

REAPPRAISING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR FUNCTIONALITY AND SELF RELIANCE OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This paper is focused on reappraising the implementation of early childhood education curriculum for functionality and self reliance. The primary goal of every level of the educational system of a nation is to achieve quality which stems from effective teaching and learning. Laudable aims and goals of early childhood education can only be achieved if deliberate efforts are made to ensure affective implementation of the curriculum. This is because curriculum remains the official and authentic content that translates the expectations of the society into bits of knowledge, skills and attitudes to the learners. This form the trust of this paper as it tried to reassess, how the early childhood curriculum is being implemented problems of implementation, and solutions to these problems.

Introduction

Education remains a veritable tool to the development of laudable programmes of both developed and developing countries of the world. It is an avenue through which solutions to societal problems in different fabrics of the society could be met. The quality of Education can best be defined by the performance of its pupils that is the post-school performance output. This output is also gauged by its inputs which deals which the implemented curriculum.

The philosophy of pre-primary education centres on the belief that the child at the early age has potentials and capabilities that early education can speed up its development. It

realizes that this stage in human development is fundamental. The success of the child at this stage, the stimulation prepares the child for the next stage. It is further believed that messing up of this stage may in some ways incapacitate or retard the child's future achievement in education (Okoro, 2006).

A nation's policy on Education is government's way of realizing the part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. According to Federal republic of Nigeria (FEM 2004) in the national policy on education. Education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development.

Early childhood education is the education received by children in an educational institution before the age of primary education. It is for children between the ages of 3 to 5 years prior to entering the primary school. Early childhood education includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. (FRN 2004, section 2 Subsection 11).

According to the National Policy on Education the purpose of pre-primary education shall be to:

- (a) Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- (b) Prepare the for the primary level of education;
- (c) Provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets officers);
- (d) Inculcate social norms;
- (e) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of

- nature, the environment, art music and playing with toys etc;
- (f) Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
 - (g) Learn good habits especially good health habits; and
 - (h) Learn the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes forms, etc through play.

The Early Childhood Curriculum

Curriculum is set of planned and organized materials designed for an intended learning outcome considered as adequate for any functional expectations of the people in time and place. Curriculum from its Latin origin means “the path, the way and the course”. It refers to all the things students could learn, this is why we must learn of all the things that we could teach, this is what we must teach” (Okobia, 2009) Early childhood education is an important phase of the Nigerian educational system. Being foundational in nature, its curriculum elements must be sound and capable of bringing out the best in the child that acquires it.

Theoretical Background of Early Child Hood Care Education (ECCE)

The national policy on educations in Nigeria has stressed the need to provide sound educational background to children so as to effect smooth transition from home to school. This level of education is meant to provide both parents and teachers the early opportunity to lay a good foundation for the development of the child. This early state of the child’s life has been considered the most important in the child’s attitudinal, character and personality development. Early educationalists such as Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Comenius and Froebel likened the concept of nursery education to the cultivation of plant seeding. Froebel for instance saw the school as a “nursery of future citizens hence in Nigeria the pre-primary level of education is often called nursery school.

Theories of psychoanalysis explained that the first five years of a child’s life is the most crucial to his personality development. These theoretical postulations make it essential for the society to plan a sound early education her citizens. One of the decrees establishing the National commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is the provision for it to produce teachers for early childhood care education (ECCE). Development of a child can be seen physically intellectually, socially emotionally and mentally hence Obiefuna and Ifegbo (2004), opined that pre-scholars earlier experience in/off school have in powerful effect over the child’s self concept and sense of individuals worth later in life. This therefore calls for a set of intended learning activities and an enabling environment for proper growth and development of the child

Problems of Implementation of the Early Childhood Curriculum

In Nigeria, early childhood education began to receive attention from 1970s and 80s when mothers started working. A critical look at the implementation of the current ECCE curriculum suggests that it is faced with numerous problems which need to be tackled if the curriculum at this level is to achieve the goals of education. It is often said that Nigeria’s problem is not the establishment of polices/ruler but that of enforcement. This is possible true of the early childhood education curriculum implementation. It is the curriculum made available to school and its effective implementation by teachers that determines what the child becomes in life. Some of the problems militating against effective implementation early childhood education curriculum include:

- (1) Non involvement of teachers in the planning and development stage
- (2) Lack of qualified and competent teachers
- (3) Over crowded classrooms
- (4) Lack of uniformity in early childhood curriculum

- (5) Poor educational facilities
- (6) Poor environment
- (7) Dearth of data
- (8) Regulation and control of early childhood education

Non- involvement of Teachers in Curriculum planning and Development stage: Teachers are at the implementation level of any curricular. The implemented curriculum refers to what is being organized and taught at different levels. More often than not, very little consideration is given to the major operators of the curriculum during the planning and development stage of the curriculum According to Brunner (1960), “a curriculum is more for teachers than it is for the pupils. If it cannot change, move, perturb and inform teachers, it will have no effect on those whom they teach. It must be first and foremost be a curriculum for teachers, if it is to have any effects on the pupils. It will have it by virtue of having had an effect on the teacher”.

Lack of qualified teachers to implement the ECCE curriculum:- Closely related the issue of non involvement of teachers in the planning phase of the ECCE curriculum is the issue of availability of qualified teachers. Teachers are the determinants of the success or failure of any curriculum in education which is meant to foster and lack of trained and qualified teachers to implement the ECCE curriculum is a major challenge to its implementation because no education system of any nation can rise above the quality of its teachers.

Overcrowded Classrooms:- The teacher pupils ratio of 1:25 as stipulated in the National policy on Education is not being maintained and this makes effective implementation of the curriculum difficult to attain because large class sizes are not favourable for effective use of methods and materials for use as stipulated in the NPE, 2004.

Lack of Uniformity in Early Childhood Curriculum:- Lack of uniformity in the implement curriculum is simply the differences in curriculum that are in use in Nigerian nursery schools. For instance, the child in urban area is more exposed to curriculum materials than the child in the rural area simply because of the different curriculum.

Poor Educational facilities: Facilities provided for the implementation of the ECCE are grossly inadequate especially in the rural areas for in stare computer science is supposed to be taught in the early stage of learning of children. These facilities to learn computer science are not available in most schools.

Poor Environment: No meaningful teaching or learning can take place in an un-conducive environment. Most nursery schools are not well located this makes the implementation of some curricula activities difficult in such locations

Dearth of Data:- Educational planners in Nigeria are always faced with the problem of non-availability of data especially for planning towards having a successful early childhood education in Nigeria.

Regulation and Control of ECCE Curriculum: Government’s position on the regulation and control of the implementation of the ECCE curriculum is not right. This is the reason why the official curriculum is usually different from the actual or implemented curriculum. Government control over establishment and ownership of nursery schools is not yielding positive results. Hence, there are many unregistered nursery schools in Nigeria with teachers who are unqualified to implement the ECCE curriculum.

Curriculum implementation

Curriculum implementation is the actual engagement of the learners with planned learning

experiences. It is the interaction stage which involves teachers and learner engaging in negotiations aimed at promoting learning. It is the transmission of the planned curriculum into the operational curriculum (Offorma, 2005). The objectives of early childhood education are lofty but attainable over time all things being equal. The crucial issue is how to work towards the realization of the objectives through effective implantation at the classroom teaching/learning process. Hence the need for reappraising the implantation of the early children dedication curriculum has become imperative.

Need for Reappraising the Early Childhood Curriculum Functionality and Self Reliance.

There is need to reappraise the implementation of the early childhood curriculum because the growth of the learner in each phase of education aids the growth in the next phase ahead of it, this will help to know whether the learner has actually grown to enable him transit to the next expected stage of growth. Accessing if the curriculum is adequate to stimulate the desired goal and reappraising if the teacher has performed the task expected for the child to grow as desired brings about the issue, of reappraising the implementation of the early childhood curriculum according to the stipulations of the National policy on education for functionality and self reliance

Conclusion

It has been agreed that education is an effective tool for the development of individuals in the society. ECCE education is the foundation on which other levels of education lie. The implementation of the ECCE curriculum should not be taken for granted it is widely believed that, if the foundation of a building is weak, it will not stand the test of time. Therefore a reassessment of the implementation of the ECCE curriculum has become imperative if the National Policy on Education in Nigeria is to

have a functional base for National development and self reliance of every citizen of this millennium.

Insights and Way Forward

Nursery education is the foundation of all other levels of our educational system; therefore it must be handled with care during its implementation stage so as to achieve the goals of ECCE. If the goals of ECCE are to be achieved, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration by all stake holders.

- (1) Government should make adequate funds available for the implementation of ECCE curriculum.
- (2) Now that there is a national curriculum for ECCE, Government should make it available to schools and insist on its implementation to the letter.
- (3) Government should provide adequate facilities for effective implementation of ECCE curriculum
- (4) More teacher education centres for training teachers for the effective implementation of ECCE curriculum should be established. Government should insist and make sure that the minimum qualification for teaching in Nursery schools is maintained in both private and public schools.

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