Editorial board

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Editorial

The Open University of Tanzania is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Being the first public Open University in Eastern Africa it has unveiled the best educational preference to many people in the region. The best learning process transcends the efficiency and ethics of a workforce. Through research and hard work, the university has been stirring social transformation evidently in the elevation of dependable approach in solving social problems consistently with the needs of the 21st century. Although the OUT doesn't brag for its learning output, its mission and vision attract many to share the reputation of belonging to such learning institution. The importance of this occasion inspires all university stakeholders to re-evaluate the contribution of the open and distance learning to the nation. The growth in delivering and expanding access to many students in Eastern Africa has been marked with increased knowledgeable workforce in the society.

Adult learning contributes in attainment of achievers of social reform and development. For 20 years, East African nations have absorbed graduates capable of transforming society dreams to reality. Learners' response in e-learning has proved that acquisition of knowledge and skills can be done in a non-tradition classroom setting. Deviating from conventional mode of delivery, learning becomes the source of interest and excitement to both students and scholars. The uniqueness of the Open University of Tanzania is realized in its attainable goals, and taking risks while embracing internal and external challenges. The opportunity to extend access and knowledge coincides with emphasis on andragogical learning methodologies. Mobilization of educational resources and guidance in the acquisition of new knowledge empower learners' confidence and sense of belonging to the institution. Inclusion of learners' background and experience has moderated the pace of learning whereby students are in control of what and when to take courses. An online learning method has encouraged students' inclination and motivation to engage in the 21st century technology. The OUT has adhered to students' quest for new knowledge through face to face sessions, virtual and physical libraries.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has liberated many individuals from stagnation to active participant through e-learning. Learners appreciate their recognition and inclusion of their experience in the learning process. ODL acts as the remedy of many shortfalls of traditional system of education. ODL is also mentioned by Mushi in her article to create free critical and relatively independent thinkers capable of interrogating, interpreting and innovating. East African governments have welcomed the OUT move to create challengers of actions, goals, social structures, traditions and thinking. Higher quality of learning and achievable goals override society status quo. Although liberation is refined by social transformation, the OUT is still challenging its staff and students to be more conversant with emerging technologies.

Human capital has been a pillar of OUT for realization of its goals. Outsourcing innovators and those proven to excel the norm, has made the institution firm to the

present. Mbwette and Ngirwa emphasized the importance of human resource managers to increase diversity of employees. Inclusion of individual's contributions enables the institution to achieve multiple goals. Differences offer higher chance of growth but is also mentioned by Mbwette and Ngirwa to elevate chances of creating specific challenges. The institution is current in its delivering superior knowledge through qualified individuals and its initiative in sponsoring its workforce in acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The stability of the institution to its core values is affirmed in its unitary vision of all stakeholders.

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The Relevancy of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe the relevancy of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory in early childhood education. Early childhood is depicted as a vital period in any individual development and learning whether cognitive, social, emotional or moral. Different theorists also recognized early childhood as a critical period for development and learning and that, children are born with physical, social and psychological gifts which allow them to communicate and learn; therefore, these gifts should be cultivated for their future participation in their society. The article also defines early childhood care and education in its holistic nature as education which includes children's survival and growth, development and learning, health, nutrition and hygiene, cognitive, social and emotional development opportunities that ranges from birth to primary school entry in formal and informal setting. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is used to describe how learning of young children is influenced by different system in her /his environment. These systems are mentioned as microsystem (family, peers, schools and neighbourhoods) mesosystem (religious institutions, health and medical institutions, other community agencies) exosystem (government policies and laws, political ideologies) and macrosystem (spiritual beliefs and cultural beliefs). It is concluded that since the interactions of these subsystem has great influence on child's development and learning, they should work together towards child care, development and learning to bring about the solid nation in terms of social and moral skills .

Introduction

Early childhood care and education is not new field since for many centuries there have been considerable academic interests in the field. Different educationists and theorists recognize the importance of early childhood care and education and advocated that early childhood as a critical period for a child, as it is when the foundation for later learning can be laid. It is because the most rapid brain development takes place at the first two years of life laying the pathways for significant intellectual, emotional, physical and social functions as the result of child's interaction with the environment (Keenan & Evans, 2009). Therefore, early childhood is seen as a critical period in human development.

History show that, during ancient times, Greece city states such as Athens and Spartan had recognized early childhood care and education and provided it according to the environment, social and political needs of that time. At age 2-8 boys were taught how to endure hardships such as hunger and cold while girls remain home where mothers and nurses insisted upon good behavior and self control. Plato (437-347 BC) stipulated

that children should be valued and nurtured because they would become the future citizens, leaders and guardians of their societies.

Similarly, other great theorists and teachers such as Joan Amos Comenius (1592-1670), Robert Owen (1771-1858), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), John Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and Jean Piaget (1896-1980) recognized the importance of learning and development in early childhood. They believed that early childhood education is important for the children future citizenship and that children's experience in early years are extremely influential in their later development and well being (Taylor & Woods, 2005)

In colonial Tanzania, ECCE was established by religious organizations such as bush schools which were the earliest form of formal early childhood education in Tanzania mainly provided by Christian organizations. There was also madras under Muslim organizations for Muslim children dominant in mainland coastal areas, Zanzibar and Pemba. Reading, writing and arithmetic were the main subjects including some bible knowledge for Christian children as well as Quran education and Arabic language for Muslim children (Mbise, 2000). After independence, early childhood education was not on the public agenda but it was recently brought into government attention and social planner by two converging forces. First women were entering the paid work force in increasing number in the country as the result of families' mass movement to cities in developing countries and better education and improved opportunities for women in developed countries. Second, long term and documented studies of the impact of ECCE have reported significant benefit for youngsters who have the opportunity to participate in the programme (Weikart, 2000)

However, the role of government in both pre- and post-independence in ECE has been minimal and indirect. The government maintained an open door policy for any party interested in initiating and establishing ECCE institutions according to the laid down criteria but with very little enforcement mechanisms thus leading to over 90 per cent substandard institutions (Seif,1992)

Defining Early Childhood Care and Education
Early childhood care and education is seen as variety of types of provision for young children in different countries, regions and provinces. The term is used to refer to group setting for children between approximately three of age and six years old which are deliberately designed to support and stimulate their intellectual development (International Encyclopedia of Education, 1985). Early childhood care and education therefore is the term that frequently applied to the education of young children from birth through age eight or the type of education which takes place before formal education either at home, neighbours, childcare centre, pre-school or nursery school. This kind of education encompasses all the domains that are physical, social, intellectual and emotional domains.

EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007) on its holistic approach states that early childhood care and education includes children's survival growth, development and learning, health, nutrition and hygiene, cognitive, social and emotional development opportunities that ranges from birth to primary school entry in formal, informal setting. Although the setting in which early childhood education is provided known by a variety of names they serve particular services needed by families, community, source of funding and theoretical approach followed.

Rationale for early childhood care and education
Basic learning begins with the family and the local community that is children learn from their parents, peers as well as through traditional learning system such as apprenticeship, initiation rites and religious instructions. However, early childhood care and education whether formal or informal seems to be not compulsory to some communities while its importance to the development and learning of children is well documented.

Evidence from education and related fields indicate that young children's development and learning proceeds rapidly in the early years of life whereas the basis of language is laid so as attitudes and social relationships. Not only that but also early years are crucial in the physical, intellectual and emotional development of the child .Weikart (2000) stipulates that children are born with physical, social and psychological endowments which allow them to communicate and learn; therefore if these behaviours are not cultivated they will shrivel and not thrive. Therefore it should be understood that school readiness and participation of the child in the society as an adult are usually laid down during early years. Taylor and Wood, (2005) suggest that, for a child to be ready for adult life, he or she need to grow though various stages of physical, mental and emotional development each characterized by unique need and task that support overall development.

Research suggests that most of the development of the intelligence in the children occurs before the age of seven due to the fact that most of the brain cells occurs during the first two years of life, accompanied by the structuring of the neural connections the brain. This process is not only affected by nutrition and health status of the child but by the kind of interaction the child get form the environment. Jeffrey (1997) establishes that if the brain develops well, learning potential is increased and chances of failure in school and in life are diminished. Therefore, through early childhood education children gain long-lasting academic and social benefits that that will have a positive impact throughout their lives.

Ecological System Theory in Early Childhood Care and Education Context
Bronfenfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979) looks at a child's development and learning within the context of the system of relationships that shape his or her environment. It stresses the importance of understanding not only the relationships between the child and various environmental systems such as family and community

but also the relationships among the environmental systems themselves. The theory view children as the active participants in creating their own environment and considers children's subjective experiences in creating their relationship and surroundings just as important as the objectives of these phenomena.

Hetherington, (1999) discussing the theory stipulates that, the theory offered the framework for organizing sets of environmental systems. In his views, the child is organized in a "sets of nested structures, each inside the next like the set of the Russian Dolls". The structures range from the immediate settings such as family, peer group to more remote contexts in which the child is not directly involved, such as society's value and legal system. According to the ecological system theory (1979), these structures of the environment are in different complex layers namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

The first layer, microsystem which is the closest to the child, surrounds the structures with which the child has direct contact. Berk (2000) affirms that the layer takes in the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings. This includes family, school, neighbourhood or child care environment. At this level, the impacts of the interactions and relationships are bi-directional that is from and towards the child. The neighbourhoods, childcare institutions and parents may influence the beliefs and behaviour of the child, yet, the child also influences the beliefs and behaviour of the others.

Whereas the mesosystem offers the connection between the child's microsystem that is between the child's teachers and his parents, church /mosque and his neighbourhood, the exosytem defines the larger social system in which the child does function directly. The structure in this layer influence the child development and learning by interacting with some structure the child's microsystem, for example parents workplace and community-based family resources (Berk 2000)

The macrosystem is not specific but entailed the cultural values, customs and laws. The consequences of principles defined by the macrosystem have a flowing influence through the interaction of all other layers. The example is if it is the cultural belief that parents should be exclusively accountable for raising their children, that culture is less expected to provide help. Therefore, the ability or inability of parents to raise their children within the context of the child's microsystem is affected.

It is important to understand how the relations of these systems are central in the development of the child and what factors may lead to the failure of child's learning. According to Bronfenbrenner(1990) the instability and unpredictable family life which lead to the breakdown of the child's microsystem give the child little interaction with his /her other important system in their life which may have great impact in their development and learning,

Application of the theory in early childhood care and education setting.
Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is applicable in any settings in which early childhood care and education is carried out. This is because the theory explicate the disparity in which individuals can get knowledge, development and other experiences depending on support, guidance and structure of the society in which they live. Moreover, the interactions and relationships between the systems influence the individual considerably. The microsystem (the family, peer groups, early childhood institutions or neighbourhoods) as the key unit around the child has the direct influence to the child when the two microsystems (teacher and parent) start to work together to educate the child. Even if teachers cannot be parents, they can interact with them and provide education about the developmental needs of their children.

The external factors (mesosystem) such as religious institutions, health institutions and other agencies which are not directly related to the child typically influence the child development and learning by interacting and changing its microsystem. On the other hand, exosystem (political ideologies and government laws and policies) and macrosystem (the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the society) in which the child is raised have also the core influence to all systems in the child development and learning.

Normally, the family, peer group, early childhood institutions and neighbourhoods is where children begin to learn the values, customs and ways of behaving appropriately or inappropriately to the social norm of that society in which he /she belongs. The family one is born, is his orientation family hence an individual learns social roles and beliefs of the society from that family. Without appropriate supervision and attention from the child's immediate systems children look the attention from other inappropriate places which may give rise to inappropriate behaviours. Apart from the family, religious institutions are important system in influencing child's development and learning. Its role is usually to perpetuate the moral, beliefs as accepted in the respective religious group. In this respect, its role in development and learning of children is not different from family, peers and neighbourhood. The major functions of this system is like what families do although it is not done by parents but priests ,pastors, Sunday school teachers or sheikhs and maalims. The religious teaching sometimes reinforces and compliments the family, peers, early childhood schools and neighbourhoods' teachings.

Likewise, the government laws, policies and its political ideology have great influence on the child development and learning. The proper government support, policies and political ideology provide the best environment most needed for healthy development and learning for children. Government policies and laws should support the interaction of all systems for the better development of the children, by creating the environment that meet and cherish families, schools and other systems interacting with the child in the learning process.

Additionally, cultural beliefs of the society, as one of the systems in child development and learning can thwart or boost the process depending on what is believed by that society. For instance if it is the cultural belief that, parents should be exclusively

accountable for raising their children, that culture is less expected to provide help. In the other way round, the belief that parents should interact with other systems to get support for the development of children, other systems are then expected to provide help needed.

Ecological system theory and the situation of early childhood care and education in Tanzania. As it was stated before, the provision of early childhood care and education in colonial Tanzania were provided by religious organization and minority racial groups. This doesn't mean that there were no kinds of education provision for young children before the colonial time. Families took a full responsibility in child rearing and early education even before the introduction of madrassa (Quran schools), bush schools, kindergartens and day care centres.

After independence, few parents put pressure on establishment of early childhood care and education institutions for their children, giving reasons that, there was growth of town hence interference of common rearing practices, working mothers, development of modern expertise and disruption of extended families. Moreover, the development of Ujamaa villages required fully participation of women in economic activities, hence early childhood institutions were seen as alternative for parental care at the time when parents are participating in economic production in the new villages. Yet, early education and care remained in hands individual families and communities without appropriate and knowledgeable establishment to provide the needed education and development.

In other occasions, religion organizations, the government with the support of donors, initiated various programmes for the care and education for young children with different names such as day care centres, nursery schools and kindergartens although in some cases the functions do not match with those institutions. Although the government took initiatives to establish early childhood institutions, until 1990 the number of these institutions was comparatively small, for example in 1988 there were 1626 registered day care centres and there were about118, 480 children registered which constituted only 3% of all children 3-6 years old (UNICEF, 1990).

Furthermore, there was no effort by government to have a comprehensive policy on early childhood care and education; hence individual policies were formulated by different ministries that had been mandated to look after the care and education for young children. Institutions established by NGOs functioned outside government policy; likewise the policies formulated by different government ministries (Seif, 1992).This lead to confusion to parents and other stake holders to in differentiating day care centres, nursery schools, kindergarten, their curricula and qualifications of the staffs. In this case, it is important to have a close look at ecological system theory and put together all systems which are very important in education for young children. Families as a microsystem of the child should work hand in hand with other systems to develop a comprehensive education for children. NGOs, CBO, religious organization

and other agencies should also interact with other child system, while government should work on formulation of policies to favour development of children. This is very crucial for any government if it aims at developing committed and trustworthy citizens.

Conclusion

Ecological system theory demonstrates to be of importance in explaining child development and learning and the role played by different systems around the child. It also ascertains how these systems are intertwined and influencing the development and learning sequence. The theory give us the ability to understand how children's live s are balanced between every aspect of their environment, therefore we should become conscious that our actions towards our children have a lifelong impact in their relationships and adjustment. As a society then, knowing how we are influencing the lives of all people we interact with, with anticipation we can strive to become a better society for the sake of our children.

By looking at the theory, the government should also be able to develop policies and programmes that can benefit its society. Therefore, the theory in useful in that, it increases the society's consciousness that working together in harmony, provide the children with a community that hold each other , the outcome of our children will be intense. If parents, teachers, religious leaders, health institutions, different agencies and government work together towards child care, development and learning, then the nation will be of triumph in every aspect.

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