

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Care and early investments in the educational development of the child is terribly neglected by the Nigerian state. Investments in this level of education are solely undertaken by the private sector. This paper discusses issues and challenges arising out of this development. Prioritizing investments by the private sector for the Nigerian child through care and education is commendable as it can be a sure foundation for achieving social justice, a route for awakening learners' curiosity for education as well as enhancing learners' enjoyment of their human and natural rights to education. On the other hand, trends in the participation of the private sector in care and educational investments for the Nigerian child are terribly elitist so much that majority of Nigerians are out of these levels of investments due to high cost, in addition to those in the system not maximally benefitting due to poor infrastructure and poor personnel. To ensure that the fast tracking of human and national development that are the objectives of private sector participation in education are maintained, the paper recommends the following: Nigerian government should provide genuine investors incentives that can enable them overcome challenges they face in the system. Nigerian government should, as a policy, be involved in providing services targeted at care and early development of the Nigerian child; and lastly providers should be more inclusive in their efforts to provide this fundamental requirement for the Nigerian child.*

*Key words: Private sector, childhood, care, education, social justice, human, issues and challenges.*

### **Introduction**

Across developed, developing and underdeveloped states, there is increased awareness to provide care and education to children prior to their official admission into primary school. Justifications for this heightened awareness for the care and education of the child prior to his or her enrolment into the primary school derive from the recognition that quality investments in the forms of care and education for the child produce multiple dividends for the child in particular and the state at large. A society that makes the provision of a care and education a national priority can be consciously exposing its citizens to opportunities that can enhance their chances to do well in their academic pursuits later in life in contrast to those children who go straight into the primary school system possibly at the age of six. In this frame of mind, a state that consciously makes care and education a national priority is clearly and un-mistakenly working towards equalization of educational opportunities, building platforms for achieving its identified national objectives and making social justice an achievable norm.

These are in addition to inculcating in its present and future generations hygienic, social, moral, civic and civil responsibility that can enhance the institutionalization of democracy, human rights, environmental justice and formulation and implementation of national policies that can produce astronomical and colossal dividends for the individual and his state. These positions are sure and cannot be doubted because sustained attempts at providing care and education by a state can be sure bets for bringing about quality and sustained investments in citizens by their states and this in all honesty can be a durable and long lasting platform for national development. Incidentally institutions that provide care and education to learners below the legally prescribed age for admission into primary education go by different names: Crèche, Daycare, Pre-nursery, Nursery, Preprimary, Head-start, Kindergarten, etc.

What may be implicated by the multiplicity of nomenclature by care and education providers for learners prior to their official age of admission into formal school system is a demonstration of a lukewarm attitude to the sector by the government and this is visible in government's inability especially in developing states to be involved or formulate regulatory policies for the practice of care and education for the young prior to their official age of schooling or a near or total lack of acknowledgement of the vital role this can play in the actualization of human and general development objectives of governments and states.

Characteristically instructional provisions at these levels principally consist of care and pre-school activities. In other words one denominator which all activities at these levels share in common is that they are all care and educational experiences for the learner before his or her official admission into the primary school. Recently there is a growing consensus among scholars of education to pay less attention to the various labels referring to early care and education for the child but simply use Early Childhood Education and Care for such programmes targeted at learners below six years of age and before their entering into primary school. This paper shall maintain this position.

Paradoxically despite this growing awareness to officially recognize and invest in the care and education of the young child prior to his or her enrolment into the primary school, there is minimal involvement of the state in the sector particularly in Nigeria. Real investments in this sector have been spearheaded by the private sector and this exclusive participation of the private sector in this level of education has raised serious issues and challenges, which if not addressed and handled with utmost care are capable of plunging the Nigerian society and mankind generally into terrible disasters that may likely threaten national peace and social creation as well as promote excess inequality and is associated reactions in the forms of increase in movements targeted at challenging the status quo. Put slightly different, the monopoly of the private sector in spearheading and genuinely initiating measures for the welfare and betterment of the young in Nigeria has come close to issues and challenges which on critical and serious examinations or reflections may threaten and undermine the benefits of their efforts both to the individual and Nigerian society. In this paper, attempts will be

made to highlight these issues and challenges in the dominance of the private sector in this sector of Nigeria's education with a view to proffering solutions without side effects.

### **Justifications for Private Sector Participation in Early Childhood Care and Education**

Education any time and any day it is mentioned across societies attracts a positive aura. Many reasons tend to account for this. The oppressed members of the society look up to education for solutions to their predicaments and those in favoured and privileged positions look up to education to sustain their positions. This ambivalent nature of education justifies why education rates high among social services provided by governments and societies that are desirous to bridge the gap in access to social goods that states make available to their citizens and why education is an important article of faith as well as a constant variable to both amateurs and professionals alike and more importantly or disastrously a mechanism upon which politics is constantly played on and a victim of various policy summersaults.

In these policy summersaults Nwaokugha (2015:71) writes that the private sector has consistently shown and demonstrated adequate interest and enthusiasm to participate in education. The interest to participate in education by the private sector is not new. History is replete with records of the development of formal education and the private sector is adequately and positively implicated and has been commended for this. In fact history still bears witness that the private sector has in the past single-handedly and courageously spearheaded the provision of formal education just as some states have exclusive and durable monopoly of private sector participation in formal education before its recent eventual takeover by their states.

This interest has grown especially now that the seals of postmodernism seem to have been reinvented in education with activities of the private sector as a focal example. It can be correct to say that this is a real call for the resurrection of interests in the general education sector that is almost dead and consequently needs the introduction of innovations from the private sector for growth, competition, expansion and reawakening of hope of millions whose curiosity and expectations to access and accessible quality education have long been dashed.

In all these one area stands out in the interests of the private sector to participate in education. It is the early childhood care and education sector. There are sufficient reasons why the private sector is interested in the early childhood care and education sector. Participation in early childhood care and education has potentials to reposition individuals economically and this on its own has capacities to boost the economy of states through tax on staff and premises. Naturally individuals who operate these centers and their staff pay taxes to the state. Equally, this sector has potentials to empower, revolutionize, radicalize and emancipate individuals, and families as well as promote social justice through the equality of opportunities it offers every citizen. Children born into families and societies where parents quickly ship them out into other families and societies for money and other gratifications may have a sigh of relief where early childhood education is

compulsorily provided by the state or even when provided by individuals and made so affordable and qualitative so much that individuals can afford it. A state or a people who compulsorily and qualitatively provide this in the form of social justice can recoup their investments through the quality of personnel and human development that can in the near future service their industries and institutions.

Learners who are exposed to quality instruction at this level may be more receptive to embracing learning and pursuit of knowledge and naturally may excel better in academics than those who did not have the opportunity for such programmes. The meaning is that in societies where early childhood education is the norm, hardly can learners experience high dropout rates in school or become social misfits, with its unfortunate consequences to the members of the society. It must be put straight that states which ignore providing early childhood education and care services to its citizens pay dearly in the form of having many deviants whose behaviours and actions cost the state highly through maintaining and sustaining a criminal justice system that invariably cater for the needs of many of such social deviants.

Parents whose children enroll at this level of education actively explore the opportunity to excel in the labour market. Interestingly there is additional boost to this. Parents' high value in the labour market gives them unquantifiable level of satisfaction and fulfillment in the form of helping them resolve conflict, between their jobs and family responsibilities.

The foregoing suggest that participation in this sector of education produces superlative dividends to parents and learners as it supports child development in the form of promoting their cognitive, moral, hygienic, religious, emotional and social adjustments later in their future endeavours and to parents by way of accelerating their participation in the labour market as well as propelling their sense of self fulfillment. It is in recognition of all these that Taguma, Litgens and Makowiecks (2012:13) write that:

*a growing body of research recognizes that it (early childhood education and care) provides a wide range of benefits, including social and economic benefits, better child well being and learning outcomes as foundations for life long, more equitable outcomes and reduction of poverty and increased intergenerational social mobility.*

Such well articulated reasons for prioritizing early childhood care and education have the potentials to increase the number of persons especially women who can engage in meaningful and gainful employment and through this way contribute to the economic prosperity of their state, afford every child early exposure to learning and education, help to quickly equip citizens with critical faculties for responding to issues of human rights, human rights abuse, social justice, equity social injustice and inequity that are ever present in social lives as well as create an awareness among the citizens for strengthening the basis for lifelong learning. In fact where it is well planned and well implemented, participation in this sector assures to be the pillar and platform for raising a generation of citizens that can

embrace learning and education with zeal and enthusiasm. All these suggest that maximum exploitation of opportunities offered by this sector of education has potentials and capabilities for laying foundations for revolutionary and radical emancipation of a people that can fast track human and national development.

In fact the wisdom of the private sector in participating in this sector of education can be located in the monumental and colossal failures of the Nigerian state to meet up the increasing demand for social services especially education, coupled with a sense of general education, coupled with a sense of general disenchantment with the quality so provided. These failures can be said to be the primary and fundamental motivations for seeking alternatives and reliefs in the direction of the private sector. Put slightly different during the regime when the state was the sole provider of education, feelings of frustration and disillusionment was so visible across all layers of the Nigerian society because majority of the products of education industry across board could not in any way perform simple services that can add value to their individual lives or make any meaningful contributions to the advancement of their state. Paradoxically, a critical look at the education industry in a regime of private sector participation as it presently obtains in Nigeria shows that the attainment of the promise associated with quality education is terribly bedeviled by issues and challenges which in all honesty can be preludes to mounting platforms for social dilemmas whose end products can be the introduction of terrible inequity and inequality across the Nigerian society.

### **Early Childhood Education and Care: Some Conceptual Clarifications**

Early childhood in the context of early childhood education and care refers to children who are yet to attain their sixth birthday. In most modern states six years of age is symbolic because it is the statutory school enrolment age consequently any care and educational programme that is provided to a learner prior to his or her age of six simply qualifies as early childhood education and care.

By its very nature early childhood care and education is a conglomeration of a variety of activities that take place simultaneously for enhancing the growth and development of the child including accelerating his or her responses to education and learning as well as events in his environment. It can be acknowledged that homogeneity is a feature associated with early childhood programmes but any keen observer can observe that early childhood institutions differ markedly from community to community. What is however common is that operators identify with and align themselves with historical and philosophical traditions associated with known authorities in early childhood education or at best work towards attaining global best practices in early childhood education.

Some states simply refer to educational provisions for the young before their official enrolment in the primary school as pre-primary education. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) pre-primary education “is the education given in an educational institution prior to entering primary school”. Within this level of education, varieties of learning and developmental experiences are provided to the learner, which among other things is targeted at preparing the learner to adequately make the necessary adjustments that can enhance his

transition from the home to the school, improve his hygiene, language and numeracy skills as well as other developmental skills.

Interestingly, early childhood care and education can occur in numerous situations. Exploring the numerous situations in which early childhood care and education can occur, the Government of Ireland (1999) writes that “in certain situations for instance in the home, education and care may be provided simultaneously in a seamless fashion, with children exposed to a variety of stimuli and experiences, which enhance their development, knowledge, disposition and readiness to learn”. This revelation is important in discussions of early childhood care and education especially in the various situation or contexts and involvement of personnel in the sector. It is a common experience that provisions of the requisite development requirement for the young can be undertaken in the home where parents and relatives are the direct persons who are involved.

It is important to point out that in both developed and developing states, the first conscious attempts to initiate childhood care and education begins from the home. However practices and procedures in the home for purposes of this cannot in any way compare with the provision of the requisite developmental requirements for the young in structures purposefully designed for that purpose. True, institutions built and equipped with facilities for the purposes of being used as early childhood care and education centers hire the services of professionals and harmonize their practices, procedures and programmes to correspond with formal educational organizational set ups bearing in mind aims and objectives for learners at this level. This means highly systematic and rigid arrangements are norms in institutions that are specifically established for purpose of facilitating a young learner’s transition from early learning and developmental initiatives to primary education.

A tradition in enhancing and promoting young learners developmental and adjustment capabilities for learning is that in its earliest stage both are normally focused on providing inclusive services namely care and education. With time emphasis shifts with focus on transiting out of care to education and this takes into cognizance the age of the children. In other words, early attempts in early educational institutions focus on providing care for the children.

It is not to be doubted that parents who are fully employed by state institutions, individuals or who are self employed seek the services of institutional care providers or individual care-givers who assist them care for their children when they are away for work. Parents are at liberty to avail themselves of any form of child care services, ranging from long day care, family day care, in-home care, outside school hour care services and vacation care services (Elliot, 2006). The names of each of the forms of care above are a reflection of what each stands for. Parents who go to work in the day can opt for long day care and arrange same with their chosen care providers. A feature usually associated with this type of care service is that its operators must be registered and must be recognized for this type of service. Family day care is characteristically unique in the sense that it is usually undertaken in the individual care provider’s home for the children of his

client to enable his client attend his work and business. The duration which the care provider puts into caring for the children of his clients depends on the agreement between him and his client. There is in-home care and what obtains here is that the professional care giver relocates to the house of the parents of the children who are being cared for by him. Outside school hour care is typically provided for children before and after school while vacation care is care services that parents arrange for their children during vacation or when parents are away on vacation.

An important clarification which scholars of education concern themselves with is the difference and similarity between care and education in early childhood education discourse.

In attempts to do this, different opinions have emerged, some of which maintain that “care that is practiced in an early education environment is education”, (Gibbons, 2007) suggesting that there is no distinction between care and education in early childhood care and education discourse. This position seems to derive from the premise that early childhood education by its nature incorporates both care and education and consequently any attempt to distinguish between care and education can be an attempt in futility while others strictly and religiously maintain that care and education are two distinct concepts in early childhood education institutions.

One can by way of rational and reflective thinking see the two position above as natural in line with man’s natural endowment to think and through that way expand existing frontiers or solve his personal or social problems but more importantly as hinging on stereotyped assumptions taken many years ago in contradistinction to emerging revelations in recent events and developments in the present where practitioners are beginning to note marked distinctions between care and education. Recent expositions that note marked distinctions between care and education is a product and a credit to analytic awareness and consciousness especially after examining position of Gibbons (2007) that “care and education should be incorporated and that the environment must carefully blend the two together”. The quotation above is unambiguous as it clearly shows and reveals that care and education are two distinct concepts.

In other words, it is necessary, one sounds it loud and clear that irrespective of the use of care and education in the context of providing education and care for persons below six years of age, both terms are not one and the same thing and their spheres of application are not one and the same thing. Children who benefit most from care services in this sector are specifically those from the ages of 0-3 years.

Descriptive and critical reflections targeted at adequately distinguishing the two concepts can lead one to say that care in a way is the surveillance of the adult over the young or infant for purposes of giving or providing him or her protection, security and keeping him or her away or safe from danger and care in early childhood education falls within a lower order where the target is to guide, assist

and nurture individuals (the infant) into internalizing basic habits for routine activities for their personal cleanliness and daily upkeep while education is a higher order activity that is consciously designed to enhance and promote continuous learning in individuals in addition to enabling individuals indulge and creatively participate in abstract and critical thinking so as to respond to the problems of their immediate and eternal environments.

By our identification and categorization of lower and higher order activities for care and education, one can say that one, notably care is inferior to education (Gibbons, 2007). The inferior status accorded care in early childhood education is understandable in the sense that the carer or care giver hardly undergoes any formal education or training and the superior status accorded education and the educator derive from the fact that he (the educator) must, in order to be effective in the discharge of his responsibilities undergo rigorous professional training especially in tertiary institutions where he acquires fundamental and requisite skills that can enable him to effectively practice. The foregoing expositions suggest that anyone can be a carer or a caregiver even when he/she has not seen the four walls of any educational institution but this is not so in the case of education and the educator.

In fact, care is custodial in tone (Hayes, 2007) and in the care arrangement, the care giver involves in minimal interactions with those he/she is caring for, and this is basically due to the age of those in the custody of the care giver. The priority of the care giver is to look after those in his or her custody. That interaction between the care giver and those under his custody is usually minimal makes the job of caring a difficult and a complex one. Not minding the difficult and complex nature of his work, he is expected to be at his best or maximally perform all the time. A technique the care giver falls to in order to achieve his aim is the use of play. Play is an essential component of any meaningful care programme. This is because when play is effectively employed, it produces truckle down effects that skyrocket the development and inculcation of behaviours that result in increase in the child's moral and social responsibility and this on its own produces effects that are beneficial to stimulating the child's cognitive development through promoting his readiness to imagine, create and learn as well as to negotiate and accommodate the interests of others. A revelation which the above exposes about caring, is that care work in the context of early childhood education can be compared to the natural and institutional domestic behaviours women indulge in the home for the wellbeing of the children, suggesting that care can be located in the same environment as nurturing or the ability to nurture.

When care is understood in this way, it becomes a practice upon which no professional training and qualification are required and no salaries may be paid. This understanding is not the case in modern societies where care giving is a commercialized and specialized endeavour and correspondingly requires professional training, qualifications, state regulations and legislations.

On the other hand education generally invokes a meaning that has to do with formalized learning and teaching in school-like settings (Urban, 2009). Unlike

care in the young's developmental and learning initiatives that is focused on children whose ages are less than three or at most three, education is purposefully targeted at older children before their entering primary school. The target is to cultivate and stimulate in the child the enthusiasm to learn and adjust soon as he enters the primary school. The socialization and the conscientization that is provided the learner at this early stage of his life empowers and creates much awareness in him by removing any aura of fear about learning and the pursuit of learning, but rather places him on a pedestrian to quickly adjust to life in the primary school. Part of the awareness the learner grasps as a result of his participation in pre-school activities is his recognition that the education industry is hierarchically structured with much task and responsibilities as one progresses and more importantly that the success and survival of the individual is highly dependent upon how he resolves tasks and issues he comes across.

Despite their differences, there is a consensus among stakeholders that education and care are inseparable in the context of preschool education. Most stakeholders highlight this inseparability in the notion that caring by nature requires education and the process of education by nature requires caring. A direction which this relationship tends to point towards is that policy and practice in early childhood education should constantly marry the two together.

However, what ought to be sustained and maintained by practitioners is to see care and education as social constructions (Gibbons, 2007) that importantly and fundamentally travel on the same road but maintain different speed, rhythm, depth and more importantly do not target the same destinations.

Like every other human institution and innovation, the footprint of change and innovation are beginning to bear on early childhood education and care practices. Recently most states are beginning to fade the rigid demarcation between child care and pre-school (education) activities by creating environments that promote easier transition from childcare into pre-school activities and this is indicative of a move towards an integrated approach. The industrial age where both parents engage in gainful and meaningful employment is principally what has boosted this transition and practice especially the length of time each day that care service providers render their services to the general public. Some child care centers provide services that last for up to ten hours and more each day to the delight of families where materialistic and insatiable dynamics of the twenty-first century have made both parents workers. Because parents identify with trends and innovations in early childhood education programmes, operators are correspondingly transiting and integrating from care services into pre-school programmes.

In what follows, attempts will be made to highlight issues and challenges in private sector participation in early childhood care and education in Nigeria.

### **Private Sector and Early Childhood Care and Education: The Nigerian Experience**

True, the involvement of the private sector in education generally in Nigeria can best be described as one of a salvaging and rescue mission (Nwaokugha, 2015) but

the involvement of the private sector in promoting early childhood care and education that is totally neglected by the Nigerian state can be said to be a wakeup call for innovations targeted at instituting social justice, human rights and equity in access to education that can easily and quickly plant the seeds that can blossom into national development.

Social justice according to Nwaokugha (2012) is any measure or innovation that is consciously initiated by a state whose exploitation and exploration by its citizens can bring about their emancipation and empowerment. Such measures and innovations demand states to put in place mechanisms, through which their citizens can quickly and easily realize, achieve and actualize their potentials through the efforts of the citizens without much difficulty (Aminigo and Nwaokugha, 2011). Interestingly, there are numerous platforms through which responsible states can initiate social justice ranging from creating conducive environments, where policies of the state target providing infrastructural, legal, social, economic and educational opportunities of the citizens. In fact the policy thrust of social justice is for states to create the enabling environments which the citizens can exploit for enhancing their productivity for their individual advancement and the advancement of their state. The logic and end product of this is simple: the advancement of the individual in a state brings about corresponding development of the state.

Of all these, innovations in the sector that are targeted at developing the young can be a focal flashpoint for achieving social justice and this is possible because any state that prioritizes or makes investments in the young through quality educational provisions can be consciously providing its citizens solid foundations that can enable them explore and exploit opportunities, no matter how complex and difficult, later in life without difficulties. The idea of social justice in early childhood care and education is clear and self evident and revolves on creating sound foundations for equipping the child with intellectual capabilities that can enable him function well and satisfactorily in his academic pursuit (Nwaokugha, 2012), starting from the primary level and beyond. From a different perspective, childhood care and education can be a compensatory, welfare and interventionist policy initiated by a state to assist her citizens who, if not assisted cannot be at par with their contemporaries. What this implies here is that states can adopt early childhood care and education as a consciously formulated social justice mechanism to assist and support citizens that cannot ordinarily afford such provision on their own. Added value which social justice brings about especially for the products of educational endeavours for the young is the greater interests it has for a state namely the conscientization and inculcation of social and political habits in the young for promoting personal hygiene, democracy and civic responsibilities for achieving national development. This is where the private sector deserves some kudos and a pat on the back for pioneering this lofty effort in Nigeria.

Emphasis on educational endeavours for the young and achieving it through consciously formulated policies of a state can be re-echoing a people's value and belief about children, development and the future of a people. The extent in which

a society invests in the welfare and development of children determine the future of such a society and it is worthy to note that Nigerians, despite their plurality in culture, religion and language speak in single voice when it comes to the value placed on the child and his development. A revelation this exposes is that the private sector is alive to creating awareness and sensitizing Nigerians on a value system that Nigerians excessively and generously cherish and it is on this premise that we can say that Hayes (2007) got it right when he writes that the reasons for investing in early childhood care and education are reflection of a people's cultural belief about children suggesting that early childhood care and education are fundamental requisites for any society that is desirous of maintaining its past legacies and achieving a sustainable future.

Again the official recognition of education as a fundamental human right to all human beings and the subsequent non provision of this to Nigerians of 0-5 years of age has been pointed out as a major invitation for the participation of the private sector who considers this segment of the population as worthy of benefiting from care and education as their basic human rights. Human rights are rights bestowed on individuals on grounds of their humanity without regard to age, sex, status, nationality or race of the person. Universally, human rights issues are framed in moral rationality and consequent upon this all areas upon which human survival and human happiness depend globally enjoy the status of human rights. One unique variable about human right is that attempts to abuse and suppress the human rights of a people either individually or collectively are bound to hit stone wall in the form of producing counter results in the forms of acting as invitations for increased agitations for demands for human rights. This is so because attempts to withdraw the human rights of a people usually impair and reduce the quality of lives of such people.

What the participation and involvement of the private sector in the development and empowerment of the young exposes and calls attention to is the desire of private individuals and corporations in the Nigerian state to strive to provide essential services that are deemed to be fundamental rights of citizens which the government of Nigerian state is not providing or is epileptically providing.

One serious issue that all these point hand to is the position that the Nigerian state seems not to take matters that are critical to the survival of citizens of Nigeria at heart and both poor Nigerians who try to benefit from these services and the private sector that try to provide these services face serious challenges in attempts to benefit and provide such critical social services. A million dollar question is: How efficient and satisfactory are the quality of educational ideas and initiatives targeted at developing young Nigerians by the private sector? True, both the private sector and Nigerians face plethora of challenges in their desire to enjoy and provide early childhood care and education in Nigeria. Put slightly different, both Nigerians and the private sector face challenges in the attempts of the private sector to provide, initiate and implement educational ideas for the development of the Nigerian child.

Below are some challenges the private sector and Nigerians face in private sectors' quest to provide early childhood care and education in Nigeria. One thing that is as permanent as day and night in the involvement of the private sector in the care and educational development of the young in Nigeria is the inclination to run such establishments as business organizations where fees and cost are fixed at prices that average Nigerians cannot afford. This behaviour has resulted in restricted access to such ventures and the simple reason that average Nigerians cannot afford to send their children to such institutions defeats the objectives upon which such institutions are established as well as raises critical questions on the issues of increase in access, social justice and human rights which had been earlier acknowledged. It is possible the given minority that can afford to explore such opportunities created for the development and education of the young can turn it into an elitist commodity only meant for the aristocratic class and a status symbol where the numerous opportunities they gain as a result of their participation in such educational programme can give them undue advantages over access to other social goods in the Nigerian society. A more serious challenge posed by this is that when not checked, this situation can provoke unfavourable reactions from the majority that are astronomically, terribly and disastrously disadvantaged.

As institutions that are run with the intention to maximize profits it is possible learners in early childhood care and education institutions can be excessively short-changed by way of the operators not recruiting the right calibre of staff who can provide and inculcate in the learners the right knowledge and not providing the right infrastructure that can challenge learners to learn. It is a thing of common knowledge that infrastructurally, most of these endeavours for the early educational development of the young in Nigeria exist in dilapidated structures not purposefully built for the purposes of early childhood care and education and consequently not licensed by the government. This means there has been terrible and uncoordinated establishment of not-too-well-equipped and not-too-well-managed early childhood care and education centres and what this means is that efforts in this direction best qualify as conduit pipes for milling unsuspecting Nigerians dry. These pictures where early childhood care and education centres in Nigeria exist in terrible structures are a challenge that fall in sharp contrast with the image of Nigeria as one country in the world where investments in education at any level produces reasonable returns on investments.

The inability of government to license and effectively supervise the mushrooming of majority of early childhood care and education centres in Nigeria may stem from Nigeria's role and level of commitment and participation in what happens at that level of education. In fact Federal Government of Nigeria (2004:4) spells out its responsibility towards preprimary education as one of only assisting "to promote the training of qualified preprimary school teachers in adequate number, contribute the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions and establish preprimary section in existing public schools". What this suggests is that at present government is not directly involved in providing early childhood care and education to Nigerians.

Be this as it may, a fundamental issue for critical reflection is the extent in which the government of Nigeria meets up its declaration in terms of its claims to providing “the training of qualified preprimary school teachers in adequate number, the development of suitable curriculum and the supervision and control of quality of such institutions”. Any keen observer can notice that this is zero and that quacks dominate among teachers who teach at that level and teacher education programmes are silent on producing experts to teach, supervise and manage issues at that level.

The challenges and implications of this are twofold: quality early childhood care and education can elude Nigerians should government not participate directly in providing services meant for the early educational development of the young. Participation of the Nigerian state at this level can at least stimulate competition and increase options of choice as well as challenge and sensitize the private sector to adopt global best practices. It is impossible for the private sector to give Nigerians the best in the development of the young without the state providing examples that correspond with global best practices in early childhood care and education in Nigeria. What proves us right is that presently in Nigeria, providers of education for the young provide any kind of childhood care and education they feel their clients can pay for even when their clients live in the same vicinity and this reveals that there are different types of early childhood care and education centres in one street, locality, community and state.

What is obvious in Nigeria’s experience concerning private sector participation in the development and education of the young is that due to the indirect and supervisory involvement of the government, which is not usually thorough, majority of such schools fundamentally lack qualified personnel and infrastructure necessary for effective service delivery. A fundamental issue and challenge this poses is that there are monumental and colossal dangers ahead of majority of Nigerians that benefited from their services. Instead of developing in learners enthusiasm and interests for learning, poorly equipped and poorly staffed centres in Nigeria destroy learners enthusiasm to learn as well as the foundation upon which further educational developments of the Nigerian child can be built and what a tragedy for a people and a state that is desirously in need of quality human and national development.

In fairness to the private sector that ventures into providing early childhood care and education in Nigerians, there is total lack of incentives from the government of Nigeria to support their efforts. It needs to be said very unequivocally and unambiguously that the private sector is simply augmenting what should be the responsibility of the government to its citizens. Where the insensitivity of the government to the plight of the private sector who provides educational services is more worrisome is that the efforts of the private sector in providing this essential and fundamental social service to Nigerians are in most cases frustrated by the state through obnoxious and draconian regulations and legislation, with host communities compounding and frustrating the same private sectors that are in the business of augmenting and providing services expected of the government to also

get involve in issues of corporate social responsibility like the provision of electricity and pipe borne water for host communities.

The Nigerian factor where corruption is fast becoming a value system has also made private sectors who operate early childhood care and education centres special victims in the hands of supervisors from Local Government Education Authority, State and Federal Ministries of Education who must be settled (bribed) in their unending vicious cycle of surveillance whose outcomes have never improved quality or raised ray of optimism concerning what possible innovations may be introduced to improve the system. In fact inspectors in Nigeria's educational system focus more attention on private investors in education than they focus on public institutions.

These demands on the private sector that provide educational services are in addition to their personal challenges of acquiring and securing lands in choice and serene locations that are befitting and stimulating for nurturing the custodial and educational development of younger ones. For the simple reason that those who identify or choose to send their young ones to care and early educational centres in Nigeria mostly live in towns or urban centre where land is more expensive, operators of care and early childhood education centres consciously and deliberately locate these centres in towns and urban centres and a corresponding behaviour they exhibit is usually to maximize their available land by building high rise buildings whose structural and architectural designs, in most cases contravene policies of the state in the form of not adhering to global best practices in the construction of public places like school. Because such high rise buildings as opted for by private investors in education contravene standards, they are in most cases prone to risk in the form of building collapse that amounts to monumental and colossal waste in human and material resources and in most cases subsequent closure of such establishments. Any close observer of structures used by operators of these centre in Nigeria can attest to the fact that such structures are poorly ventilated, lack state of the art modern sanitary facilities and where anyone exists, the pressure on it makes it to exceed it carrying capacity thereby pruning it to be more of a safety and health risk to members of the school and the general public than a facility for public convenience.

Again any close observer of premises where operators of early child development institutions operate from in Nigeria can quickly reach a conclusion without much scrutiny that such centres terribly lack spaces for physical activities and play and we are all aware of the importance of physical activities especially play in building up the interests of the young for learning and education. That a sensitive omission such as play and physical activities could be missing may point in the direction that learners whose skills are tilted towards sports may not have their talents developed alongside what they are destined for as they remain as learners in such learning centres.

### **Conclusion**

Any casual appeal to history can quickly remind Nigerians that formal education in Nigeria is traceable to the receptive and creative ingenuity of the private sector.

This paper in its focus has focused on an aspect of education which for many years of the introduction of formal education in Nigeria has been neglected and in which the private sector has also spearheaded and this is commendable. The leading role of the private sector in Nigeria in spearheading a revolution targeted at popularizing early child development institutions may stem from their conviction first that investment in the educational development of the child has multiple advantages and getting the best out of a learner and out of an education system may lean heavily on the extent in which the foundational stages of a learner is managed and secondly that exposing learners to sound foundations through early childhood care and education programmes are right steps in the right direction for achieving social justice, awakening learners' curiosity for education and providing platforms for enhancing the enjoyment of a child's human and natural rights to education. These efforts of the private sector have one thing in common namely the planting of the genes that can blossom into national development. It is self evident that the extent in which individuals in a state develop determine the extent in which that state develops. In a way, the participation of the private sector in education can be anchored on their desire to fast track human and national development in Nigeria.

So far so good, how convincing can it be that trends in private sector participation in the welfare and education of the child have been a bed of roses, so rosy that every child in Nigeria is provided for? And how humane is the environment for the operators to effectively deliver? The truth is that the landscape under which operators operate and learners learn has been one of a mix bag and consequently what constitutes issues and challenges discussed in this paper. To resolve such mix bag and reinvent confidence for the benefit of all calls for pragmatic steps such as the following:

Genuine investors in the sector should strive to be inclusive in a way that learners from across different layers of the society can be accommodated in their modes of operation. The Nigerian government should assist private investors who provide educational services by providing incentives that can enable operators beat infrastructural decay as well as double its efforts in its supervising functions. The Nigerian government should be a direct participant in all efforts at enhancing the welfare and development of the Nigerian child. This is to enable the state initiate standards that can correspond with global best practices from where private sector operators can emulate or match theory with practice. The continued sitting on the fence for private sectors to initiate fundamental practices in education that a state ought to provide its citizens makes the Nigeria state irresponsible and one that is insensitive to the plight of its citizens; or one that is not serious with laying solid foundation for its sustainable development

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