Early Childcare Education in Awka Urban Town, Anambra State:
The Nigerian Experience

Obumneke - Okeke, I.M. and Anyachebelu, F.E.

Department Of Earlychildhood & Primary Education.
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: Obumneke - Okeke, I.M

Abstract
Education is a facilitating factor in the development of early society and the foundation laid by the teacher in the formal and informal setting(human and media)contributes to what a child turns out to be academically. The study investigated the contribution to early childcare education by female teachers. The area of study was Awka Urban Town of Anambra State. 420 female teachers in both public and private Nursery schools constituted the population of the study. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select 200 female teachers who formed the sample for the study. The research design was descriptive survey. Six research questions guided the study. Simple percentage scores were used to answer the research questions. Findings revealed that female teachers are important educators of their young children. They help in the provision of affection and security; character training and development, they also help in teaching of basic attitudes, culture and other social expectations, the/also have impact on the health care of the children. Based on the findings, it is recommended among others that female teachers should be acknowledged both at home and school. Female teachers should be advised to carry out their duties of childcare diligently. Male parents and male teachers should cooperate with women (mothers and female teachers) in the upbringing of their children. Early childcare education should be given priority attention because it constitutes the bedrock of education.

Keywords: Earlychildhood, female teachers, childcare, children, mothers

INTRODUCTION
Early Childhood Care and development has been defined by Nwagbara, (2003,) to include the feeding, providing shelter, clothing, adequate supervision, preventing and attending to ill health, providing a stimulating and safe environment for learning through play for the child. The period of early childhood, if properly taken care of provides a lifelong opportunity for good health, growth and development. It makes for positive changes in the life of a child. The increasing need for proper training in early childhood, resulting from changes in family structures and women's changing position and work patterns, combined with the recognition of the developmental needs of the child, makes it imperative for the society to provide complements to nursery schools to cater for the majority of Nigerian children. Childcare is becoming increasingly important around the world as more and more parents are working and need care, for their children. In addition, societies are increasingly interested in providing educational experiences and stimulation for all children to improve their chances of doing well in school. Often these experiences are provided in full-day setting, understanding how the children are faring has become critically important?. Children safety is only one issue, other concerns relate to children's, learning and development, safety and freedom from danger. Necessary ingredients for training in early child care are:

- Knowledge of the objectives and philosophy of early child care.
- Knowledge of nutrition, preventable diseases, hygiene and first aid.
- Knowledge of the role of parents in child development and how pre-school children learn.
- Activities and experiences in mental development.
- Activities and experiences in social and moral development.
- Activities and experiences in physical development.
- Skills in providing teaching and outdoor play materials, toys and games from local resources.
- Skills and knowledge in compiling stories and songs for child stimulation and learning activities.
- Knowledge and skills in the use of the language, science and mathematics training manuals.
- Knowledge of the role of play in child development;
- Skills in story telling.

Research evidence has shown that women have been known to play the role of mothers in our society. (Obioma, 2005). Mothers’ are essential to human life. They do not give birth to their younger ones, but they also play the role of child upbringing. Amongst
the numerous functions of the mother is education of her children because a child's first words and its speech pattern are usually learned from her mother. Hence a persons first language is often referred to as its mother tongue. The Federal Government (NPE, 2004) emphasizes on the use of mother tongue in the pre-primary and primary schools. A mother spends more time with the children each day than her partner, so she may be their first teacher as well as principal disciplinarian.

Jibowu (1979) pointed out that a child spends about six hours at school and about eighteen hours at home. The mothers influence on her child is therefore very great during the formative years and a mother with a good education can help a growing child tremendously. Some only buy the books and uniform while many are responsible for everything the child uses in school.

Fafunwa (1984) states that most formative period in child's life require intelligent care of his physical needs are trained guidance in his mental, emotional and social personalities. Many female teachers take the challenge to teaching those children during the crucial formative years. They also stimulate children's intelligence and curiosity in developing their character and creativity. Thus, if we want our children to posses the traits we admire, we need to teach them what these traits are and why they deserve both admiration and allegiance. Teachers help in the character formation of their children which play a grant role in their academic excellence. Odor (2002) states that, a child needs adequate security and affection for his proper physical, emotional and social development which are provided by mothers and female teachers. This type, of background makes a child to feel secured and have a balanced all round development in life. Adequate care and affection give the growing child of feeling of stability which in turn enables him to go out and meet his mates without fear, knowing that when he gets home, he will get security and affection.

Every child is entitled to enjoy good health, protection from diseases and proper medical care for survival, personal growth and development, and no child should be deprived of his or her rights to health care service. It is obligatory that mothers should ensure that the child is given all necessary immunization, ensure adequate, check up and medical attention to prevent disability and death (UNICEF, 1995). Moreover, Teachers help in the teaching of social relationships, basic attitudes, basic culture and social expectations of the child. In as much as these virtues are taught in the home, but they (children) learn-the demands of culture in the society as they grow up by watching their parents, teachers and other people's actions.

Ndubizu (2002) citing Obioma (2005) asserts that women can be said to be the bedrock of any developing country like Nigeria. He described that naturally a woman is a life giver, loving, generous, prayerful, sensitive, educator, selfless, determined, courageous, and a wonderful agent of change. In as much as women have contributed enormously in educating and caring of their younger ones in the society, the society has always looked down on the significant role of womenfolk and early childcare education has which been presumed to be beneficial to the children's well being. Based on this, this study sets out to investigate how female teachers take care of the children under their custody. It specifically seeks to find out how they give them affection and security character training, look into the health of the child, teaching of basic culture and social expectations to the children in Nursery schools to enable them get full benefits of quality early child care which is the foundation for all educational pursuit.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. How do female teachers contribute to the provision of security and affection to the child?
2. How do female teachers contribute to the character formation of the child?
3. How do female teachers influence the health of the child?
4. What impact of teaching social relationships do female teachers make on the child?
5. How do female teachers impact on the child through teaching of basic culture and social expectations?
6. What is the impact of female teachers on the teaching of basic attitudes to the child?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive survey design in order to explore the opinions of the respondents on the issue of female teachers and early childcare education in Awka Urban Town. Ten Nursery schools (public and private) 420 female teachers constituted the population. Simple random sampling techniques was employed to select 200 female teachers and they formed the sample of the study. Six research questions guided the study. 18 item researchers adapted and developed questionnaire was used. The instrument was duly validated and reliability tested using person's product moment correlation co-efficient and the reliability stood at 0.68. The questionnaire has 6 subscales each bearing the different variables, titled Early Child Care Education for Female Teachers, questionnaire (ECEFTQ) it was structured on Yes or No options to sort the opinions of the respondents on each item of the questionnaire which
was based on variables such as affection, security, character formation, health of the child, basic culture, social expectations and basic attitudes. The respondents were required to tick against the options that matches their opinion.

RESULTS

Research Question One
Table 1: Provision of Affection and security by female teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers show love to children.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teacher show empathy to children.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers have no concern to children welfare.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 indicates that all the respondents agreed that female teachers show affection, love and concern for children's welfare. Therefore, it means that female teachers have high degree of affection, love and concern for their children.

Research Question 2
Table 2: Female teachers impact on character development of the child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers teach children how to be polite.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teachers teach commitment to duty.</td>
<td>Yes 180 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers do not live exemplary life.</td>
<td>Yes 30 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reveals that the frequency and percentage frequency on character development of the child. 85% disagreed with the statement that female teachers do not live exemplary life while 15% agreed with the statement.

The analysis revealed that female teachers have impact on the character formation of the child.

Research Question 3
Table 3: Female Teachers Influence on the Health of the child.

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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers maintain clean (learning) environment for the child.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teachers check immunization records of the child.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers do not take proper care of the child.</td>
<td>Yes 10 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 showed the frequency and percentage on the influence of female teachers on the health of the child. The first two statements agreed that female teachers have influence on the health care of the child 95% of the respondents disagreed that female teachers do not take proper care of the children while 5% agreed with the statement.

Research Question 4
Table 4: Female Teachers impact on teaching social relationships

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers teach children how to be polite.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teachers encourage group/cooperative work in the child.</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers encourage children to be cooperative</td>
<td>Yes 40 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 reveals that the first two statements agreed that female teachers have impact on the teaching of social relationships to the child while 80% disagreed that female teachers have negative attitudes toward the social life of the child. It goes further to explain that in as much as female teachers have impact on teaching social relationships, they also do not teach negative attitudes which is not good for the growing child.

Research Question 5
Table 5: Female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic culture and social expectation to he child.

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<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers teach children cultural values</td>
<td>Yes 250 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teachers teach children to dress decent</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers teach children how to greet elders</td>
<td>Yes 200 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 revealed that the frequency and percentage frequency on the impact of teaching basic culture and societal expectation to the child. The three statements indicate that all the respondents agreed that female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic culture and societal expectation of the child including decent dressing and greetings to the elders.
In table 6, the first statement showed that 85% of the respondents agreed that female teachers teach the children to respect elders. All the respondents agreed with the second item that female teachers teach moral values to the children. 93% of the respondents disagreed that female teachers have lukewarm attitude on the teaching of basic attitudes while 7% agreed with the statement. This means that female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic attitudes to the child.

DISCUSSION
The findings of the study revealed that female teachers help in the provision of security and affection to the child. The results of research question one show that affection, love and concern for children’s welfare. These findings fall in line with Odor, (2002) who found out that children needs adequate security and affection for their proper physical, emotional and social development. The result of research question two showed that female teachers help in character formation and stimulation of children’s intelligence. Fafunwa (1984) opined that during the crucial formative years that whatever quality traits we must acquire as teachers should play a great role in the academic excellence of the child. Therefore, positive character formation will be of immense the child and will also be crucial in his academic learning environment.

The findings of research question three reveal that female teacher have great influence on the health of the child. This findings affirms the (UNICEF, 1995) assertion that every child is entitled to enjoy good health, protection from diseases and proper medical care for survival, personal growth and development.

The result of research question four indicates that female teachers have impact on teaching social relationships which majority disagreed that female teachers have negative attitudes towards the social life of which is not good for the growing child. The analysis of research question five indicates that female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic culture and social expectations to the child, therefore mothers can be seen as role models on teaching of character formation and transmission of cultural values (Ndubuizu 2002, citing Obioma, 2005), assert that female teachers and mothers are care givers, nationally a woman is a life giver, loving, generous and a wonderful agent of change. Results of research question six shows that female teacher teach respect for elders, and moral values. This means that female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic attitudes to the children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions were drawn. Female teachers help in the provision of affection and security to the child. They have impact on the character formation of the child. They have influence en the health ca-e of the child. They also have impact on the teaching of basic culture and social expectations to the child. They also help in teaching of basic attitudes. If children can learn all these mentioned attributes at the Early child care centres, and if this period of early childhood, when properly taken care of will provide a lifelong opportunity for good health, growth and development. It, then makes for positive changes in the life of the child to ensure that appropriate information should be supplied to ensure that children are given solid foundation in their educational career.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Female teachers should be acknowledged for their role in child care both at home and school.
- Female teachers should be advised to diligently carryout their duties of child care.
- Male teachers and male parents should cooperate with female teachers and mothers in the upbringing of their children.
- The government should give priority attention to .Early child care education because it constitutes the bedrock of education in that any mistake at this level of education will adversely affect the educational career of the child.

REFERENCES


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<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female teachers teach respect for elders.</td>
<td>Yes 170</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No 30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female teachers teach moral values to the children.</td>
<td>Yes 200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female teachers are lukewarm on teaching basic attitudes.</td>
<td>Yes 14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No 186</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Female teachers have impact on the teaching of basic attitudes to the child.


