

# VISION AND MISSION OF NURSERY EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## Abstract

Education, as stated in the National Policy of Education, is the inalienable right of every Nigerian child. Such education starts from nursery education. It is education given to children aged three to five plus, prior to their entering into primary school. The child's earliest years are the time of the most rapid physical and mental growth. The child is most susceptible and responsive to positive environmental influences, which expand and enhance his learning. Early childhood education, if properly harnessed, lays a solid foundation and desire for formal education. The paper therefore presents the future and purpose of nursery education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Introduction

Education relating to early childhood had existed before the advent of Nursery school. although it was not called pre-primary education. Nigerians adopted baby-sitting method where by grandmothers provided care and supervision for children while parents are on farm and market.

Pre-primary education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged three to five plus prior to their entering the primary school (NPE, 1998). Fafunwa (1986) describes it as a school that serves the need of two to five years old children by offering them experiences that are adapted to the growth needs of their age level and promoting sound growth in a period when growth is rapid and vital.

Evans (1975) and Chomo (2001) see the nursery school as a garden where children are nurtured. Mialaret (1976) also describes pre-school educational institution as a place where children must be able to play and expend (their energies, engaging in many different activities. Findlay (1996) indicates that the principal aim of nursery school education is to develop each child socially, physically and mentally. To Findlay the aim is to awaken in each child a quest for knowledge, a desire to learn and a thorough healthy, lively look on life so as to prepare him for primary education.

Nursery school teaches a child to be independent and to have initiative. The school environment provides the child with all sorts of play materials and companions to play with, thereby helping those lonely, frustrated, unhappy or deprived children come to terms with their environment. The child learns all the time, through creative play and thus laying the basis of number and language concept (Odabi, 1986 and Meliliuwa, 2001).

Studies conducted in different parts of the world, including Nigeria, show that children share a good deal of developmental needs. Therefore the general goal of any pre-primary education is to help each child live a happy childhood life, reach his or her potentials and become a happy, full functioning adult (Hilder land, 1986).

Traditionally, in Nigeria today, government has the responsibility for education. Nursery Education is provided by private individuals or organizations. The proprietors or proprietresses of the schools, according to studies carried out by Okonkwo (1984); Usoro (1991); Irene (1994) and Anidugbe (2001). All agree that they establish the school just for its financial gain. This is further seen in the uncondusive structures, inadequate facilities and poor environment in which they operate their Nursery school. Hence, the need to present what future and purpose of Nursery education in Nigeria would be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Vision of Nursery Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria

The word "vision" has been described by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English as power of seeing or imagining; looking ahead. The vision of nursery education implies looking ahead or dreaming of what the future of Nursery Education in Nigeria will be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By 21<sup>st</sup> century, Nigerian population of 200 million now would have increased to 260 million (Oranu, 1998) bringing about high rate of unemployment and increasing the number of people who will enter into establishing Nursery schools as a means of earning a living. More women will enter the workforce, thereby leaving so many children in need of the nursery school where adequate care and supervision will be provided while their parents are in the offices.

The future will project the production of sophisticated technological equipment and materials

for nursery education. The need to upgrade the educational background of teachers to incorporate the emergence of a new body of knowledge arises.

Furthermore, the rapid economic, social and technological development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require great participation of the government and few individuals and organizations who can afford and provide a conducive nursery environment.

The nursery school teacher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be characterized by marked flexibility. He/she will be more amenable to innovations due to the emergency of new technologies.

New equipment and facilities for nursery schools will be introduced. The pace of technological change will make play and learning equipment become obsolete very rapidly. The evolution of different types of play equipment and learning materials are possibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

The new equipment and facilities will necessitate constant and effective training and retraining programme for the teachers.

All head teachers, proprietresses should acquire knowledge of pre-primary education so as to cope in the 21<sup>st</sup> Nursery education in Nigeria.

### **Mission of Nursery Education**

Mission is explained in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as "special task assigned to an individual or unit" or "special task with which a person or group is in charge". National Policy on Education announces the present mission of Nursery education as follows: to

- a) effect a smooth transition from home to school.
- b) prepare the child for primary level of education.
- c) provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc).
- d) inculcate social norms.
- e) inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploitation 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, and
- h) teach the rudiments of numbers, letter, colours, shapes, forms etc through play

The present mission of nursery education will continue to aim at forming the link between home and school. This is because development in women education would have made more women enter the workforce, thereby increasing the number of homes that will need nursery education in the country.

Retraining of teachers and reorientation of policy makers due to adoption of new technological facilities and equipment for effective learning becomes necessary.

Another mission of nursery education during the period will be establishing well-equipped .nursery schools for the teeming population.

Nursery education will also focus on actualizing its aims rather than its financial gain.

Nursery education will be the responsibility of the government and private individuals.

Nursery education will be having periodic checks by the relevant educational section.

AH the teacher institutions in the country should have courses enabling students to specialize in pre- primary education.

The qualification for nursery school teachers will be TCII, NCE, and B.ED.

### **Recommendations**

Government should:

- a. encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education
- b. make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;
- c. provide textbooks in Nigerian languages;
- d. ensure that the main method of teaching at this level is through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this;
- e. regulate and control the operation of pre- primary education (FG, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to look at what the vision and mission of Nursery education would be in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It presents its vision, which revolves around the government, teachers, equipment, physical facilities and proprietors and proprietress(es) of nursery schools. The main mission of nursery education is forming the link between home and school through provision of adequate care and supervision of children when their parents are on the farm, market or office.

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