

POLICIES IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION OTHER THAN THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Nigerian policy document on early childhood education places emphasis on the education of children from ages 3-5 years. Education of children aged 0-2+ is not accorded serious recognition by the Nigerian Government. The policy lapse necessitated this paper that examined inter alia the concept of childhood education, policies on education in Nigeria, the millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for ALL (EFA) and the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria. The paper recommended a more articulated and definitive invention by Nigeria in the education of children 0-5 years in terms of defining roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in education industry.

Introduction

Education is a commodity with both public and private consumption values. It is an essential infrastructure for the development of civic and democratic society. It facilitates the acquisition of skills, which economically empower the citizenry and alleviates mass poverty causing social vices to reduce. UNESCO (2005) saw education as a facilitator of the development of new skills and technology that enables society to break its production possibility frontiers and enhances the level of affluences. To the individual, education enhances income and provides a leverage to climb to a higher level of the social stratification.

In this presentation, we will look at what constitute Childhood Education, policy and examine the policies on childhood as contained

in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Education for All (EFA), and the National policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria. First what is childhood Education?

Childhood Education

This is the education given to children from the age bracket 0-11+. It involves the education from Day-care, Crèche, Nursery, kindergarten and the primary school. Uruakpa(2004) and Aunna and Obi (2006) saw this education level as fundamentally concerned with the preparation of the child for development of moral values, pre-school behaviours and acquisition of basic skills for healthy living. Succinctly put, it means the education that ends at the primary school. Early Childhood care and education is the care and education given in the day-care centers and nursery schools to children from age zero to five years plus. Such centers would be found in private homes, designated centers and crèches. Two categories of early childhood education can be identified in Nigeria. There is the one that operates in non-formal child-care centre for children aged zero to two years (0-2+). These are often referred to as Day-care centers.

The second category is the pre-primary which operates in a more organized setting where children aged 3-5+ receive early childhood education preparatory to enrolling in primary schools (Agusobo, 2005).

Policies on Education in Nigeria

As a British Colony up till 1960, the system of education in Nigeria would not but

derive from the British system. Before independence, the British Government set up numerous commissions in Nigeria on education such as Phelps Stokes (1970), Asquith and Elliot (1943) and the Ashby Commission. After independence, several attempts were made at making the curriculum more relevant to the Nigerian nation. A lot of conferences, workshops, and seminars were conducted in this direction. All these culminated in the National Policy on Education for the Country in 1977. Policies on Education are government or organizations ways of achieving that part of its national objectives that can be met by using education as a tool. There are numerous policies on education in Nigeria and for this presentation; these are to be discussed hereunder as they relate to childhood education, first the millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Millennium Development Goals

These are series of eight time-bound development goals that seek to address issues of poverty, education, equality, health and the environment, to be achieved by the year 2015. These goals were agreed by the international community at the United Nations Millennium Summit, held in New York in September 2000. Out of the eight-point goals of the summit, goals two concerns this write up and the goal states to:

Achieve Success in Universal Primary Education. It was agreed that education should be provided free and compulsory and made accessible to every child. The universal basic Education programme has had two important effects in this direction. There is improved efficiency of primary education with higher completion rates, and increased enrolment in primary schools. However the full realization of UBE objectives still faces challenges related to universal access, equity, quality, funding and management. Education for All (EFA) - the Dakar Framework

This is the outcome of the world Forum on education held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. it was essentially convened to commit participating

governments to the achievement of education for all (EFA). The Dakar Framework is a collective commitment to action. Governments have an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained. Prior to this summit/forum, concerted commitment have been made by international community to basic education throughout the 1990s. Notable among these are:

- (i) The world summit for children (1990),
- (ii) International conference on child labour (1997) and
- (iii) Fifth international conference on adult education (1997), to mention but a few.

At the Dakar meeting, it was recognized that by the year 2000 threat more than 113 million children had no access to primary education. Following this and other observations, a six point goals were agreed upon. These goals are as shown below:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
3. Ensuring that learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programme;
4. achieving a fifty percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
5. eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015, and achieving gender equality in education by

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2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

From the first goal, all young children must be nurtured in safe and caring environment that allows them to be healthy, alert and secure to be able to learn. Past years have provided more evidence that good quality, early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, have a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. Such programmes should be comprehensive, focusing on all of the children's needs and encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and sycho-social development. They should be provided in child's mother tongue and help to identify and enrich the care and education of children with special needs.

Education for All (EFA) Jomtien summit This was organized in response to the widespread concern over the deterioration of education systems all over the globe. It took place in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. The global gathering had representatives from 155 countries, 33 inter-governmental bodies and about 125 non-governmental organizations. The conference conducted with the unanimous adoption of the 'world Declaration on Education for ALL', Nigeria took part in this conference. At the Jomtien conference, a six point goals were adopted and they are listed below thus.

- (1) Expansion of early childhood care and development activities, specially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children;
- (2) Universal access to and completion of primary education by the year 2000.
- (3) Improvement of learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate

age group (e.g. 80 percent of 14 year olds) reaches a defined level of necessary learning achievement;

- (4) Reduction of adult illiteracy to, say one-half its 1990 level by year 2000;
- (5) Expansion of provision of basic education and training in other essential skill required by youths and adults for improved heath, employment and productivity;
- (6) Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for a better living and sound and sustainable development made available through all educational channels including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action (UNESCO, 2005).

In pursuance of the attainment of these goals, the Nigerian government undertook a range of activities among which are:

- Establishment of the National Commission on Mass Literacy and Non-Formal Education in 1990;
- National Commission for nomadic Education in 1990;
- Introduction of the nine-year schooling programme in 1992 and launched as UBE scheme in 1999;
- National conference on EFA was held in 1993 to further enhance the achievement of the jomtien goals.
- Promulgation of decree 96 of 1993to revive the national primary Education Commission;
- Comprehensive educational analysis conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education between 1997 and 2000.

Irrespective of these efforts, the achievements in EFA came largely through the interventions of international development partners, government policy

which places responsibility for delivery with the private sector and civil society, may have constrained achievement in this area. National policy for integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria.

In pursuant of good care for young children, Nigeria has developed a good number of policies in education, health, food and nutrition, all of which are aimed at improving the status of young children. The average Nigerian child is highly deprived in terms of good health, proper care, education and rights to basic requirement of life (Agocha, 1998). The Federal Ministry of Education released the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria. This is basically for Children between 0-5 years. The policy is inter-sectorally developed to enable the Nigerian child appreciate all its rights as stipulated in the convention of the rights of the child to which Nigerian subscribes.

The ultimate aim in the provision of early childhood care and Development is to provide care for the child while the parent are at work and to prepare the child for further education.]

Policy Goal

The goal of the IECD is to expand, universalize and integrate intervention from various sectors in early childhood development for effective implementation and co-ordination of programmes that will optimize development for children aged 0-5 years in Nigeria.

Policy Objectives

Since IECD aims to integrate intervention from the various sectors, the objectives of the policy derive from the National Policies on Education, Food and Nutrition, health and the child Right Act states as follows:

(a) Provide care and support that will ensure the rights of the child to:

- i. Good nutrition and Health
- ii. Healthy and safe Environment

- iii. Psycho-social stimulation
- iv. Protection and participation
- b. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc
- c. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents/guardians are at work (on the farms, in the market offices, industry, etc)
- d. Prepare the child to adapt when his/her current context changes.
- e. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
- f. Develop a healthy, well nourished adequately stimulated child able to achieve it fullest potentials.
- g. Contribute to reduction of high infant and U-5 mortality
- h. raises awareness of HIV/AIDS and promote protective behaviour among children including OVCs.
- i. Inculcate acceptable social and culturally appropriate norms, values and beliefs.
- j. Raise awareness of IECD policy in all communities by 2015
- k. Build capacity of all stakeholders for IECD policy implementation.
- l. Support existing legislation to reduce all forms of abuse and denial of children's rights.
- m. Establish and expand mechanism for collaboration and co-ordination of IECD programmes.
- n. Provide guidelines and standard to ensure quality service delivery.
- o. Establish reliable management information system on IECD to facilitate research
- p. establish a valid and reliable monitoring and evaluation system for all aspect off the IECD policy.
- q. build strategic partnership with government at all levels, the private sectors, civil Society

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- Organizations/NGOSs, development partners and communicate to mobilize resources for IECD implementation.
- r. promote community participation, ownership and sustainability.
 - s. integration of Quranic system into IECD.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

The Nigerian policy document of Early childhood education places emphasis on the education of children from ages 3-5 years.

Education of children aged 0-2+ is not accorded serious recognition. This may be policy lapse. However, since the declaration of the international Convention on Child's rights, it has become mandatory that ECCD should embrace 0-5+ children.

Irrespective of the various policies on childhood education, not much has been achieved in Nigeria. Under-funding, administrative bottlenecks, lack of infrastructure, inadequacy of personnel in childhood education among others, seem to hinder the progress in this direction. A more articulated and definitive intervention by Nigeria in the education of children 0-5 years in terms of defining roles and responsibilities of government and non governmental institutions, the private sector and the communities should be involved. A meaningful intervention should take the form of a national programme of support through which the government facilitates the provision of affordable high quality education for children, through the act of parliament and making the required fiscal provision in the yearly budget.

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