

CREATIVITY AND INVENTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Education is what happened to us from the day we were born till the day we die. Without education no society can progress. Education as the most valuable asset to any nation has been defined differently by different communities, educators and philosophers. It has been defined as the “process by which the individual acquire many physical and social capacities demanded of him by the group into which he is born and within which he must function” (James 1973). Likewise, it can be seen as “the process of developing the individual physically, spiritually, mentally, morally and socially for his own welfare and for the welfare of the society to which he belongs”(James 1973). It is therefore, the process of acquiring knowledge of inculcating heritage and ideal in the civilization of the future. Early childhood care and education is the educational care, protection, stimulation, and learning promoted in children from age 0-5 years in a day care centre, nursery and kindergarten. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 2008) National Policy on Education, early childhood education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their entering the primary school, it is an education that lays the foundation for the primary level. Creativity involves the use of skills and imagination to produce something new, thinking about new

ideas, showing ability to write something new. To invent is to produce or design something that has not existed before eg. Who invented the steam engine? It is against this background that this paper will focus attention on the importance of childhood care education to the Nigerian society, challenges and prospects of childhood education to the Nigerian society .Finally conclusion and recommendations are made.

Nigerian Education system needs new ways and strategies to make the child to imagine new ideas and ways to make the country progress. Effective ways of learning in the class like dramatisation, modelling, discussion, pictures and drawing songs that will make the child to imagine new ways and ideas. Early childhood care and education exists side by side with the primary schools that their existence had been acknowledged by successive government, yet government did not encourage the private sector to provide for early childhood care education for children between 3 and 5 yrs. The creativity and invention in early childhood care and education will not be fully realized if the government does not fully address the challenges facing the early childhood care and education. Early childhood education is considered by many societies and individuals to be beneficial to the young children because their educational development was given official recognition by the federal Government of Nigeria in the National policy on education. Early childhood education in the form of nursery school or pre-primary education known today in Nigeria is largely a post-colonial

development. The semblance of it during the colonial era were the kindergartens and infant classes which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. As grouping for instruction in schools was not age-based during that period, some children age six or even more, could be found in some of the infant classes. With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools. The demand for nursery education was however, very low until recent times. A study of the provision for nursery education in Lagos, by Makinwa-Adebusaye in 1981 for instance showed that only 7.7% out of the 948 parents in her study sent their children to either a nursery school or a group, care centre. A similar study by Orebanjo in the same year showed that half of the working mothers in Ile-ife which by then, was a semi-urban settlement, preferred keeping their children with members of the extended family for child care than sending them to day care centres or nursery schools. Orebanjo as cited in Elkin (1981) opines that modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones for

obvious reasons. It is common practice in most societies to make provision for early childhood or pre-primary school education programmes of various sorts of children below the official school going age (usually six years) mainly to prepare them for education in the primary schools, Macron (2002).

Importance of Childhood Care and Education to the Nigerian Society

The purpose of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in the national policy on education 2008 are as follows:-

1. To effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.

Most of the time, it is not easy to effect the child transition from home to the school, because of the absence of the parents in the school. Before the childhood school age, the child relied heavily on his parents to care and fulfil all his wants. But as soon as he enters the nursery school there are changes to the new pattern of habits in the school. These usually create emotional tension in many pupils. A smooth adjustment from the home to the school may be possible if the child is made to attend school at the childhood age. Before the primary education itself, he would have been used to the system. Thus, the pre-primary or nursery helps to effect a smooth transition.

2. To prepare the child for the primary level of education.

The primary level of education must have some elementary foundations. This will enable the child to cope conveniently and successfully with the school activities, especially in his first year when he eventually gets admitted into primary school. This may be why some schools now make it their policy that a child must have some rudimentary academic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, counting and communication as a prerequisite for admission into primary one. More so, a child that is ready and prepared for primary school would have been used to the school environment. The psychological tension that new intakes usually experience would have been over. He would have made friends that will assist to make the environment appear homely.

3. To provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work/on the farms in the market, offices etc.

Parents who are employed cannot always be with their children and as such, they need people to adequately take care of their children. This is one of the reasons of sending the children to the nursery school. Thus the nursery school performs the dual functions of academic activities as well as that of day care.

4. To inculcate social norms:

These social norms are ways of behaviour that are considered normal cherished and established in a particular society. For example, in most societies

one of their social norms is that respect for elders and those in positions of authority is appropriate behaviour. Some parents hardly stay with their children, the teaching of these norms hardly takes place at home nowadays. Therefore, they will have to be taught to the child in the school to supplement what is given at home.

5. To inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.

This is to develop the child's spirit of enquiry and creativity. It is highly demanding because of the scientific and technological wave presently engulfing the world. It is not how much a childhood school age pupil can contribute at the moment that matters but how his mind is developed towards being interested in enquiring and creativity. However at this stage, playing with relevant materials is the best method to apply.

6. To develop a sense of cooperation and team-spirit:

Nigerians need a sense of cooperation and team-spirit. This enables us to live and interact together despite our differences. At the individual level, cooperation enables us to get help from one another collectively, it helps the nation to fulfil certain basic needs. The material resources of one part of the country can be used to develop the entire country. The pupils should be taught the

attitude of cooperation and team-spirit, let them borrow and lend material to and from one another in good spirit. Let them work together using one single material belonging to one or none of them etc.

7. To learn good habits especially good health habits:

This is to influence the child's attitudes so that he will not grow up adopting measures that are harmful to him. For example, a child may be assisted to develop value for health and adopt a life-style that promotes sound health like washing of hands after visiting the toilet, wearing clean clothes etc.

8. To teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, Shapes, forms etc, through play:

This is for his mental development. Here the child is taught reading, writing, identification, grouping, differentiation etc. By so doing his mental ability will grow paving the way for intellectual development. But because of the nature of the child at this level, he must be taught through play.

Challenges of the Early Childhood Care and Education

1. Lack of supervision by both state and federal governments to early childhood education centres to ensure the maintenance of the standard.

2. Significant provisions is yet to be made in any public or private teacher training institution in the country for the production of specialist teachers in early childhood education.

3. No government (state or federal) in the country has done anything to ensure that mother-tongue or local language is mainly used for instruction in nursery schools as stipulated in the National policy of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2008).

4. The play method of teaching that is advocated in the National policy on childhood care and education is not effectively used in most of the schools, as most of the teachers are not trained on the use of it.

5. Most of the children are still exposed to a lot of hazards, abuses, discrimination and exploitation. Parents and caregivers should ensure that children are protected from harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, hawking, begging, physical and sexual assault.

Prospects of Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria

The prospects of childhood care and education will be good if the following conditions are met:

1. Good salary structure for childhood care education should be implemented by states and federal government nationwide.

2. Enrolment of the childhood teachers should be on merit and special scholarship for them.

3. Adequate infrastructural facilities and instructional material should be provided at all levels of our educational system.

4. Government should implement should implement the instructional standard of 26% budgetary allocation to education.

5. Teachers should be accredited every year to sniff out resigned, dead, retired and even retrenched workers.

6. Budget implementation committee should be set up by the federal and state government to make sure that the funds allocated to primary educational institution are utilized by the management in a more efficient and effective way.

7. Assets declaration by public office holder are necessary before appointment letter is given and after retirement, resignation or relieving of duties by the government.

8. The Board (SUBEB) should pay regular visits to the schools of Early childhood care to see to the day-to-day running of the schools. This is expected to make the teachers and head teachers to gear up to their work by ensuring the provision of adequate education.

9. Funds should be made available for effective running of our early childhood care schools.

10. The appointments of auditors, accountants and directors should not be publicized to accomplish a better and honest job.

Conclusions

Any early childhood education has a positive influence on educational development of the children in later life. The objective of early childhood - education in the country can only be achieved if the policy is effectively implemented.

Government should therefore show more interest in early childhood education by providing some facilities and funds and must make sure that all those measures stated in the national policy document aimed at facilitating the achievement of the objectives are put in place. Control over the establishment of nursery schools should be made. Both urban and rural areas should be considered. Facilities and activities in these schools should be closely monitored and regularly inspected to enhance the quality of their educational programmes.

Recommendations

From the discussion so far in this paper one can see that, an organisation such as Early childhood care and primary education sector needs good and honest management because of the importance of early childhood care

education such as to effect a smooth transition from home to the school, to prepare the child for the primary level of education etc. The early childhood care education management should be a collected effort for effective movement.

1. There is the need for federal, state and local government to provide relevant facilities in both rural and urban areas.

2. There is need for federal or state government to setup and run, few model childhood care education centres to serve as a guide to proprietors who are interested to establish them.

3. Effective quality monitoring units should be set up by state ministry of education and provided with necessary logistics support to ensure that minimum standard are maintained in both public and private childhood centres.

4. The problem of financial constraints, insufficient number of competent teachers and overcrowded classrooms should be looked into.

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