

MISSION AND VISION OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Pre-Primary Education is the bedrock upon which other levels of education rest. This form of education, despite its importance, has only very few children in the country that have access to it. This paper, therefore, tries to identify and discuss why such important system has been neglected. Suggestions are made to address the identified problems.

Introduction

The awareness and importance of education world-wide cannot be overemphasized. That is why the education industry in the country today continues to witness rapid increase in terms of structure and population. In the past, pupils were being hunted for from one community to another to be sent to school, most especially in this part of the country (North), but today, the reverse is the case. It is not surprising, therefore, that a good number of parents send their children to nursery school in order to lay good foundation for them.

On the other hand, it is unfortunate that as important as this form of education is, the government has consistently given less attention to it and as a result of this only very few children have access to it. For any developing nation like Nigeria to progress, she cannot afford to ignore it, especially these days when there is hue and cry about fallen standard of education. The main reason of this paper therefore, is to identify and discuss why government has constantly given less attention to this form of education in the country. Suggestions are also made to the problems identified.

Education in the Colonial Era

In Nigeria, it is an established fact in history that the British colonized us until 1960 when we eventually became independent. Throughout that period of colonialism, a lot of things were bequeathed on Nigeria by Britain and one of these was Western Education.

In introducing Western Education to Nigeria, deliberate attempts were made to transfer the British system of education into Nigeria with ultimate aim of making the education suit their needs as colonial masters and not our needs as Nigerians. That was why the curriculum was limited to the 3Rs (that is, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) to produce clerks, messengers, house boys/maids who will help them in their day to day activities.

In his own contribution, Madueke (2003), stresses that different countries of the world, at different times and phases of their nationhood have always tried to review their educational policies with the view of making the education system relevant to contemporary times. He goes further to say that in Nigeria, for instance, before her independence, there was no uniformity in the educational system. In some parts of the country it was 6-5-2-3 system, that is, six years duration at the Primary level, five years in Secondary, two years for Higher School and three years for University Education. In some other parts it was 7-5-2-3 system. After independence, however, in 1974 a uniform system emerged throughout the country and it became known as 6-3-3-4 system. This system created two tiers for secondary education with three years in Junior Secondary School (JSS) and three years for Senior Secondary School (SSS) while primary and university remain six years and four years respectively. Nothing was said about Pre-primary Education in the "Chain" formula. In fact, this missing link or omission creates the impression in the minds of thousands that Pre-primary Education is deliberately ignored by the government in Nigerian Educational System.

Pre-Primary Education

Pre-primary Education is called different names by different countries. In Nigeria, for instance, it bears such names as: Play Class, Tea Class, Day Care, while in the United States of America and Great Britain it is called Kindergarten, to mention just a few. The word "Nursery School" and "Pre-primary school" are used interchangeably in Nigeria. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998), Pre-primary Education as referred to in this document is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary school. In line with the above definition, Pre-Primary School is the place where the child is not only being prepared for the primary level of education but being prepared for all other types of social experience like learning to work with others as a team, sharing and respecting others' views, ideas and opinions

and, in all, good character and attitude formation (Fowoyo, 2003).

Objectives of Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (NPE 1998:11) states its objectives as: to

- a) effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b) prepare the child for the 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 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) teach the rudiments of members, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

It could be seen from the foregoing that Pre-primary Education is an important aspect of an individual's education. In realization of the importance of Pre-primary Education, government went further to map out specific ways in the document through which the stated objectives for this level of education could be achieved. These are stated in item 14 of the document that the government shall:

- (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) ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or language of the immediate community; and to this end will:
 - a) develop the orthography of many more Nigerian Languages, and
 - b) produce textbooks in Nigeria languages;
 - c) ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; and
 - d) regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education.

Sokoya, (1987:28) also summarized the above thus:

The government is to review and enforce the educational laws which relate to the establishment of nursery schools. It will also make sure that nursery schools are well run through regular inspections by the Ministry officials and ensuring that qualified teachers and other academic infrastructure are provided.

The Need for Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria

Pre-primary education has become increasingly popular in Nigerian cities and urban areas. It is a place to keep the children while the parents are at work. Pre-primary education is the first education a child receives in a formal school setting. It is the actual foundations of the huge educational structure upon which the other levels are built. In spite of the importance of this form of education, only very few children have access to it in Nigeria. The need for this form of education therefore cannot be overstressed. Madueke (2003) states that in comparing the academic performance of primary one pupils with and without pre-primary education, the result reveals that those who attended pre-primary schools "have better learning readiness, adjust better to formal school processes and are better equipped to succeed". Government should therefore have a second look at the National Policy on Education and take urgent action to save our pre-primary children who have no access to this form of education.

Why Less Attention is Given To Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria

Following what has been stated in the National Policy on Education, section 1, No 4©, there is need for equality of educational opportunities and ability. In this case, no segment of our society should be denied the opportunity to benefit from formal education. In our country where Pre-primary education is left in the hands of the private sectors, it is not the best because not all children have access to it. However, some highlights on why pre-primary education has been given less attention by the government will be discussed.

- (a) Government's intention not to provide actual foundations of sound education to some children in the country.

During the colonial era, Nigeria's educational aims were not specific, education was provided as the needs arise. After independence, the educational system wore a new face. Yet, there is still a hangover of the colonial mentality of not wanting to give the right type of education needed and that is why Pre-primary education today in Nigeria has not been given proper attention by the government. According to Madueke (2003), that could be one of the reasons why government accepted in principle that Pre-primary education should feature in her educational system; but it would appear to be a mere nodding acceptance without real

commitment as beautifully stated in the document (NPE, 1998).

Government does not directly participate in the running of Pre-primary schools. It is therefore, a private enterprise and mostly situated in urban areas. Consequently, the pupils are charged high school fees and poor parents from rural areas who cannot afford this do not benefit and this makes the rural areas to be educationally disadvantaged.

- (b) Another reason is that the system (Pre-primary Education) is too expensive to run in terms of facilities, qualified teachers and counsellors to mention but just a few:

The government should not look at the monetary aspect because no nation wishing to progress can afford to ignore this system.

- (c) Leaders serving in government are also contributing to the problem:

It is only when our leaders in the government learn how to value and appreciate our own educational system that the objectives set could be achieved. That is, all their children should study at home (Nigeria) and not abroad as the case may be.

Suggestions

- 1) Government should participate fully in running Pre-primary schools. With immediate effect, Nigerian government should launch and introduce Pre-primary Education scheme to replace Universal Basic Education (UBE) and not only making it free but to make it very compulsory so that the system can supply sufficiently the right materials needed for the primary education.
- 2) The nomenclature should be changed from the present 6-3-3-4 system to 3-6-3-3-4 system. That is, three years duration of Pre-primary education, six years duration of Primary education, three years each for both Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) respectively and finally, four years duration of tertiary education. It is when this bold step is taken that Pre-primary education will be accorded due recognition and will feel part and parcel of the country's educational system.
- 3) Specialist teachers/counsellors for Pre-primary schools.

The government on her part should train teachers to receive specialist training for pre-primary schools. In addition, Pre-Primary Education Studies should be incorporated into NCE curriculum just as Primary Education Studies was incorporated.

On the other hand qualified counsellors should be posted to Pre-primary schools. This will go a long way to identify pupils with exceptional abilities and those with disabilities will be detected early in life so that they will be developed or have the identified problems corrected. According to Ehiozuwa (2001), the functions of such counsellors will include, among others:

- (i) providing in-service guidance training for teachers;
- (ii) working with pupils with behaviour, educational and social problems;
- (i'O) testing and using test results with pupils; and
- (iv) conducting occasional home visits especially in cases where parental counselling is necessary.

4) Funding

Government should fund the programme and supply the necessary materials needed more than any other level of education; and if there should be any embezzlement by any officials, such officers should not only be made to refund but should equally be prosecuted.

Conclusion

A good house needs a good foundation. Any house that is built on sand cannot last long but a house built on concrete foundation lasts longer. This illustration applies to educational system of any nation. Pre-primary education is the actual foundation upon which the other levels are built. Therefore, if the suggestions made in this paper are strictly followed, the quality of Pre-primary education in this country will be improved and every child, especially in the rural areas, will benefit and the problem of only few children having access to Pre-primary education in Nigeria will be over.

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