Policy Brief

Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development:

July 2016

(No. 6) Indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education (IECCE) Curriculum Framework for Africa: A Focus on Context and Contents

Patience O. Awopegba, Esther A. Oduolowu, and A. Bame Nsamenang

Summary

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs enhance the cognitive, social, moral, nutritional, and physical development of children prior to the beginning of primary school. Good quality ECCE programs contribute to the monitoring of good health outcomes and provide a strong foundation necessary for life-long development.

Indigenous education 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 next. The education and socialization, which occurs in the early years of life, should inform children's appreciation of cultural values, and help them acquire the appropriate skills and knowledge that makes them a functional and successful member of their society. For this reason, indigenous education should play a significant role in ECCE. While most of the literature in early childhood education is based on Western ideas, the curriculum in Africa should be focused on the cultures and contexts in her various countries. The learning must be relevant for students' lives.

This book was written in 2013, meaning its ideas and recommendations are still relevant and important in today's education field.

What the Research Shows

Currently, access to pre-primary education is limited for many in parts of Africa, especially rural areas. Other issues considered when researching the implementation of an appropriate ECCE curriculum include: rationale for linking early childhood development and education with future educational attainment, approaches to and types of training given to the ECCE management and teaching personnel including the strength and weaknesses of each strategy, legal frameworks for protecting the rights of children to benefit from the existing forms of care and education, and national, state, or local government policies and financial support for training and retaining pre-primary education teachers.

Concepts in Indigenous education: Indigenous means originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; this could refer to people, ideas, cultures, and values. Concepts that are important to quality indigenous education include indigenous language, mother tongue, local and home languages, culture, values and social norms.

Indigenous ECCE (IECCE) Framework: It is a strengths-based approach that recognizes and incorporates the knowledge, skills, values and wisdom from ECCE that originated in Africa and are still relevant to today's rapid globalization. Preserving indigenous values is an important part of identity formation and without indigenous education children would lose this identity. Additionally, as culture is a collective experience, it is important to consult members of the community regarding the education being given.

Arguments for advocating for IECCE: Some arguments include that indigenous education is a matter of children's rights, aids their psychological development, prevents loss or endangerment of culture and language, secures educational equity across gender, socio-political class, and empowers individuals to engage with the community and society at large. Mother tongue instruction in early grades is an important way to preserve cultures and is one of the best ways for children to learn.

Guiding principles of the indigenous approach: The program should be accessible to all children and delivered in the best interest of the African child and his or her culture. Additionally, IECCE should portray good cultural values from Africa, be conducted in the local language or mother tongue, use local resource, adapt a holistic development approach, have a sense of community ownership, and the contents of the modules should be generative.

IECCE in the African Context

Indoor and outdoor IECCE Environments: It is important to create learning spaces for children within the community to facilitate IECCE. Additionally, the learning environment should be conducive to learning, meaning it is organized, clean, enjoyable, safe and comfortable for students.

IECCE Delivery Methodology: Mother tongue should be recognized as the delivery model for education in early childhood programs. It is an important aspect of academic success for children in minority groups. It also leads to community involvement and ownership in the learning process.

Monitoring, assessments, and evaluation: Keeping a record of students' progress holds the teacher accountable, demonstrates the child's growth to parents and families, and monitors the child's learning and involvement in activities. It may also help stakeholders understand to what extent program goals are being achieved.

A guide for teachers and caregivers: Children have a lot of needs, especially when they are young. In order to meet these needs and help children develop in the best way possible, teachers and caregivers should ensure that their education includes the following: having the best interest of the child in mind at all times, being aware of all aspects of the child's development, allowing interactive learning and learning through play to take place, using authentic assessments to monitor progress, and establish good relationships for the child with other community members.

Conclusion

ECCE is a fundamental component of a child's development and educational achievements. Research shows the following benefits of ECCE: cognitive gains, economic gains, social gains, and national gains.

Human development is largely interconnected with culture. The environment in which children learn should reflect their reality and day-to-day lives in order to en-sure authentic understanding. The future possibilities for indigenous early childhood care and education must be anchored to African cultural identities if there are to be successful in African contexts.

Recommendations

In order to ensure good quality IECCE, indigenous ideas must to valued and understood. To reach this goal, the following recommendations should be considered:

1) The **creation and implementation of IECCE frameworks/curricula**

2) Use of **mother tongue and local languages** during the earliest years of schooling

3) Use of **local materials and resources** to support indigenous learning

4) **Stakeholder involvement**, especially from the local community

About the Authors

Patience O. Awopegba, PhD, is a Program Specialist in Education Planning at UNESCO- International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA). Her research and training interests include economics of education, education planning and management, early childhood care and education, gender issues, and teacher development issues.

Esther A. Oduolowu, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her research interests are early childhood education and care with a focus on early childhood curriculum development, policy issues, and capacity building of ECD caregivers and teachers.

A. Bame Nsamenang, PhD, is a professor of Psychology and Learning Science, head of the University of Bamenda (Cameroon) Cooperation Division and founding director of the Human Development Resource Center. His main interest is the education of African youth.

To read the full text, visit UNECO-IICBA's website

www.iicba.unesco.org