. A typical example is the America plan that seems to have tolled through the line of early childhood special component that facilitates services through advocacy/education, medical care, child care, nutrition and family support. Hence the critical stage of life (0 year) is serviced through advocacy for unborn at the antenatal clinics.

Education continues from hospital to home as prescribed through assessment. Furthermore, early helps provide services to reduce or eliminate the effect of disabilities or to prevent the development of other problems, so that the need for subsequent special services is reduced (Heward, 2009). It also helps to change behaviours of children, most children grow and learn a lot from birth (Beckley,2017). For children with disabilities to master the basic skills that most children acquire naturally, many preschoolers with disabilities must then go through carefully planned and implemented early childhood special education programmes under these special teachers who have been trained and equipped with such knowledge in education.

Education is one of the essential services rendered to infants, toddlers and families with special need ones. Hence the importance of education cannot be down played. It continues to receive global attention at conferences worldwide. The Jomtien conference of 1990 attended by 155 countries and 150 organizations gave birth to the global slogan, Education for All (EAA). The attendee pledged to make education accessible to all by the year 2000 (UNESCO, 2003). Unfortunately, this goal was not met and another world education forum which took place in Dakar from 26th-28th April 2000 and endorsed six goals with a view to among other things; ensure that the learning needs of young people and adults are met through access to appropriate learning and life skills programmme.

Education is an inviolable right (not privilege) to be acquired and enjoyed by every citizen, not bearing in mind age, social status, sex and condition of an individual. Thus, education is the legal right of all citizens irrespective of any seemingly barriers. Education also has been severally defined by ancient and modern researchers that applied to this study. It is seen as a baton that is handed



over from one generation to another to develop behaviours needed in the society in which they live. It is said to be geared towards developing the individuals to live effectively and efficiently in the society and to contribute to its growth and development. Furthermore, it is also believed that behavior pattern of individual could be changed in the desired direction through education.

Education is concerned with the dissemination of formal instruction under the direction of specially trained teachers (Azikiwe, 2013). As a process of initiating the child into cherished norms and skills. It is further designed and implemented by matured member of the society to effect the desirable changes in the younger ones from one generation to the other. In the same vein Adama and Onu (2021), stated that education is the process of teaching, learning the theories and practice of teaching information about or training in a particular subject. The truth is that teaching and learning could be done in different ways. However, education has three forms: informal, formal and non- formal education. Informal learning is the training one obtains from home, that is from parents and significant others. Formal education is tailored and planned in curriculum and implemented accordingly to recipients of the knowledge and skills, as seen in preprimary, primary, secondary and higher or tertiary institutions. On the other hand, non-formal education is a planned continuous development of learners(teachers) in service for updating in recent trends in the field of study to enhance competence in the field of specialty. For the benefit of this study teacher's preparation on early childhood special education is assumed to take place in higher institutions and non- formal levels of education.

Recent statistics revealed that Nigeria has more than 170 Universities. Out of the 170 Universities in Nigeria, only 12 are offering Special Education Programme. The Universities offering Special Education include: Bayero University (BUK); University of Benin UNIBEN; University of Calabar (UNICAL); Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA); Federal University, Lafia (FULAFIA); Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni (IAUE); University of Ibadan (UI); Kwara state University, Ilorin (Kwasu); Nasarawa state University, Keffi (NSUK); University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN); University of Uyo (UNIUYO); University of Jos (UNIJOS). Nigeria has these number of institutions with special education departments but the question is how many of these institutions have Early Childhood Special Education unit in their departments?

It has been observed that most institutions emphasize on few areas of disabilities such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, audiology, rehabilitation, and gifted and talented. While early childhood special education, autism, hearing impairment-visual impairment, emotional and behavioural disorder, albinism among others seemed to have not actually gained ground in special education in Nigeria. By implication, there is still much fallow ground to cultivate in the field of special education hence, the need to prepare teachers in various fields in special education with particular emphasis on early help or ECSE.



One would ask why should the emphasis be on early help? Early help averts preventable disabilities from occurring and already existing ones are ameliorated from further deterioration. Not only that, with ECSE at work in Nigeria there will be less disabilities thereby making inclusion feasible. Statistics on special needs schools in Nigeria numbered 1,177 full- fledged special needs school and 33,603 inclusive schools having special needs children population (Statistics on SNS, 2022). These statistics are very important to x-ray the need for teacher preparation to meet the rising demand for competent teachers. Therefore, getting teachers that are competent to handle the teeming population of special needs could only emerge via training and retraining of teachers. Furthermore, children are the touchstone of a healthy and sustainable society, how they are nurtured has significant influence on how they will grow, prosper and be viewed by others (Ibiam, 2016). The quality of care also increases when the child is a child with special needs. It demands therefore highly qualified teachers to really make impactful significant improvement in a child with autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, among others.

Teachers are persons who provide education for the children in all societies. The teacher facilitates their learning. Teachers also are curriculum users and implementers. Hence, the need to have knowledge and understanding of the curriculum content of early childhood special education. They are expected to have high quality skills, knowledge, right attitude, and positive values to inculcate to learners. ECSE is quite embracing in that it takes care of all areas of disabilities at early stage of life hence the teachers are prepared in specialized programme, and licensed to teach students with a particular disability. Not only that pedagogical skills also are so dynamic that it has implications for teachers' roles and teacher's preparation. Research has equally shown that no matter what curriculum is used, what degree of equipment sophistication or amount of teaching aids are available, what condition under which students are taught, the major factor governing the applauding of the programme is the qualification of the teachers. Early childhood special education then is not a One Size -All' teaching career, but with the right education, teachers can gain valuable knowledge and experiences to pilot success in their postings. To achieve maximally in early childhood special education, teacher's preparation then remains inevitable.

Preparation is an intervention programme for teachers on early childhood special education. In the theory of learning Marvin (1995) states that those skills that enable us to perform some specific functions are learned either through accident or planned organized programmes. Since teacher preparation is the bedrock for early childhood special programme, it is then a planned and organized programme that tolled from a well-planned curriculum. The reason is not far-fetched as getting prepared will enable teachers to face and compete favourably in the global community. Hence, it ought to be regular and supposed to permeate into their hours of practices. Having special need children at heart, preparation of teachers enhances ethical behavior of learners (teachers). Behavior of teachers also



toward a child with special need may mar or improve the child. It could also stabilize and maintain steady progress.

The thesis statement of the chapter will throw lighter on Early childhood special education teachers and modes of teacher preparation. This entails the pre-service training and in-service training or continuous teacher development. The chapter will also x-ray the factors challenging teacher preparation on early childhood special education. The prospects of teacher preparation on early childhood special education will also be discussed. Implication of teacher preparation for special needs children, conclusion and suggestions will be proffered in the chapter.

Emphasis on ECSE Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation is highly advocated not merely in early childhood special education but in other special areas of learning to eschew the rate of quackery in the society which have done more harm than good. The importance of obtaining high quality teaching and learning in school's preparation cannot then be downplayed. In Nigeria, only seven Universities are shown to train teachers for special education. Among the Universities ECSE is still a novel area to be explored. Preparation of teachers has become a necessity with the emergence of education for all children with disabilities by Individual with Education Act (IDEA) 1975,1998 and was improved on 2004. The policy statement by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers has become a mirage as no concerted efforts are geared towards actualizing the policy. The aims of teacher education are still far from being achieved due inadequate preparation of teachers. Such as using the traditional way of teaching which simply replicates itself in practice that may not meet the present demand.

In the same vein, proper and continuous training will make them not just to be a custodian of knowledge, but increasingly versatile in techniques of imparting learned skills and knowledge. Developing regular in-service training as an integral part of continuing teacher education and regular exposure of innovation in their profession is a commendable gesture from FRN (2004). Teacher in ECSE is not exempted, but rather recommended due to specific teaching skills available in special education. New teaching approaches in workshops like Reggio Emilia pedagogy, early signing, early braille manipulations, early orientation and mobility training, chart and symbol reading for speech and language disorders. These skills should be learned for effective and efficient teaching and learning in special schools.

Teacher professional preparation has two main phases as viewed by researchers namely the initial preparation that starts from Diploma to Degree to Masters and Doctor of Philosophy. The second phase is the in-service training, both at school and on practice such as seminars, workshop and conferences, inviting lecturers from outside to update teachers on new trends and innovations. Teachers, at all levels should be given the time to develop to share and train in order to meet



needs of an evolving audience. To help young people learn the more complex and analytical skills they need for 21st century teachers must learn in ways that develop higher order thinking and performance and to develop the sophisticated teaching required for this mission, teachers must also be prepared in various pedagogical knowledge and skills. The skills will generate activities in learners to learn the knowledge and skills relating to different subjects' areas. In early childhood special education, several skills are needed to convey teaching and learning to the learner.

In Nigeria, longer and more rigorous programmes have been shown to prepare better teachers than shortcut programme. Vying for inclusion has also led to preparation of general and ECSE in the same stream to develop skill and knowledge for better inclusive classroom management. National survey shows that 50% of children aged 3-5 years lack access to any form of organized early child education programme. Only 20% of children aged 3-5 years are participating in organized early child care programmes most of which are not child friendly pre-school centers (Federal Ministry of Health (2010). The percentage of children irrespective of condition of children in educational system that are uninformed therefore calls for teacher's preparation. Preparedness enables the teacher to face the numerous age range of pupil waiting at the door of knowledge. Since pre-school stage is the foundational line of educational development that starts from birth to 5 years. It includes the day care, creche, nursery and kindergarten. Preschool desires well prepared ECSE teachers especially when it has to do with special need children to handle their specific needs.

Mode of teacher preparation

Teacher preparation permeates all aspects of human domain of a particular individual undergoing the training. The training influences the physical, social, intellectual and mental aspect of human being. This could be achieved through training of the teacher. Training is relevant for professional development and could be done through pre-service training and in-service or continuous teacher development.

In pre-service training, the requirement for admission to a desired institution depends on the recommended brochure. Intended teacher student will be admitted according to institutional requirements. Early childhood special education professional preparation programme should have a strong grounding in the liberal arts and include professional course work in the areas of child development, curriculum, assessment, diversity, inclusion and family relations as recommended by the (National Association for the Education of young children, 1996). In the pre-service training student teacher are taught in line with curriculum which include theories, practical and practicum.

The theoretical content of classroom work which include all theories pertaining to early childhood special education, laws in special education, all disabilities, forms, cause, preventive measures and classroom management of each of them are taught in training. The students are also exposed to teaching practices



in inclusive classes and in special schools. The practicum is another special activity in the school where the students are expected to carry out case study in any area of their interest and report at the end of the study. In higher degree the practicum extends to rendering preventive education to pregnant women in the hospital, going to special school, organizing seminars to prisoners on behavioural change. Community awareness on causes, forms of disabilities and preventive measures could be arranged for the community as one of practicum activity. Pre-service training alone may not be enough to equip one, there is need for continuous teacher development through in-service training. Training of teachers should not end at graduation but their knowledge and skill should be updated through attending seminars, conferences, workshops and oversea training in a specific area.

In-service education is a training given to employees on the job in order to assist in their functions. It updates teachers to techniques in management of children with special needs among other benefits. A well-designed in-service training is intended to influence teachers learning and improve implementation of teaching practices. The amount, scope and teacher development offered to ECSE vary greatly from programme to programme and in their effectiveness. Research in an evaluation of a high scope trainer of trainers' project demonstrated that a well-designed, intensive and theoretical coherent in-service program can significantly improve early childhood teachers practices and developmental outcome for children.

For in-service training to become effective, it must extend beyond a simple workshop format. Several researchers have concluded that successful in-service education must reflect the following characteristics: Opportunity to apply knowledge; a continuous programme of study, not one-shot workshops; individualized delivery; expert mentoring provided on site and immediate feedback. Education contents must be uniquely suited to the audience or participants and not One Size Fits all Teacher approach which may not meet the needs of all participants in the workshop. Early childhood special education is a diversified teaching and learning in all the areas of needs namely; visual impairment, hearing impairment, autism, health impairment and others. The training must be tailored to the needs, experiences, education and ability of the participants. Effective in-service education must be intensive continuous and individualized. These components need proper application for effective and efficient impartation in teaching and learning in ECSE.

Challenges of Teacher Preparation on Early Childhood Special Education.

One of the major challenges of teacher preparation on early childhood special education is paucity of fund. The fiscal allocation for educational development seems to be underrated. This has equally affected other logistics needed to prepare teachers in ECSE. Lack of instructional materials and assistive technologies for



teaching and practical are matters to be addressed for preparation of teachers on ECSE to really achieve the targeted goal. This limited instructional material and sophisticated teaching material have also led to developing static teachers in a dynamic curriculum and evolving society. Also due to poor teaching structure and resources, such as infrastructure, facilitation of knowledge and quality of curriculum, some institutions have been noted to produce half-baked teachers with its' consequences. Again, newly developed teaching facilities with little supervision has also impinged on high quality of teacher preparedness.

Usurping of positions by non-teaching participants during in-service training has also reduced the chances of training more teachers. Poor attitude to teacher preparation for ECSE. The government and individuals are still seeing ECSE as One Size Fit Teacher' programme. Many may have not seen the need to train the teacher rather more money is invested in building schools than training teachers. Teachers are poorly paid. Some are owed for months thus many teachers cannot upgrade themselves or attend in-service training to develop their knowledge and skills. Lack of sponsorship has hindered many from attending seminars, conferences and workshops. Economic factor has also played negative role to teachers' preparation. The quest for money to make the ends meet is posing a great challenge for student teachers in training. Some may be distracted by their businesses, thus lacking full concentration in the training which may mar the outcome of the training. Nevertheless, amidst all the challenges teacher preparation has several prospects when properly channeled.

Prospects of Teacher Preparation on Early Childhood Special Education.

The prospects of teacher preparation cannot be undermined. Teacher preparation enforces and equips teachers to manage pupils from different backgrounds and in any level of educational system. Bearing in mind their diverse abilities, self- perception and self-efficiency and beliefs. The exposure of teachers to planned and systematic educational system will input the responsibility of desiring further professional knowledge. This could be done via commitment to reflective practice, research and continuous up grading of their knowledge through seminars, workshops and lectures from renowned professional scholars. The evidence of early learning points out the need for major investments in teachers' preparation and professional development to support new capacities in teachers of early childhood special education.

Preparation of teachers develops them continuously into expertise in any area one is called to teach. Such as in the area of handling infants and toddlers with visual impairment, hearing impairment, autism, audiology among others. Teacher preparation enables one to work in the hospital, collaborating with medical personnel: doctor, nurses, midwives and others to ensure minimal disabilities in the unborn and babies with existing disabilities. As an itinerant teacher, home teacher follows the child with disabilities home, teaching and learning continuous,



introduces family support system to family member for further information on the existing condition and grant support if need be and organization concerned.

Prepared teacher could teach competently in the day-care, creche, nursery and kindergarten. Trained teacher could also work with public health educations as team to advocate for children with disabilities and their families. Both could collaborate in creating awareness in the community on causes, forms of disabilities and how to avert the occurrences. Not only that, they could employ the community leaders to persuade the community to allow their children with already existing disabilities to attend schools where they can learn and acquire skills. The trained teacher could be retained in higher institution depending on the teacher's performance. Further trainings help individuals to obtain higher qualifications to teach early childhood special education in Colleges and Universities.

Implication of teacher's preparation on ECSE to children with special needs.

Teacher preparation on early childhood special education creates window for diversity. Due to diversification of the disability, preparation of teachers in these areas will help to reach all children at their various needs. Develops ability of the child up to the optimum level. Learning is effective when differences in learner's language, cultural and social behaviour are taken into account.

Preparation of teachers enhances positive behaviour of the teacher toward children with special needs which enhances improvement, stability and maintain progress in learning. It inculcates in the teacher passion for teaching, patience and sense of humour, creativity, communication skills, flexibility, understanding diversity and also ensures educators understand basic learning objectives and developmental milestones for young children.

It also ensures educators understand basic learning objective and developmental milestones for young children. It gives skill to support kindergarten readiness and future academic achievement. It prepares teachers to be advocates who understands the value of early learning as the tap root of the child's future academic achievement.

Early tutorage in the use of assistive technology ensures belonging, participation and steady progress on the part of infants and toddlers with disabilities. Early instruction in signing helps children with hearing impairment and families to easy off confusion aggressiveness due to inability to communicate seen in children with hearing impairment. In the same way, orientation and mobility cues if taught early helps children with visual impairment to adjust early to family and school environments.

Conclusion

Preparation of early childhood special education teachers in higher institution is all about training student teacher in theories, practical and practicum as stated in the curriculum. It also involves keeping up with emerging trends in instructional



process and related activities in curricula activities and retraining in pedagogical skills through seminars, workshops and conferences.

Teachers preparation in early childhood special education is not exceptional but very unique because of technical components of the field of study that involves early childhood special needs. The teacher readiness depends on special instructions and pedagogical skills that should be learned to be able to impact to learners. Hence the need for teacher training in ECSE practices remains mandatory to ensure significant progressive improvement in the learners.

Suggestions

In the light of the study the following suggestions are made:

1. Early childhood special education is the bed rock of future academic achievement therefore formal and nonformal training should be given to the teachers of these pupils.
2. Preparation of teachers demands facilities, instructional materials and expertise personnel in the field. Nigerian government should put these variables in place to facilitate training of teachers.
3. Feasibility of any programme is fund. Teacher preparation on ECSE can only be meaningful when government and philanthropist are directly involved in raising money for the training of teachers.
4. Nigeria government should uphold the training of teachers from foundational stage like ECSE, hence proper prioritization of teacher training should be done.

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