

PRIMARY AND NURSERY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study examines primary and nursery education in Nigeria as part of the government's efforts, to uphold her commitments to the provision of fundamental education to everyone. Pre-primary education refers to the education given in an educational institution to, children age 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary schools, and this is faster in urban centres where industrialization has taken place, where government institutions and other forms of formal education have been set up. The paper also focuses attention on the objectives of primary and pre-primary education in Nigeria. The smooth transition from home to the school, preparing the child for the primary level of education and to inculcate social norms and to develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit. Problems of nursery and primary education are also discussed. Solutions to the problems are suggested and finally conclusion is drawn and suggestions made.

Introduction

Pre-primary education is also another name of Nursery education in Nigeria. The pre-primary and primary education in Nigeria is part of the government's efforts to uphold her commitments to the provision of fundamental education for everyone. The efforts of the government to include the pre-primary and primary education in the National Policy on Education (NPE) shows her concern for children in these levels of education. This is a response to the many world educational submits to which Nigeria is a signatory. The federal government of Nigeria has shown serious commitment to educating her citizens. It is evident from the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 1998). It reflects Nigeria's philosophy of education, and acknowledges that education is an instrument for national development as well as the most important instrument of change.

Pre-primary education refers to "The education given in an educational institution to children age 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary schools". (FRN, 1998:11). It is an officially acceptable and recognized policy, and this goal is meant for every child irrespective of socio-economic background. This education is faster in urban centres where industrialization has taken place, where government institutions and other forms of formal education have been set up. It has been slow in the rural areas.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998:13) refers to primary education as the education given in institutions for children age 6-11 plus. It further stresses that since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole national educational system. In other words, the primary education is the first tier of the 6-3-3-4 educational system, which is for six year's duration in Nigeria.

According to Adepaju (1998), primary education is the type of education which is exposed to children in primary institutions, where the child acquires fundamental knowledge, skills, thought, feelings and actions which are considered necessary for all citizens, regardless of social status, vocation or sex.

In another dimension Dibal, S. (2010) refers to primary education as "The root background progress which must be given to children ages 6-11 plus irrespective of their socio-economic status to make them useful citizen for themselves and the society and that any failure or success at this stage will influence the whole system".

Table 1: Structure and Functions of Education in Nigeria

Level of Education	Age of pupils	Types of education provided
Pre-Primary Education	3 – 5 years	Reading, Writing Language development, Counting, Painting building, Modeling, Neating caring for things. It has the aim of training children to use objects in their environment and acquisition of skills in order to develop desirable attitudes and value.
Primary	6 – 11 + Years	Reading, Painting, Writing, Maths, Social Studies, Language Moral Religious Instruction. Elementary Science, Health and Physical Education, Games and Sports, Music. The rest of the education system is built upon it. It is also the key to success or failure of the system.
Secondary	12 – 18 years	This is intended to give a general education so that students can proceed to higher institutions. The following subjects are taught. Geography, History, English Language, Maths, Government, Religious Studies, H/Economics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Economics, French. The level prepares students for useful living and higher education.
Tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Coll. of Education, College of Agriculture etc.	19 years and above	These are higher institutions of formal learning. They prepare young men/women in various disciplines and professions such as law, medicine, teaching, banking, accounting, nursing pharmacy and so on.

Objectives of Primary and Pre-primary Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (1998) 3rd edition gives the following objectives:

- 1. To Effect a Smooth Transition from the Home to the School.**
This is always difficult for effective transition, because of the absence of the parents in the schools and at this time the, child depends heavily on his parents to fulfill his social roles and responsibilities. The child gets some changes and new habits and emotional adjustment as soon as he enters the nursery school.
- 2. To Prepare the Child for the Primary level of Education**
Here the child needs some elementary foundation which helps him to cope with the school activity especially as a beginner as soon as he gets admitted into the primary school. For this reason, some schools make it a policy that a child must have some rudimentary academic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, counting and communication before considering him for admission into primary one.
- 3. To Provide adequate care and Supervision for the Children while their Parents are at Work (on the Farms in the Market, Offices, etc).**
Those parents who were employed or those who were away on the farm or market cannot adequately take care of their children. This is the reason why they have to send their children to the nursery schools. Thus, the pre-primary school performs the dual functions of academic activities as well as that of day care.
- 4. To Inculcate Social Norms.**
Social norms are ways of behaviours that are considered appropriate and acceptable in a particular society. For example, in some societies one of their social norms is the respect for elders and those in the position of authority. Most parents do not stay with their children as such the teaching of these norms hardly takes place at home nowadays. Therefore, they will have to be taught to the child in the school so as to supplement what is to be 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 helps to develop the child's spirit of enquiry and creativity and it is in high demand because of the scientific and technological waves presently engulfing the world. It is not how much the pupils can contribute at this moment that matters but how his mind is developed towards being interested in enquiry and creativity. At this stage playing with relevant materials is the best method to apply.
6. **To Develop a Sense of Co-operation and Team Spirit**
In Nigeria we need a sense of co-operation and team spirit. This enables us to live and interact together despite our differences. Co-operation enables us to get help from one another at the individual level, while collectively it helps the nation to fulfill certain basic needs. Any material resources of one part of the country can be used to develop the entire country. Attitude of co-operation and team spirit should be taught to the pupils. The pupils should work together using one single material belonging to one or none of them. They should borrow and lend materials from one another.
7. **To Learn Good Habits Especially Good Health Habits**
This is aimed at making the child's attitude to adopt measures that are beneficial to good health and reject those that are harmful to it. The child should be taught about washing of hands after visiting the toilet, wearing tidy clothes, etc.
8. **To teach the Rudiments of Numbers, Letters, Colours, Shapes, Forms, etc. Through Play.**
This is very necessary for the mental development of the child. The child is taught reading, writing, identification, grouping, differentiation, etc. His mental ability will grow giving way for intellectual development. The child must be taught through play.

Primary Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (1998) identifies seven (7) major goals of primary education in Nigeria.

1. **To Inculcate Permanent Literacy and Numeracy, and Ability to Communicate Effectively.**
This is having to do with the child's, speaking, writing, listening and reading skills. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be language of the environment, for the first three (3) years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment and French shall be taught as a subject.
2. **To Lay a Sound Basis for Scientific and Reflective Thinking**
This is necessary because of the rapid changes that are taking place around the globe especially in science and technology. Government wants basic science to be introduced in the primary schools. Naibi (1969) recommends that "A course in elementary science should be planned to embrace simple observation in agriculture, weather, health, botany, zoology, simple knowledge of machines and principles of physics. He goes further to say that some of the apparatus could be made locally and other equipment bought cheaply or obtained through technical aid from international organizations. The purpose of elementary science at the primary school level is to "catch the child young" – to impart on him the elementary knowledge and skills of science and technology.
3. **To Give Citizenship Education as a Basis for Effective Participation and Contribution to the Life of the Society**
To achieve this, government has stipulated the teachings of citizenship education in primary schools. The child is taught not only about his community and state, but also about other communities and states in the country. The child should learn about the right and

responsibilities of a good citizen especially now that democracy is on course. The child should know the loyalty and responsibility he owes his country as well as his financial obligation to her. He should know the relationship of his country to African countries in particular and the entire world in general.

4. **To mould the Character and Develop Sound Attitude and Morals in the Child.**
Both the school and the parents should provide moral values for the children. Any breakdown in the moral values will result in juvenile delinquency, destitution, corruption, etc.
5. **To Develop in the Child the Ability to Adopt to his Changing Environment.**
Education is an instrument of change and must be provided to equip him to meet the present day challenges.
6. **To give the Child Opportunities for Developing Manipulative skills that will Enable him to Function Effectively in the Society within the limits of his Capacity**
Not only theories, but the child should use his manipulative skills that will help him function effectively in the society to which he belongs.
7. **To Provide the Child with Basic tools for Further Educational Advancement Including Preparation for Trade and Crafts of the Locality**
The child should have knowledge of various skills and services that the country needs for development. The child should also be taught how to become an intelligent farmer, craftman, trader, etc. Who will help to produce the wealth on which the country depends for their development.

Problems of Nursery and Primary Education in Nigeria

Most problems encountered are financial constraints, insufficient competent teachers, overcrowded classrooms, narrow curriculum content and high rate of dropout from schools. The concept of management was poor as there was no intelligent utilization of human, capital and material resources directed towards the achievement of the objectives. Cultural and religious factors hindered the progress of education in some parts of the country, north in particular.

Solutions to the Problems

The government should provide the needed skills and abilities thereby laying the foundation for life-long education. The problems of financial constraints, insufficient competent teacher and overcrowded classrooms should be solved. The narrow curriculum content and the high rate of dropout from schools should be solved. The cultural and religious factors should be looked into.

Recommendations

Teachers should be sure that they consider the child's level of maturation in whatever they teach or want to teach so as to achieve the objectives. Teach him those things he is ready to learn at any given stage of his development. As teachers, we must make sure that we consider the method of teaching, ability and skills the child had already acquired. All planned curriculum should take more serious cognizance of childhood development as well as the maturity level of the child. More facilities should be provided and they should not overcrowd our classrooms. Qualified teachers should be employed to teach and more funds should be provided in the education sector.

Conclusions

From all indications, one can conclude that nursery and primary education is the foundation of the educational system and it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Nigerians need more funds and competent teachers to make the system move. More facilities should be provided so as to avoid the overcrowded classrooms. Also both parents and the teachers should be actively involved in the moral training and character building of the child.

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