TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE QUALITATIVE NURSERY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discussed the effective management strategies needed for a sustainable qualitative nursery education system in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper examines the concept of nursery education system in Nigeria as well as some of the common features for which that level of education needs better management strategies. As a way out, the paper advocates for more active participation of the government especially in periodic evaluation and monitoring of the school activities; aiding the schools with funding subsidy; designing a special instrument to appraise the instructional styles of their teachers etc.

Introduction

There is no doubt that education plays a major role in national development and social emancipation. To ensure effectiveness of this role, education must be made accessible to all members of the society. It should also be designed and structured in such a way that it will from an early age, afford each and every member of the social group opportunity and the ability participate in the process in the process.

Children are considered valuable assets in the society. The education of the child therefore demands great sacrifice and commitment on the part of the parents, teachers and government. It is in realization of this fact that the federal government, among other things, recognized nursery/Pre-Primary Education by also including it in the National Policy on Education (2004:10) defined pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. As a matter of fact, nursery/pre-primary education level should be the focal point for laying a solid foundation in the child for greater contributions in the world of science and technology. It is also a period for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning of the child from early childhood. This is therefore a very critical period in the life of the child especially with respect to what he is going to become in future.

Management of this level of education cannot be left in the hands of private individuals whose sole aim is profit maximization to the detriment of quality teaching and learning. Government’s role should not be limited to the setting of standards alone. This paper, among other things discussed the effective management strategies that will ensure quality nursery education commensurate for laying solid foundation for greater productivity in this age of science and technology.

Nursery/Pre-Primary Education in the Nigerian Education System

Early Childhood Care and education (ECCE) Nursery/Pre-primary education refers to the education given to young children aged 0- to less than 6 years. Specially, Nursery/Pre-primary education according to the National Policy on Education (2004) is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 years + prior to their entering the primary school.

Osanyin (1984) described pre-primary education as an extension of the home while Fafunwa (1981) asserted that pre-primary education properly conceived implies among other things, provision of selected and specialized environments in which the child can interact and develop. The environments include trained staff, adequate physical and infrastructural facilities, suitable instructional and reading materials.

Nursery education is of primary importance and should be planned and managed very efficiently as any mistake at this stage in one’s life, could be disastrous in subsequent educational career development. It is perhaps, the most important stage on which all else depends. Maduabum (1992) delineated nursery education to include: serving as a supplement for home, bridging the gap between home and formal education, serving as source of mental, physical and social enrichment for
the child as well as a base for parental education in the proper understanding of the developmental needs of children.

The purpose of pre-primary education as spelt out in the National Policy on Education (2004:11) elucidates the importance of this level of education to children. These objectives are to:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc.);
- Inculcate social norms;
- Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc;
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
- Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

The above objectives appear very laudable. But one wonders the extent to which these objectives have been realized. A closer observation reveals that this very first step towards formal education has been very badly neglected by the government. Much of the progress recorded in this level of education are done by voluntary agencies (individuals; missions, communities etc).

An examination of government’s role in this level of education reveals a not-too-ready stance on these institutions but rather to:

- Encourage private individuals to establish pre-primary education;
- Make room for specification in early childhood in teacher education programmes;
- Ensure the use of play as a main method of teaching and channel curriculum of teacher education toward this; and finally
- Regulate and control operation of pre-primary education.

From the above it will be deduced that only takes the role of mere general overseer. Fafunwa (1991) also observed that the role of government in pre-primary education is advisory. However, one of the major innovations of Universal Basic Education (UBE) was the incorporation of pre-primary or nursery education into the primary. The 4th edition of the National Policy on education (2004) states clearly that:

> The responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions, and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools.

The decision of Nigerian government to establish pre-primary sections in existing public primary schools have not made the situation better. Recent visits made to some of the schools by the researcher, indicate that the apparent “vote of no confidence” passed on public primary schools has been extended to that section, h it is only poor parents who have no alternative that send their children to those schools. It is observed too that the level of attention formally given to pre-primary schools by government have not changed too. Also the quality of teaching and learning in that section has not also improved. Moreover, the Pre-primary education is not even part of the nine year compulsory basic education policy Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is pursuing. By and large, the success and accomplishment of the roles and objectives of pre-primary education are contingent upon the government’s continuous review and monitoring of these objectives to ensure proper implementation.

**Common Features in Nursery/Pre-Primary Education Practice in Nigeria**

Basically government did not present itself as an active participant in the provision of nursery education in Nigeria. Its role was limited to the setting of standards which she still needs to perform well.

Actually, the initial posture of government in respect of pre-primary education resulted in lack of awareness of proprietors of pre-primary institutions on the need to seek and obtain guidelines for establishment of pre-primary institutions. As a consequence, some of these schools take off without government approval. Sometimes, government officials pretend not to know of the existence...
of such schools and even when their attention is drawn to that, do not care to investigate. Some of the proprietors who are actually aware of the laws establishing these schools, use the Nigerian factor to circumvent the laws. The result is the proliferation of substandard nursery schools in our society. One can easily notice their existence in many private homes, stores, huts, uncompleted building etc. without enough spaces for play where everything but quality nursery teaching and learning take place.

A lot of things happen in these schools in the name of education. Sometimes, there is no common curricular in use; untrained and uncertificated personnel were proprietors and teachers in the school. Some of these schools have no defined aims and no time-table is normally in use. There was no age limit for admission. The government policy of teacher/pupil ratio of 1:20 is never adhered to. The only thing that matters is that parents pay their children’s fees very promptly. Apparently, that is why Eluwa (1985) opined that government is really not concerned with the nature of instructional practices in school. This may therefore need to design an effective management strategies to ensure that standard and quality are maintained in our nursery/pre-primary education level. This is very necessary given the fact that nursery education is the frame-work upon which the child’s future education superstructure will be built. It also plays a very significant role in determining a child’s future cognitive development. Apart from this, let us examine and see other reasons for pre-primary education in Nigeria.

**Rational for Nursery/Pre-primary Education in Nigeria**

There is no doubt that education is a human right issue. According to Eheazu (1998), the universal declaration of human right proclaimed by the United Nations’ General Assembly declared in article 26 that “everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.” It therefore follows that every individual should be allowed to benefit from and enjoy this inalienable right to education.

The importance of this level of education is further substantiated by the global demands for respect and fulfillment of children’s right to education. This was provided in article 5 of the Jomtien declaration which states that “learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education. This can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, institutional programmes as appropriate” (UNESCO, 2002). Nigeria not only endorsed the Jomtien declaration and convention on child rights, but has gave prominence to the need for early childhood care and education in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) launched in 1999. This is laudable. However, a lot still needs to be done in areas of effective management.

Further to this, the Nigeria Constitution (1999), section 18 (1) gave much legal basis to this level of education when it stated that “government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all level.” Consequently, every child has a right to a basic education and the child’s best interest should be the overriding factor in every matter concerning the child.

Childcare providers need to be guided in exposing children to the right experiences for early stimulation and for their optimal growth and development.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure value for the money paid for services rendered since most ECCE/Nursery and Pre-Primary education providers are private individuals who are sometime driven by profit motives. They charge exorbitant fees which many poor and disadvantaged groups cannot afford. There is therefore serious need to streamline standard and evolve an effective management strategies to not only ensure that the objectives are fully realized but also, to give all citizens equal access to this all important basic education.

**Effective Management Strategies for a More Qualitative Nursery Education**

To achieve the aim of qualitative nursery education in Nigeria, some effective management strategies are very necessary.

Government’s active participation is a ‘sine qua non’. There is serious need for government’s active participation in the running of nursery education. Appropriate level of government will from time to time, review and enforce the education laws which relate to the establishment of nursery schools. This is necessary to ensure that stipulated conditions necessary for approval are maintained and fully complied with.
Further to the above, these should be proper involvement of the government through adequate and constant review, evaluation and monitoring of all the activities of the school with a view to ensuring that adequate number of staff are recruited and maintained; that infrastructural and instructional facilities, as well as recreational facilities are adequately provided.

State Education Commission or Zonal headquarters should design an instrument with which to appraise the instructional styles of pre-primary school teachers occasionally. With this, they should be able to monitor and evaluate what teachers do when they teach the pupils. This type of supervision should be done periodically. This is very essential as it ensures seriousness and commitment on the part of teachers leading to improvement and professional growth.

A well motivated officer who should work closely with the Head-teachers should be trained to oversee the programmes and activities of the nursery schools. He is expected to report to the head teacher who in turn sends quarterly report to the State Ministry of Education.

Government is equally expected to participate more in this critical sub-sector by coming up with funding subsidy. This is to make positive impact on improving access to nursery education and access to resources such as rent, food, equipment/materials and capital purchases. By this, a greater share of total educational resources would flow towards the poor.

Caregivers must possess a minimum of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE with special bias to childhood education. Moreover, government should support capacity building of head teachers, teachers and caregivers. There should also be regular training and retraining of teachers and caregivers in child caring practice.

Participatory monitoring should be encouraged to involve all stakeholders in nursery education including P.T.A. and community members. Even the activities of the private nursery centers should be monitored and regulated to ensure compliance with stated norms and standards. Reports from stakeholders can also be taken very seriously.

Conclusion
Generally, education is perceived to be the most important instrument of change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society. It is equally seen as fundamental human right of every child. Since it has been seen and established that nursery education is not only a right but also the framework upon which the child’s future education superstructure will be built, it will be a very big mistake attending to its management and supervision with levity. Government is expected to be very actively involved in order to realize fully all the noble objectives for which that very level of basic education was established. For these objectives to be fully realized, government is expected to adopt fully all the above mentioned management strategies to ensure a more standard and quality nursery education in Nigeria.

References


