



**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
IN CAMEROON: THE SEARCH FOR A CONTEXT
SPECIFIC CURRICULUM APPROACH FOR ALL LEARNERSⁱ**

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Abstract:

The objective of this article is not to advocate that early childhood education and development is an imperative objective to pursue; this has already been established. Rather, the purpose is to examine the status of early childhood Education provision in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) such as Cameroon, and to determine if current support for pre-primary activities can inform educational policy strides within the context of Cameroon. The emphasis that African governments are placing on improving the education of children is seen in national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which set goals and targets aligned with the MDGs. Cameroon is not left out in this quest. In essence, poor children are likely to grow up to become poor adults and give birth to children who are poor, perpetuating the poverty cycle. In contrast, children are more likely to go to school and perform well if they have support during the earliest years and if their parents are educated and supported in providing appropriate care. Research backs up the link between a supportive environment for the young child and poverty reduction. The economic, private, and social returns on investments in nutrition, health, and education early in life have been demonstrated by van der Gaag and Tan (1998), Myers (1998), and Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart (1993). Meeting the basic health, nutrition, and education needs of young children is key to breaking the poverty cycle.

Keywords: childhood in Africa, generative curriculum approach for learners and early childhood education

ⁱ L'ÉDUCATION DE LA PETITE ENFANCE AU CAMEROUN : LA RECHERCHE D'UN CONTEXTE APPROCHE CURRICULAIRE SPÉCIFIQUE POUR TOUS LES APPRENANTS

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Abstrait :

L'objectif de cet article n'est pas de prétendre que l'éducation et le développement de la petite enfance constituent un objectif impératif à poursuivre ; cela a déjà été établi. L'objectif est plutôt d'examiner l'état de l'offre d'éducation de la petite enfance dans les pays d'Afrique subsaharienne (ASS) tels que le Cameroun, et de déterminer si le soutien actuel aux activités préscolaires peut éclairer les avancées en matière de politique éducative dans le contexte du Cameroun. L'accent que les gouvernements africains mettent sur l'amélioration de l'éducation des enfants est visible dans les Documents de stratégie pour la réduction de la pauvreté (DSRP), qui fixent des objectifs et des cibles alignés sur les OMD. Le Cameroun n'est pas en reste dans cette quête. Essentiellement, les enfants pauvres sont susceptibles de devenir des adultes pauvres et de donner naissance à des enfants pauvres, perpétuant ainsi le cycle de la pauvreté. En revanche, les enfants ont plus de chances d'aller à l'école et d'obtenir de bons résultats s'ils bénéficient d'un soutien dès leurs premières années et si leurs parents sont éduqués et soutenus pour leur prodiguer des soins appropriés. La recherche confirme le lien entre un environnement favorable au jeune enfant et la réduction de la pauvreté. Les retours économiques, privés et sociaux des investissements dans la nutrition, la santé et l'éducation dès le début de la vie ont été démontrés par van der Gaag et Tan (1998), Myers (1998) et Schweinhart, Barnes et Weikart (1993). Répondre aux besoins fondamentaux en matière de santé, de nutrition et d'éducation des jeunes enfants est essentiel pour briser le cycle de la pauvreté.

Mots-clés : enfance en Afrique, approche curriculaire générative pour les apprenants et éducation de la petite enfance

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is the foundation of human development. A focus on the young child and holistic early childhood education provides an opportunity for sustainable human development, economic growth, social change, and transformation in Africa. Evidently, countries need to develop early childhood education policies that will guide strategic decision-making and resource allocation. Nearly all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have developed and implemented various forms of sectoral early childhood education activities since at least the 1960s in support of young children and their families. A few countries have developed, or are in the process of developing, specific national early childhood education policies that integrate the various sectoral activities. The integrated approach aims at the holistic development of the child. It encompasses health, nutrition, water and sanitation, basic care, stimulation, learning, social protection, and family and community empowerment so that children can develop to their fullest potential. The time is opportune to expand and accelerate a holistic early childhood education policy process as a central focus in Africa's development.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is home to over 130 million children under age 6, many of whom live in dire conditions. Millions of young children need rapid and intense health and educational interventions. Just 14 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's preschool-age children between ages 3 and 6 enrolled in preschool in 2007, which is a third of the rate in East Asia and South Asia (UNESCO, 2009). The gross preprimary school enrollment rate has grown by 2 percentage points between 1999 and 2004, increasing from a total enrollment of 5.1 million children to 7.4 million. This large increase in absolute numbers, however, was not matched by the ratios because of the region's high population growth rate during that period. The gaps between high- and low-performing countries are greater in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) than in any other region; the low-performing countries have the worst indicators in the world.

Countries with high preprimary gross enrollment ratios (GERs) included Mauritius and Seychelles, which had universal enrollment, Kenya (44 percent), Ghana (40 percent), Liberia (41 percent), and Equatorial Guinea (31 percent). These rates contrast markedly with the low enrollment in Mali of 3 percent, in Côte d'Ivoire of 2 percent, and in Senegal of 1 percent. More than half (64 percent) of all preprimary school enrollment was accounted for by private institutions including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), neighborhood associations, churches, mosques, and private providers.

Preprimary school life expectancy (the average number of years of preprimary education a child expects to receive if current participation rates remain constant) is very low, at just 0.3 years. Children in the region's high-performing countries (Liberia, Mauritius, and Seychelles), however, stay in preschool longer than children in many other countries in the world, including Canada and Greece, indicating a wide variety of conditions in early education in the continent. The central question is; what lessons can Cameroon learn from these successful countries?

During the 1990s preprimary gross enrollment ratios grew at an average of 5.2 percentage points in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the poorest countries (countries with per capita GNP of less than \$695), the ratio rose just 1.4 percentage points (Jaramillo and Mingat, 2006), while in the region's richest countries, the ratio grew 33 percentage points. If enrollment continues to grow this rapidly, these latter countries will become the first group of countries in the world to achieve universal pre-primary education by 2025. For the region as a whole, only 4 out of 36 low-income countries and 4 out of 8 higher-income countries are on track to reach the target of 25 percent preprimary gross enrollment ratio by 2015 (Jaramillo and Mingat, 2006). The pre-primary gross enrollment ratio would have to increase by at least 2 percentage points a year in every country for all countries to reach the target. Primary completion rates stand at only 58 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa far lower than the 74–96 percent in other developing regions (UNESCO, 2006).

Cross-national data on the status of young children in Africa highlight the dire conditions and the urgent need to improve nutrition, health, and early childhood conditions in nearly all of the countries. The region has the highest rates of absolute child poverty in the world, affecting more than half of all young children. The findings from the cross-national data confirm earlier research that investing in young children

would likely improve the chances of these children succeeding later in life. The completion rates in the primary years, as well as the primary gross enrollment rates, are positively affected by the level at which countries invest in the early years in nutrition, health, preschools, and childhood care. Because improvement in education improves lifelong human capital, investments in the early years would contribute to the longer-term economic development of Sub-Saharan African countries.

Indigenous populations are also ethnic groups in any given location. In the late twentieth century, the term indigenous peoples began to be used primarily to refer to ethnic groups that have historical ties to groups that existed in a territory before colonization or formation of nation-states, and which normally preserve a degree of cultural and political separation from the colonially imposed mainstream culture and political system of the nation-state within the border of which the indigenous group is located. The political sense of the term defines these groups as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and oppression by nation-states and international interest groups, especially those associated with resource exploitation, so-called eco-tourism industries, and human science researchers engaged in unethical practices. As a result, a special set of political rights, accorded to indigenous people and in accordance with international law have been set forth by international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The United Nations has issued a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect the collective rights to their culture, identity, language, employment, health, education, and natural resources. The Constitution of January 18, 1996, of the Republic of Cameroon, in its preamble, states that "*the State shall ensure the protection of minorities and preserves the right of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with the law*".

Contextually, Cameroon has adopted a number of conventions that are supposed to protect the rights of indigenous persons. The ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) Convention No. 111 was ratified by Cameroon on 13 May 1988. It provides an important framework to promote the right of indigenous men and women to equality and decent work in the spirit of ILO Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 September 2007. Cameroon, like the vast majority of African countries, voted in favour of the adoption of this text (ILO, 2015).

Indigenous education an emanation of African epistemology, can be defined as the body of context-evolved cultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices, and cultural values and aspirations transmitted from one generation to the other. It is all-embracing and the curriculum, though not written but tacitly followed by the indigenes. Indigenous education is a means to an end; one of its central components is social responsibility, aspects of which include: imbibing moral and spiritual values, participation in ceremonies, rites, imitation, recitation, and demonstration (Zulu, 2006). Other strategies for the acquisition of the body of knowledge and skills in indigenous education are poetry, reasoning, riddles, praises, songs, story-telling, proverbs, folktales, games, dance, music, tongue-twisters, and more (Majasan, 1974). Most of these context-based pedagogic

strategies used to occur within the family, and peer group activities but could be adapted and integrated into the school curriculum. This implies that early childhood education is an integral part of indigenous education.

2. Conceptualisation of Childhood in Africa and Implications for Early Childhood Education

How is childhood conceptualised within African thought? Onwauchi (1972) maintains that the indigenous African societies educated their children through the ongoing processes of life in their traditional customs and values. Through their traditional tales and myths, the elders teach the children the moral and ethical codes of behaviors and social relationships. Through certain religious rituals and practices, communal attainments of spiritual ideas were established. These spiritual ideals lay the foundation for the respect that the indigenous Africans have for their political institutions; and the love, respect, and obedience that the children must show their parents and elders.

It is important to emphasise that children in traditional Africa were perceived to be human beings in need of help and direction. Childhood in Africa also entailed a spiritual component. In traditional African religion, the belief in reincarnation meant that children were reincarnated people who had lived and died in previous generations. Children were thus not only accorded respect by members of society, but it was also the responsibility of the society to ensure the protection and proper socialization of children. Using the modes promulgated by DeMause, as cited in Jenks (1996), an assertion can be made that childhood in Africa is trapped in a period of socialising mode. The African child is trained to conform to the tenets of the culture. Children are trained to follow the prescribed paths set by the custodians of the culture.

Childhood as a social construction is very relevant within the African context. Children are perceived both as biologically vulnerable beings in need of protection and nurturing and at the same time a social construction, which prescribes certain social functions and relationships. Children prescribe the roles that parents play because fathers are the providers of the family and the mothers provide the needed nurturing for the children. The importance of children in traditional Africa is their fundamental role as future insurance for their families.

According to Nsamenang (2005), the period of childhood is stretched out within the developmental periods of social apprentice and social entrée (Nsamenang, 2005). In the early years of these developmental stages, the child is expected to recognize social roles, acknowledge self in connectedness, and develop a high sense of peer interaction and work. In later years, the child is tasked with the ability to recognize and adjust to changes, perform domestic chores, and participate in rite of passage if any. Fortes (1957) writing about the Tallensi in Ghana, divides child development into two stages, babyhood, and childhood.

The first stage, the babyhood is the period of birth till about a year old. Although the baby is in the absolute care of the mother, the responsibility of care for the baby is

that of the whole household, including older brothers and sisters, the mother's co-wives, and grandparents. The babies in Tallensi tradition are weaned around the age of three but are fed exclusively on the mother's breast milk for a whole year. According to Fortes (1957), the first development stage is marked by the completion of weaning. This is the period when the child is physically and psychologically severed from its mother. After the child is weaned, the Tallensi children often follow their older siblings, playing and communicating his/her feelings verbally. This increased freedom of the child does not relegate the position of the mother as the center of the universe for the child. For girls, the reference of the mother as the centre of the universe remains until marriage, but ends sooner for boys, who must be attached to the trades of their fathers. For the Talle child, although the primary distinction and recognition exist for the biological parents, such distinctions are blurred with the wider household because all adults in the household are referred to as 'mothers' and 'father'.

The next period in the development of the Talle child is the period of childhood. This is between the ages of 4 and 8 years, and it's the happiest and freest of the child's life (Fortes, 1957). The child begins to participate in the daily events in the community through observation and mimicking of such activities. Parents begin to instil discipline and exert some authority over the children. Fortes (1957) claims that until it (the child) reaches the threshold of adolescence, at about 12 to 14 years of age, it still remains free to play for much of its time. But from the age of 7 or so boys and girls are eager to participate in the adult routine of life and they become more and more involved in it. They begin by being given the simplest economic and household tasks. Division of labour begins to manifest during this period. Boys are generally trained to engage in the manual aspect of the labour process, while girls follow their mothers in their occupational duties. Although the Talle child is allowed some latitude in value conformation up until the age of 5 years, the period between the ages of 8 and 9 is considered the period in which the child has acquired some sense. Conformation of the values and norms of the community is expected from the children.

Another important conceptualisation of childhood and rearing practices is through the concept of lineage in Africa. There are two main lineages in Africa, the matrilineage and the patrilineage. The lineage in which a child is born has two important significances. First, it determines which household the child will spend the greater part of his childhood. In matrilineal societies, childhood training, and apprenticeship exist mainly in a matrilineal context. The reverse is the truism in patrilineal societies where rearing and training practices are conducted within the patrilineal context. The second is how inheritance is arranged. In a matrilineal culture, one can only inherit from the maternal side of the family. For example, a son in a matrilineal society cannot directly inherit the father but can contest for an inheritance from the brothers of the mother.

However, heirloom in a patrilineal society holds that the children of the father are the direct beneficiaries of the property(s) of their father. This is interesting because, when it comes to child upbringing, the role of the mothers is uncontested. However, when the child is between the ages of 7 and 9 years, their maternal uncles train boys from

matrilineal societies, and those from the patrilineal remain under the tutelage of their biological fathers. Whatever the dichotomisation of lineage, the child from the union of a man and woman possesses some important features of both. From the Akan perspective, the child possesses the *sunsum*. That is the spirit of the genitor. The child also possesses the blood of the mother. It is the possession of the blood of the mother by the child that earns him/her lineage. An Akan child ascribes to the *abusua* of the mother and the *sunsum* of the father. The prominence of the matriarch in Akan polity does not diminish the role and importance of the patriarchy in the lives of children. The child within this traditional lineage arrangement is perceived to be sacred and in need of protection, physically and spiritually.

Childhood in African philosophical thought is considered as delicate as holding an egg in one's palm. Holding the egg too tight crushes it; careless handling of the egg may fall from the palm and be destroyed too. Childhood is a delicate concept in the African traditional system, which provides a political and social space for children to develop and perpetuate the cultural legacies of their ancestors.

The concept of childhood in Africa is incomplete without a discussion of the fostering practices. Fostering includes the provision of the needed material and spiritual support for the development of the children. According to Kilbride and Kilbride (1990), sibling interdependence is a significant feature underlying patterns of fostering in Kenya. Writing about the Samia people in Western Kenya, Kilbride and Kilbride (1990) assert that a child born out of wedlock will live with his mother's parents, usually permanently. At the death of one or both parents, a child may move to live with the relatives (uncle, aunt, etc.) after the funeral.

A child is sent to a "more prosperous" relative but will visit his or her parents regularly and will eventually return to live with them. If living alone, one can request a child from a sister to alleviate loneliness or to live in the house while the resident is away at work, at night, or periodically absent. In traditional African societies, the notion of destitution was non-existent. Every child belonged to a family, a kinship, or a community. The rearing of the child was the responsibility of not only the family but all well-meaning members of society. As has been opined by Kilbride and Kilbride (1990), the family support system invariably forms a barrier against child abuse and neglect. The support system inherent in the African traditional family system actually reduced the rate of child destitution.

The above analysis seems to suggest that there were no problems within the traditional African family system. However, some evidence suggests that the traditional African family may have been overrated in its potential to be a stabilizing unit and as a protector of children. It has been argued by Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1994) in their discussion on the traditional African family system that although the system was fairly stable, there were credible incidences of divorce and abuse. This stemmed from polygamous family systems where co-wives competed for the attention and resources for their children. Children were witnesses to occasional family squabbles between their

mothers and among the children. There was jealousy and a scramble for family resources especially from the children.

The early years of life have been established to be very important not only because children in their early years are quite vulnerable but more so because what happens during these early periods of life has significant effects on later life. In fact, a Kenyan proverb refers to children as the 'foundation of humanity' (Lanyasunya and Lesolayia, 2001), which implies the foundation for national development. This is supported by a Nso proverb that says "*Wànbàáyò' yìikúybó a shòm. Kìbòñji tàrwàn kin yèè wàn wáaker liì wo jun, bì' fowàn kúyí e nènkù a yìiréñréñ moo wun. Dzè é ghan se wàn yii réñréñ moo kitàrkinyiyi.* (The cub of a leopard does not grow before it gets spotted. Also, like the father like the son). It is good that a parent should behave well because the child is likely to take after him", meaning, 'a smart child will show the evidence from a very early age depending on what he or she has modelled within a specified eco-cultural setting' (Tani, 2015). Therefore, indigenous education for the child begins at birth, his or her survival, health, nurturance, upbringing, and socialization ought to be patterned for him or her to appreciate the cultural values, and to acquire the appropriate skills and knowledge that would make him or her a functional and successful member of his or her group or society but not losing sight of it as part and parcel of the global community with its obliging requirements.

3. Indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education Framework

The Indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education framework is a strength-based approach that acknowledges and seeks to incorporate the knowledge, skills, values, and timeless wisdom of early child care and education that originated in Africa and are still usefully relevant for rapidly globalizing requirements for early childhood development. In fact, without preserving indigenous values and other aspects of cultural background, African children would soon lose their cultural identity, a right enshrined in the CRC.

However, indigenous ECCE frameworks should not lose sight of globalizing trends in the UNCRC that enshrine the non-denial of any child's right to her or his own cultural identity. It is designed to address the perceived lack of resources for conventional and elitist models by encouraging the creative use of local resources and positive cultural capital. Appropriate indigenous models involve the participation of knowledgeable indigenous individuals and make use of available resources in the indigenous setting for providing early stimulation and education for the African child. The expectation from this approach is such that the contents and methodologies used for delivering the curriculum are structured using an "*open architecture*" (Pence and McCallum, 1994).

This process leaves room for voices from the teachers, the children, the caregivers, and the community to enter into the active, constructivist teaching and learning process. Regular meetings will be held by those involved in the delivery of the programme to share knowledge and experiences of cultural traditions and community history pertaining to various aspects of child care and development covered by each of the seven

modules. This will allow the community-based component of the designed curriculum to be generated to reflect the uniqueness of each of the communities. The African-ness is assured during the delivery process as teachers and caregivers discuss with the elders, parents, and experienced individuals who understand the context of the community. The discussion will be centred on historical, social, political, and cultural factors affecting children in their community. The stakeholders involved are able to learn about the principles of child development within the context of their culture and how to help the children of our community with such generated knowledge.

This makes access to ECCE services easier and systemic because of the involvement of local communities as owners and primary stakeholders. An important feature in this approach, which is consistent with longstanding African family-based early years' education, is that the adults within the households and extended families can fully identify with the learning to which their children are exposed. The quality of teaching and learning can be improved with the availability and use of training modules that have been developed, produced, and adapted to the local culture of the indigenous child, and which employ the child's mother tongue or local language as a tool for effective teaching and learning.

Prominently, indigenous children are to be educated within their cultural context. Evidence abounds that the type of ECCE programmes currently being operated in many African settings are neglecting the cultural values and practices that are capable of adding value to the lives of the children to make them functional members of their society. Therefore, these modules are being produced as living documents to build on the capacity of parents, older relations in households and extended family members, elders in the neighborhood, and older siblings, including helpers and interested stakeholders who can read and write in the local language. The learning therefore can be home-based, community-based, or institutional-based. Eventually, versions that will be amenable to self-learning through a combination of modes (face-to-face, online, open and distance learning, etc) should be made available to those requesting them.

3.1 In-Door and Out-Door IECCE Environments

Creating learning spaces for children in local communities encompasses the preparation of the physical, social, and emotional environments. This has great implications for parent and family engagement. The physical environment has been observed to have an impact on children's behaviour, communication, emotional well-being, and general engagement. It is therefore imperative to get the environment right to enhance the overall learning achievement of children. The environment should be calming, welcoming, and stimulating. It should take into account children's preferred learning contexts. Teachers of the IECCE model would require a good understanding of the rich cultural endowments of the local community and creatively simulate these in the child's learning environment. Teachers should be able to observe and reflect on how the environment affects the children and how it could be adapted to create the best possible learning spaces for transition to happen.

Furthermore, the learning environment should be a safe place where children are protected from danger and are easily supervised, and it is where the important activities of the day take place, such as playing, eating, sleeping, washing hands, and going to the bathroom. Beyond the basics, however, an environment for young children implements and supports a programme's philosophy and curriculum (Wardle, 2012).

3.2 Preparing the Indoor and Outdoor Environment with Local Resources

The world has become so technologically advanced and so have games or sports have become sophisticated with the advent of several video games and digital entertainment for children. Nevertheless, long-established African games are still as exciting and full of fun if teachers and caregivers can be creative in their use.

Some of these games range from out-door games like jump rope, ballgames (locally known as tabala, hopscotch), racing, circle games (known as sezo, sling swing), shooting of marbles, etc and indoor games like Ludo, riddles, and jokes, thinking games, toys, rhymes, tongue-twisters and spelling games among others. These cost nothing in terms of cash. The fun derived by the children and adults involved depends on the creativity and presentation styles of the teachers, caregivers, and other adults involved in the lives of children. Most adults can remind themselves about the games they played as children and the rules attached and teach them to their children and grandchildren. Age-appropriate modifications can be made to them to make them even more interesting. Creativity or ingenuity must be encouraged in the development of appropriate activities and the corresponding environment for children to play and learn in the African context. Africa is very rich in natural resources for creating indoor and outdoor activities and environments for children. What is created will certainly depend on the geographical location in which a child lives. For instance, the activities for children that live in the delta regions will differ from those living in arid or desert areas. Objects like sea shells, coastal stones, sharp sand, water and soft wood, plants, and different types of leaves among others will form the bulk of the materials for planning the activities of children living in the coastal areas. On the contrary, those living in regions close to desert or arid areas will be rich in different types of objects ranging from skeletons of wild animals, pictures of camels, snakes, spiders, lizards, scorpions, cacti, ants, coyotes, etc. The type of plants would be more of cactus plants, fine sand, hard rocks, and desert-type of houses among others. Stories would include those that children in the local communities can relate to. The IECCE personnel should be able to reflect on the best use of the natural endowments to stimulate critical and logical thinking, attentive listening, and writing mechanics of the child. In every case, the interest of the child is given the prime consideration.

Parents and extended family members, elders, older siblings, and peers are the primary educators of young children through both formal and informal learning processes as children grow up. Children watch how these knowledgeable people around them carry out their tasks and they learn from them through some kinds of interactions different from the conventional styles peculiar to Western-oriented styles. In the indigenous settings, pedagogy that scaffolds, co-constructs, promotes meta-cognitive

strategies (riddles, stories, fables, proverbs, tongue twisters, etc.), and facilitates children's learning in the context of adult or older children are adopted (Majasan, cited by Akinbote et al, 2001).

Experimentation is encouraged during game periods with peer groups when children are free to explore on their own, and interact with friends and mates from other families. The environment is stimulating with natural forests, trees, attractive foliage, animals and their tracts, birds and their nests, etc. There are also in the natural environment vocational laboratories like the palm oil mills, the blacksmith's billows, the dyer depot, the portal's depot, etc. Children are free to explore these sites, observe, and participate in these activities as they are available in their environment. The rationale for this approach is to make the child to be self-sufficient, work out some things, and learn to think for oneself. This form of learning style is not quite the same as the conventional one the indigenous child may be exposed to in formal schooling where talk and chalk and asking of questions dominate the classroom practices.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) theories are springboards for those involved in child care and learning to take off. They are the frameworks on which care and learning activities for children are built. The theories provide useful guides to parents, caregivers teachers, researchers, and others on how to handle children's care and learning at the critical stage of early childhood. The guiding principle is that every child's development requires health care, nutrition, safety as well as learning opportunities. The ultimate goal of early childhood development is to improve young children's capacity to develop as they learn, especially through play. Therefore, the facts and information gathered from theories are to be put into practice to bring the best out of children. The goals emanate from the holistic approach and rationale for the child's all-round development. ECD programme must be delivered in such a way that it will take care of the child's holistic development and in his or her best interest. Support will have to be provided by trained and experienced teachers, elders, and community members among others on practical ways of turning every object in the child's environment into a tool for learning. Teachers and caregivers need to be further supported to carry out research into the pedagogical use of everyday objects for teaching and learning.

Child development theories have some common grounds on issues relating to child development such as the pedagogical, cultural awareness, acquisition of knowledge and basic skills for problem-solving, parents and community involvement, the natural environment, and other activities that support the child's best interest. Furthermore, research results based on many of these theories have established some benefits that children and families gain when they are exposed to quality ECD programme.

3.3 Policy Implementation

Most Sub-Saharan African countries have been implementing specific sectoral aspects of ECD, such as prenatal care, immunization, supplementary feeding, early learning, and preschools. Mauritius and Namibia have had the longest implementation periods; their policies were reviewed in 2005–06, and suggestions were made for changes. Policy

implementation in Ghana began with the establishment of the ECD Steering Committee in April 2005.

Experiences so far indicate some of the critical elements for successful policy implementation, which include:

- a) steering committee;
- b) action or operational plan and guidelines;
- c) funding;
- d) advocacy, social mobilization, and information;
- e) networking; and
- f) monitoring and evaluation.

a. Steering Committee

Effective implementation after policy adoption requires a dynamic, high-level structure or mechanism for follow-up. Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania have established high-level national interministerial steering or coordinating committees, assisted in some cases by technical working groups or task forces. The main tasks of the committees include high-level advocacy, promotion of intersectoral coordination, and monitoring and evaluation of the policy and programs. Such committees face challenges of consistent, high-level participation and funding for their activities. The early development of action or operational plans with funding strategies, as well as high-level political support by the government, would alleviate some of the problems.

b. Plan and Guidelines

The Namibia case study showed that the absence of an action plan after adopting the policy had a negative impact on implementation (Torkington, 2001). The experience in Malawi showed that action plans, in addition to policies, are critical to advancing ECD (Pence, 2004). Action plans identify implementation strategies and time frames for coordination and partnership building, links with existing child care (for example, OVC and prevention of mother-to-child transmission), sectoral and national development policies, funding, capacity building, advocacy, social mobilization and networking, monitoring, and evaluation of program activities, as well as the entire policy. Action plans must be monitored and updated in light of new challenges and opportunities. Some countries, including South Africa and Uganda, have developed guidelines to facilitate policy implementation by multiple partners.

c. Funding

A funding strategy is essential for successful policy implementation. Every effort must be made to ensure that funds are available to implement the policy and its component programs. The strategy should identify diversified funding sources and potential contributions from communities, local and national governments, civil society, NGOs, the private sector, and international partners. The strategy should also indicate the

accountability criteria and modalities. Given the multiple partnerships, transparency is crucial for success. Case studies and other experiences show that funding issues are some of the major bottlenecks to policy implementation. South Africa has had positive experiences that increased access to ECD services. It developed a broad partnership for funding that involved all levels of government, employers, community organizations, parents, and donor agencies. When holistic ECD is incorporated into sectors such as health, education, water, and sanitation through transparent Intersectoral cooperation, those sectors should contribute to financing these activities (Jaramillo and Mingat, 2003).

d. Advocacy, Social Mobilization, and Information

Continuous advocacy is necessary at all levels for policy implementation. A well-developed research- and knowledge-based advocacy, social mobilization, communications, and information strategy would facilitate reaching policymakers, local government, community leaders, and parents for their support and input. It would also help to generate public demand for ECD services. Often policies remain at the national level with little dissemination to districts and communities. Eritrea, a rare exception, successfully translated the ECD policy and program materials into eight official local languages, which proved crucial in gaining local support for ECD implementation at district and community levels (Pence, 2004).

Cameroon has had a successful experiment since 2003 in implementing a convergence model to promote services for holistic child development in one province. The approach coordinates five entry points for children and their families for nutrition and health, education, water and sanitation, protection, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. A key factor for the success of the program was social mobilization which led to the active participation of traditional leaders and communities in microplanning. The program has witnessed, among other things, increased birth registration and schooling for girls (UNICEF, 2004a).

e. Networking

Many countries, especially Tanzania and Uganda, have used networking as an effective strategy to promote ECD policies and implementation. Through effective sensitization and information sharing, an ECD network was developed at both national and district levels between 2000 and 2004. The Tanzania ECD Network has played a key role in organizing national meetings to promote an ECD/EFA Action Plan for 2003–15 and ECD and HIV/AIDS strategies (Pence, 2004). Tanzania highlighted the importance of national and international organizations appreciating critical points in capacity building that are achieved and are then prepared to act quickly to support such local efforts. When capacity is relatively thin, the timing of support becomes critical if solid advances are to be stabilized and progress is to continue.

f. Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, national ECD policies need well-designed and adequately funded plans for monitoring and evaluation. Policy monitoring and evaluation should be an essential part of the ECD policy so that appropriate revisions can be made to respond to new challenges and opportunities. Quantitative and qualitative indicators for ECD should be used in cross-sectoral programs to influence the orientation, scope, and coverage of major development policies and plans. Strong links between the national planning department, statistical services, and universities are recommended to obtain the necessary capacity and to develop appropriate expertise (Vargas-Barón, 2004).

4. Africa Focused Early Childhood Pedagogies and Local Learning Materials

Philosophies of Montessori, for example, require well-designed classrooms with low shelves, four basic learning areas, and places for children to work and learn independently. The materials used do not have to be imported but made from local materials to which children in local communities can relate. The traditional African setting provides a rich environment that can be creatively designed to ensure that it is child-friendly. The natural outdoor environment provides shady trees and rocky sites where children can sit down to enjoy fantastic stories from resource persons from the local environment, caregivers, or teachers. British infant or primary programmes have classrooms with a variety of rich learning centres, a cosy reading area with a couch and carpet, and a lively science area that contains pets and plants.

Froebel's 'gift' (Hill, 1908) which includes rods of different shapes, colours, and sizes which are used to teach concepts and relationships in arithmetic can also be stimulated through the thoughtful use of materials naturally found in Africa. Different colours of wooden rods of varying lengths can be carefully chosen by teachers to engage children in explorations of arithmetic concepts and relationships among the objects. Examples of naturally coloured woods are African Blackwood native to Eastern Africa, known as Mozambique Ebony or Senegal Ebony; the African Mahogany with a deep reddish-brown colour called African mahogany, munyama, red mahogany, Cameroon mahogany; bamboo tree found also in sub-Saharan Africa are green when fresh and brown when dry are useful for making *green schools* and learning materials; and timber with variable colours from pale-yellow to medium-brown. When fresh it is called Iroko in Nigeria. It is universally adopted as Iroko on the international market and is also known as Mvule in East Africa. These are a few examples of woods that can be sourced from sawmills, local wood shops, and bushes. Teachers can use them to teach various lessons in and outside the centres and homes where IECCE is taking place.

5. A Generative Curriculum Approach Indicating Differing Teaching and Learning Styles

Traditionally, educators have been observed to insert culture into education instead of inserting education into the culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This attempt has had the consequence of isolating minority groups from the system of education practiced. Consequently, researchers in the field of culturally relevant pedagogies have come up with terms such as “*culturally appropriate*”, “*culturally congruent*”, “*culturally responsive*”, and “*culturally compatible*” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is a teaching method that blends a child’s experience at home and what they experience at school or in their learning centres; using the language of communication best understood by both teachers and the learner to ensure fruitful and effective learning. According to Gloria, it is a pedagogy that uses culture as a vehicle for learning, and respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice. This approach seeks to provoke a generative approach to bring together international or other practices with local understandings to see what new approaches might be generated.

5.1 Letter and Sight Word Recognition

Alphabet charts in the mother tongue can be used to represent vocabulary from the environment of the child, especially with the older kids preparing for formal schooling. This does *help* (rather than *hinder*) the development of pre-reading skills. They will be able to incorporate the *newly* acquired vocabulary for animals with the words they already know, incorporating them into their existing schemata or systems for organizing their world (Davis, 1991:20).

5.2 Categorisation

This helps young children to identify, name classify, and use new information about different types of animals or objects to develop their vocabulary. It also helps them to create an organisational hierarchy or groups in their mother tongue. It draws upon the rich context of their home experiences. These experiences and the vocabulary linked with them enable the children to look for details, logically interpret what they see, and develop their ability to describe what the picture conveys.

5.3 Story Sequencing

Pictures from common processes of activities that they are very familiar with are shown to the children. The children look at all the pictures and tell the teacher what they observe. Then, they describe the sequence for carrying out procedures depicted in the pictures they are observing. For instance, pictures of a woman preparing a local dish from maize or yam or cassava as the case may be. Children can learn the sequencing of events.

6. Listening to Sounds (Auditory Discrimination, Placement of Sound in a Word, Vowel Length Awareness)

Children, like anyone else, can distinguish the sounds within a word which actually make a difference in the meaning of a word in their own language. If their mother tongue has a given set of vowel system, the sounds of which can only be learned by hearing it from native speakers. These vowels cannot be learned in colonial languages except in the respective local language.

6.1 Grammar and Spelling Exercises

This is the transition from recognition of grammatical elements in words to their use in proper grammar in sentences. Attention to mother tongue grammar does not only facilitate good writing or comprehension, but it also lays a foundation for second language acquisition at a later stage in the child's learning process.

6.2 Creative Writing Development

At the preschool stage, a foundation for creative "writing" can be sequentially developed. It is laid with the development of children's oral expression. Their vocabulary develops along with correct usage of the grammar of their mother tongue. This process continues during formal education at the lower primary levels. As their vocabulary expands, so do their language abilities to compare, contrast, note details, describe, and comprehend what they read and hear from people in their communities with whom they interact. As children become exposed to formal education, written expression can be refined and enriched, in such a way that they reflect the subtle nuances, unique beauty, humour, and emotive power of that particular language. This process is further enriched as the children progress through early primary school by exposure to a wide variety of literature such as traditional poetry and songs, proverbs and riddles, folktales, study of cultural phenomena such as the marketplace and seasonal events, fiction and nonfiction literatures. Comprehension exercises encourage initial readers to reproduce the natural speed, rhythm, and melody of a language, further develop their vocabulary, condition them to expect *meaning* from books and encourage whole word recognition, demonstrating direction, reading fluency, dramatization of stories, oral repetition of whole sentences and phrases, and a meaningful context for isolated words.

6.3 Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation

Record keeping is an essential component in the achievement of quality within early childhood settings whether it is indigenous or non-indigenous. It is standard practice for caregivers and teachers to keep extensive observation records about children in the ECD centres. The goals of record keeping include: accountability requirements, demonstrating the child's growth to parents and families, monitoring the child's learning and involvement in various activities, providing information to key stakeholders, and reflecting on the extent to which the goals of the programme are achieved. The

assessment tools that can be used to carry out the observation records vary and may include profiles, running records, anecdotal notes, rating scales, checklists, collections of children's work samples, learning stories, and others. The areas of the child's development commonly assessed are:

- Physical health and well-being of the child,
- Social and emotional competences,
- Language and cognitive development skills, and
- General knowledge.

Evaluation is usually through practical tests relevant to the child's experience and level of development in indigenous settings. This is in consonance with the nature of traditional education which is pragmatic. Evaluation is designed to form a gateway into the life of the community. There is no room for theoretical abstractions. Moreover, there is no basis for comparing one child to another; rather every child is measured against himself or herself. There is no pass or fail but evaluation has one of the goals as indices for scaffolding a child at the zone of proximal development.

6.4 Resource and Instructional Material Support

Indigenous education is a type of education designed by the indigenes of a particular setting, the resources and materials are drawn from the immediate environment and according to the goals and needs of the people. Furthermore, because indigenous education emphasises both practical activities and participation, the children are given the opportunity through play and games to see and possibly handle some materials used for particular vocations. For example, a child from an agricultural environment can start using wooden hoes and machetes at a tender age while that of a fishing environment would start experimenting with abandoned nets to learn how to mend broken nets and fish with basic fishing tools. Pastoral children learn by playing with wooden animals, twigs, and grasses and start following their parents to lead cattle to graze. Parents, knowledgeable adults, or older siblings are always at hand to provide guided support and supervision with the use of these materials. The plays and games of children usually reflect real-life experiences such as being chased by animals, enclosing a big fish, or guarding imaginary cows against raiders. This implies that there are ample instructional materials in the immediate environment of the child which he or she uses for learning the values, norms, morals, knowledge, and skills of his or her people.

6.5 A Guide to Teachers and Caregivers

The young of every species have basic needs that must be met for them to develop and mature. Children are no exception. For children, these essential needs include warm, caring, and responsive adults; a sense of importance and significance; a way to connect and relate to the world around them; opportunities to move and play; and people to help structure, guide, and support their learning. In the past, these needs were met at home and in the community, but now these needs are being met also in centres and classrooms to complement home-based approaches. Children need to explore, experiment, and learn

basic knowledge through direct experience. Indeed, childhood is a time when children should learn first-hand about the physical world, the feel of water, the constant pull of gravity, the stink of rotten fruit and dust or mud, and the abrasive feel of concrete on a bare knee.

Play provides a way for children to integrate all their new experiences into their rapidly developing minds, bodies, emotions, and social skills. Brain research supports this idea, stressing that children learn best through an integrated approach combining physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth. The role of the teacher is critical in a child's life. Children depend on teachers to be their confidants, colleagues, models, instructors, and nurturers of educational experiences. Clearly, children need lots of exposure to other people in their early childhood years. A basic human need is the need to belong. Children need to feel they belong, too. They need to be close to people they know from the local community where they are raised, have familiar and comfortable objects, and be in a setting that has a personal history for them. Children living in cities may have less exposure to the diverse group of people living in the local villages' bakers, farmers, gardeners, carpenters, bricklayers, painters, etc.

Older family members have traditional practices for eliciting good, appropriate, and socially acceptable practices for children. Therefore, ECCE practices are not novel in the indigenous African setting. It has been part of the process of educating the youngest citizens of African societies. The capacity to use child-friendly approaches that benefit from the available resources in the natural environment where children live needs to be reinforced among the adult members of the household.

6.6 The Best Interest (of Child) Principle

The child's best interest should be of paramount importance in all matters concerning the care, protection, and well-being of the child. The caregiver must consider the child's interest when making decisions about the child's care, development, and other form of intervention. This implies that the caregiver must always bear in mind some factors in his or her planning, preparation, and arranging learning activities for the child. The factors include:

- The child's age, interests, needs, maturity, and stage of development;
- The child's gender.

6.7 The Holistic Development of the Child

The caregiver must be aware of all aspects of the child's development- mental, physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and moral development. The caregiver will need to plan his or her daily activities for the children to provide opportunities to help the child develop his or her full potential. They should be given opportunities to play and discover things for themselves, encouraged to be creative, talk and interact with others, share feelings and worries, relax and have fun, etc. Children should explore and learn about their world, develop coping skills (resilience), become more independent, respect themselves and others, and have the opportunity to develop love and respect for differences they observe

in other people. This practice could be encouraged through the use of games, cartoons, pictures, etc. Children must be cared for in a constructive manner which would give them support, and security and ensure the development of positive social behaviour.

6.8 Interactive Learning

This involves experimenting, exploring, investigating, discussing, and responding, particularly in peer groups, as referred to in the section on African social ontogeny. Children gain knowledge, skills, and other valuable skills as they construct personal understandings of the activities they are actively engaged in their environment. Therefore, the caregiver should encourage this approach by ensuring that children establish positive relationships with people and materials in their environment. This he can do by providing a lot of open-ended materials that will provide and allow children to use them in a variety of ways. Children should be able to manipulate such materials in a variety of ways to discover relationships, cause and effect, and acquire skills using tools relevant to real-life situations.

6.9 Interaction

This is a fundamental experience that is important for children to acquire in the early years of development (Malaguzzi, 1993). Interaction could be from one child and another child; one child and one teacher; among one child, one teacher, and other people (from the school or immediate community); or among one child, one teacher, and the child's family. Children need a nurturing environment that will promote meaningful interaction and the caregiver should be able to provide this. This will also satisfy the innate yearning and the needs of the children to explore, discover, learn, and know. The caregiver will not only be able to scaffold children's learning through interaction but it will ensure acquisition of knowledge, skills, and positive disposition.

6.10 Partnership and Relationships

Caregivers should place importance on building and establishing trusting relationships with key stakeholders involved in the care of the young children in the community. These people could be the parents, grandparents, older siblings, etc. The caregiver should honour indigenous and local knowledge about child rearing and the goals and aspiration of these people for their wards. Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children. The web of family and community is the child's anchor for early development because families are the first and most powerful influence on the child's early development. Relationships between families and the community benefit children when those relationships are respectful of family structure, culture, values, and knowledge (Weiss, Caspes, and Lopez, 2006).

Knowledgeable, responsive, and skillful early childhood professionals are essential components of the ECD programme. These are caregivers and teachers. Their role cannot be overemphasised in the curriculum delivery. Shortage of qualified

professionals to do this job characterized most existing ECD settings even in urban centres and it is worse in indigenous and rural areas. It is therefore imperative to employ facilitators and/ or trainers within and outside the community who generally have higher levels of basic education and can be trained on a short-term and regular basis to carry out the responsibility. Such personnel must be equipped with the skills to perform some of the following functions:

- Integrate their own knowledge and daily experiences to guide their interactions with the children and their families.
- Create supportive, trustworthy, and pleasurable relationships that children will enjoy and benefit from early learning.
- Create a learning environment where children play collaboratively and participate in the daily routine.
- Observe children and keep records of their development to inform planning.
- Use a range of appropriate strategies in play to help children to extend their learning.

The benefits of IECCE are discussed below.

6.11 Benefits of Early Childhood Care Education

Early childhood education is no doubt fundamental to a child's overall development and the child's later educational achievements and future success. There is now a strong consensus on the many benefits of early childhood education (Sacks and Brown-Ruzzi, 2005; Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon, 2005; Knowledge Universe, 2010; UNESCO, 2010). Research evidence abounds to support the benefits of this level of education for children worldwide.

These benefits include the following:

a. Cognitive Gains

According to Baloyi (2014), the brain grows faster than any other organ of the body during infancy and toddlerhood. The work explains the view of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has formulated several principles to explain the science of brain development. One of these principles states that "*genetics determine the when or the timetable for development while experience determines the how or the actual construction of the circuits*". Berk explains that during the early years of development, neurons are in place and once they are in place, they rapidly form synapses or connections and release chemicals called neurotransmitters that cross synapses to send messages to other neurons. During the peak period of synaptic growth in any brain area, many surrounding neurons die. However, stimulation determines which neurons will survive and establish new synapses and which will lose their connective fibres through synaptic pruning. Brain researchers have discovered that 90 percent of brain development is completed by the age of three and conscience and personal responsibility are established.

Brain development is activity-dependent. The implication of this is the fact that stimulation of the brain is essential during this sensitive and formative period (the period

in which the brain is developing most rapidly). Prolonged early deprivation can disrupt brain growth and interfere with the brain's capacity to manage stress. Appropriate early stimulation also promote-expectant brain growth. This depends on daily experiences which early childhood developmentally appropriate practices provide for the child. Therefore, a child's exposure to high-quality early childhood facilities does not only increase readiness for formal schooling, but also causes positive long-term improvements in the child's school performances and social outcomes. Efforts to support or provide early childhood education will promote growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills, and social-emotional functioning during these critical years. These will prevent major learning problems, shrink the achievement gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged children, and produce more productive citizens (Reynolds and Ou, 2004).

Specifically, the study carried out by Aliyu and Garba (2012) in Nigeria on *"the implications of child poverty on the Nigerian economy"* revealed that *"the well-being of children has a direct link with the present time activities of the child, the government, community, organisations, parents, family members, etc"*. They further posited that fulfilling children's rights and values at an early stage of childhood would certainly transform them to achieve their full potential and to participate actively in society.

b. Economic Gains

There is a strong consensus among researchers that high-quality early childhood education is an excellent investment for society. Lately, there are strong advocacies for this level of education coming from the unexpected members of society- the economists. These experts are supporting the studies that suggest spending money on high-quality early childhood education which can lead to economic wealth in the future. They say that investments in early childhood education easily pay for themselves over time by generating very high rates of return for participants, the public, and the government. These experts wrote in their tabloid that *"spending money on childhood development programmes will yield more return to economic development, that investing in early childhood education is a sound fiscal policy which has huge potential long-term payoffs"* (Heckman and Masterov, 2004). James Heckman the 2000 Nobel-prize winner in economics argues that if children have a high-quality early childhood education, they will be better able to use higher education and job training later in life. One of the researches to support this view is the study of Head Start graduates in California. The study showed that society receives nearly nine dollars in benefits for every dollar invested in Head Start children. The economic benefits also include:

- Increased earnings,
- Employment potentials,
- Family stability,
- Decrease welfare dependency,
- Decrease grade repetition,
- Need for special education (remedial education),

- Parents, caregivers, and families also greatly benefit from the programme.

c. Social Gains

Front-line experiences have clearly shown that systematic provision of early childhood education helps in the development of children in a variety of ways.

These include:

- Improving socialisation,
- Inculcation of healthy habits,
- Stimulation of creative learning processes, and
- Enhanced scope for overall personality development.

However, some indigenous children, those in rural or difficult-to-reach locations that do not have exposure to quality ECCE are found to be behind from the beginning of their formal schooling. Many may fall further behind by the end of up to two or four years behind by the end of primary education. This does not imply that such children's capacity to learn or the skills, talents, and abilities they possess are less than others from urban or industrialised children. The fact remains that indigenous children come from a different cultural and social base in which they learn differently. When they begin formal schooling, they enter a domain foreign to them. In order to make this new experience easy and beneficial to them, an appropriate approach must be adopted.

According to Serpell (1993), schools are expected to promote economic progress, transmit culture, and cultivate children's intellectual and moral development. However, experience has shown that schools do not always achieve a synthesis of these functions because of the conflicting perceptions emanating from post-colonial contexts, the economic and cultural agendas of schooling as it relates to child upbringing, and its relationship to their moral and intellectual development. Citing the case of Oceania as in most developing countries, Thaman (2001) explained that while the cultural agenda is rooted in Pacific indigenous cultural traditions, the economic agenda is European-based, informing what teachers and students are supposed to do in school. This situation therefore creates cultural gaps for indigenous children. A realisation of this situation should encourage an expanded approach to a preschool programme that promotes cultural inclusion. The approach to preschool should take into account a good understanding of their cultural and social base and build on the strengths that they possess.

Some basic underpinning premises must guide the methodology of delivery of the indigenous curriculum developed to meet the needs of indigenous children.

Some of these include:

- Indigenous children live in a wide variety of circumstances in rural and remote communities, difficult-to-reach community contexts such as riverine, and mountainous, and others live where poverty, unemployment, violence, and pestilence exist. Very many live in families that have strong traditions and cultural orientation with little formal education.

- Early childhood programme for indigenous children may not necessarily be patterned after those in existence in urban or industrial cities but should be community-based that would meet the needs of indigenous children and their families.
- The programme should be provided within an appropriate cultural context so that a sound foundation can be laid and children would not be alienated from their cultural background.

d. National Gains

Today's children are tomorrow's elders and leaders. They are everything that every country needs; hence the foresight is in investing in today's children for a healthier nation in the future.

There is much Africa's development partners and international organizations can do to support Africa in its quest for child well-being and quality of child life, as funds and influence largely reside with Development Partners and International Organizations in disproportionate quantities. It is wished that those powers and resources should no longer be used to merely demonstrate but to support Africa's efforts to hear its own voices, among others, and to seek its own ECCE way forward. Africa shall find that way through children who understand and appreciate multiple worlds, through young scholars who frame their own contextually sensitive research questions, and through leaders and caregivers who appreciate the riches of the past, as much as the possibilities and uncertainties of the future that anchors on African cultural identities.

6.12 Policy Implications Toward the Attainment of Early Childhood Education

Cameroon government must improve and make important policy decisions if they are to have a realistic chance of achieving early childhood MDGs and the first EFA goal. These decisions involve (1) defining the specific Early Childhood Education activities that could be undertaken within the social context, (2) designing a strategy that maximizes the mix of formal structures and community-based activities, (3) developing Early Childhood Education programmes that match the needs of the 0–3 and 4–6 age groups, and (4) setting priorities among populations to be served by Early Childhood Education activities.

6.13 Designing a Strategy to Maximize the Mix of Activities

Most of the activities undertaken for young children in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries (including Cameroon) are organized in formal structures, in particular, preschools. Scarcer, community-based (informal) services are generally organized with the support of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Experience shows that formal structures are more often in urban settings, often (but not only) operated with private financing. Formal structures are characterized by relatively high unit costs per child and they benefit better-off children disproportionately. By contrast, community-based activities are more often in rural

settings and are characterized by either relatively low or high costs per child, depending on whether all costs are included in the calculations.

In designing the Early Childhood Education strategy, it is useful to document the respective merits of using formal or informal (community-based) structures to implement the types of activity under consideration. Costs and outcomes must be considered. The following questions need answers: What is the balance between the cost incurred and the impact on outcomes? To what extent is preschool a cost-effective strategy, given the alternatives, to improve educational outcomes in primary education?

6.14 Designing Early Childhood Education Programmes to Match the Needs of Age Groups

Among the different modalities, programmes can be roughly divided by age group: those that target 0- to 3-year-olds and those that are aimed at 4- to 6-year-olds. Programmes for 0- to 3-year-olds are more focused on parental education, health and nutrition, and psychosocial development which are important aspects of a child's well-being. These types of programs are rarely center-based. Parents are the main audience and, in most cases, trained community leaders are the key providers.

The center-based approach, however, is better suited to meet the needs of the 4- to 6-year-olds. Preschool programmes focus on socialization (such as cooperating in a group, following discipline and rules), fostering cognitive development (such as spatial and psychomotor abilities, and language), and supporting the child's healthy physical development. These approaches are not exclusive. It has proven to be effective to continue to work with parents when children are in the older age group. Often parents of 4- to 6-year-olds have toddlers or infants at home; parental education and outreach programmes conducted out of the center can be more focused and make monitoring easier. In practical terms, the same caregivers can teach the 4- to 6-year-old children and provide relevant education to parents on how to adopt the behaviors that are most appropriate for the harmonious development of their 0- to 3-year-old children.

6.15 Setting Priorities in Service Provision

The need to set priorities and make strategic choices about who will receive early childhood programmes is a crucial theme in the development of Early Childhood Education programmes in the years ahead in the African region. The need to prioritize applies to two complementary issues. First, the expansion of Early Childhood Education coverage that is called for will, by necessity, be gradual. Given that coverage is less than 5 percent in most countries of the region, universal coverage can be envisaged only in the long run. For a large proportion of countries, reaching a preschool enrollment of 25 to 30 percent by 2015 or 2020 would be a positive achievement. In such circumstances, it will be difficult to determine who will be included and who will be excluded from the interventions.

Based on the experience of health and education systems, where this issue of selectivity has oftentimes been dealt with implicitly, services are first put in place to serve

populations where demand is high and the logistics are easy. Consequently, services have often been provided first to better-off urban children. In the next phase, systems have been expanded to benefit progressively less-advantaged populations. In 2005, the rural and poor populations constituted the majority of those who were still excluded from health and education services (or who had access only to low-quality services). The actual geographic and social distribution of preschool in most countries is an example of such implicit selectivity in service delivery.

The EFA Goal 1 states that Early Childhood Education should be targeted *“especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.”* If this goal is to be taken seriously, Early Childhood Education programmes need to explicitly address prioritizing and selectivity, setting criteria transparently and positively, then implementing activities accordingly. The second issue of prioritizing concerns the comprehensiveness, quality, and cost of the services. For example, some countries might decide on a common core of services for all children, with additional services provided for a certain segment (such as those who are living in especially difficult conditions). Another option would be to focus on specific kinds of interventions (such as nutrition).

Similarly, the services provided might be the same, but the subsidy might differ according to particular circumstances. For example, some communities might be asked to contribute (in kind or in money) to the financing of goods or services (for example, construction of a preschool or remuneration of a teacher or caregiver), while some other (poorer) communities may get these goods and services at a subsidized rate. Another issue that determines what a government does to expand its early childhood provision relates to the costs of various programmes.

6.16 Build and Strengthen Technical Capacity for Early Childhood Development Policy and Implementation

Governments and their partners need to:

- use and coordinate in-country expertise in multi-sectoral policy planning and development for **Early Childhood Development** policy development;
- ensure adequate capacity in the focal ministry or structure for **Early Childhood Development** policy as well as program coordination, advocacy, and monitoring; that ministry or structure should actively engage in cross-sectoral and cross-institutional dialogue and technical cooperation to promote **Early Childhood Development** and avoid its isolation;
- Develop and implement a strategy for capacity building and retention in the **Early Childhood Development** field in partnership with national institutions, universities, international organizations appropriate experts; and use available capacity and resources of partners to build and enhance national capacity for **Early Childhood Development** at the national, regional, local, and community levels.

6.17 Build and Sustain Broad Partnerships to Accelerate Early Childhood Development Policy Development and Implementation

Governments must:

- ensure that **Early Childhood Development** partnerships reach and include parents and communities whose contributions at the household and community levels are critical and indispensable for the survival, development, and protection of young children;
- ensure that quality basic services reach all children—especially the youngest and most vulnerable and their families, who must also receive empowering and poverty-reducing socioeconomic support including parent enrichment and income-generating activities; and,
- Adopt strategies of coordination and participation by all partners that would reduce costs in **Early Childhood Development** policy development and program implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

6.18 Conduct Research for ECD Promotion

Governments, statistical services, research institutes, and partners need to:

- undertake research to fill gaps in knowledge, such as on the importance of ages 0 to 3 in holistic child development, traditional care practices, basic data on children's status (such as infant mortality rates by geographic region), and the situation of especially vulnerable young children, particularly orphans, children with special needs, and those affected by HIV/AIDS; and,
- Collaborate on monitoring and evaluation of **Early Childhood Development** policies and use the findings for policy advocacy, review, and revision.

7. Conclusion

The article focuses on the practice of indigenous childhood care and education in Africa. The article discusses the conceptualisation of childhood in Africa and how this conceptualization affects childhood education. The chapter then highlights the various inter-nation and national policies that seek to facilitate childhood education. Of great importance is the discourse on indigenous early child care education elaborated in the chapter with various Africentric teaching and learning styles. The article concludes with the benefits of early childhood education. Given the current levels of preschool provision across Sub-Saharan African countries, it is probable that MDG and EFA goals will not be met by the year 2025. What will make a difference? Political will is reflected in the adoption of education policies that include Early Childhood Education programmes. Governments (of the majority of African countries) whose education budgets are unlikely to substantially increase in the coming years must carefully analyze their choice of education policies. Shifting a percentage of their current budget structure to support quality preschool programs should be a priority. While in the short term, this shift might decrease funding for some areas of education although not necessarily, as efficiency gains

are not a result of decreased funding in the long term this shift will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their education systems.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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