

# PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION: A VEHICLE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

There have been so many questions about the child and early childhood education. The child is the product of his total environment and the curriculum of pre-primary school should follow the child's national inclination. The curriculum of this level of education must be geared towards the needs of the child and the society at large. The foundations must be strong enough to enable the child face the challenges ahead. This research paper therefore examined the curriculum of pre-primary education system to see whether it conforms with the idea of national development or not. It also examined the attitude of private education entrepreneurs to see whether they are only for profit making (underdevelopment) or have the interest of the child and the nation at heart (development). The study

discovered that the present curriculum of primary education in Nigeria is good and relevant and if properly implemented would serve as a good basis for not only the development of the pupils but also for the effective national development. The study also confirmed that majority of private owners of pre-primary schools are discharging their duties in addition to making money like any other private business.

## **Introduction**

Three types of Pre-primary Institutions could be identified. The day care centres or creche that provide technical care and services for children without any strict academic work. In most cases children whose parents are too busy at work; those children who are too stubborn at home and those children who need companionship due to one reason or the other which may include space to play and who to play with. There is no age limit and duration could be between 7.am and 9 p.m depending on when it is convenient for the parents to pick them.

The second type is the Nursery School, which came in focus with the activities of Jean Baptist Firming, a French philanthropist who during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century observed the neglect on children by working mothers. His observations led to the development of programmes for Nursery School by different non-governmental organizations. This was why according to Frasier (1956) the U.S.A. Federal Government sponsored Nursery Education Programme during the First World War to cater for the children whose mothers were actively engaged in the war and in related industries.

The third category is the kindergarten, which is for children of between ages 4 to 6 years, whose brain is ready to accommodate academic work preparatory for the primary school curriculum. A German scholar Froebel was the first to establish a kindergarten school in 1840 at Blackenburg. Although it was not patronized at that time, the German communities in United States of America spread the programme using Montessori method instead of Froebelian Method.

In Nigeria today the three types of pre-primary education are noticeable in almost all private primary institutions, with the Nursery type taking the lead. The names Daycare and Kindergarten are no longer frequently used. In most cases the signboard or signpost of most schools in Nigeria read Nursery and Primary School, but when you investigate further you will discover that all three categories of pre-primary education are available.

## **Review of Literature**

Education of the child or childhood education is very important. Training the child is like laying solid foundation for a good building. If the education of a child is well planned for, it's like the Biblical adage of building on a rock. In pre-colonial Nigeria, education of the child was jointly taken care of by the immediate family of the child, the extended family and the society or community where the child belonged.

Today, the situation is different, the child starts school as early as 1 year, presently referred to as preparatory class or sometimes the child start at the age of one month or thereabout in a Nanny's house popularly called **"Day Care Centre", or Crèche**

There are various research studies on pre-primary education, the development of young children and the type of environment, which could facilitate their maximum development. (Isaacs, 1930; Gazelle 1954). The research of Gardner (1962) was on the reasons why mothers in England send their children to pre-primary school. He came out with the following eight reasons: -

- (i) Space to play
- (ii) Need for companionship
- (iii) Provision of equipment
- (iv) Preparation for group life in infant school
- (v) Feeding difficulties or backwardness;
- (vi) Need of mother to work;
- (vii) Mother's ill-health; and
- (viii) Child's health.

On their own part Foster and Headly (1965) studying American Kindergarten education listed some of the factors which could be responsible for the type of Nursery School which a society may need as: -

- (i) The demands and expectations of that society;
- (ii) The philosophy of the teacher and/or the school;
- (iii) The age range of pupils;
- (iv) The ability range of the pupils;
- (v) The number of pupils enrolled and the ratio of boys to girls;
- (vi) The length of the yearly and the daily sessions;
- (vii) The physical plant;
- (viii) The geographical location; and
- (ix) The education and strengths of the teacher.

The National Policy on Education (1998) defined pre-primary education as education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary school. It listed the following eight points as the purpose of this level of education: -

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

The curriculum of pre-primary school must prepare the children for all round development. This was why Awoniyi (1991) listed the following essential needs:

- (a) Physical need, whereby the child activities, the sensory motor skills through the use of games and play materials;
- (b) Social and emotional need for cultivation of self-control, self-confidence, love and cordiality in interpersonal relationships.
- (c) Intellectual need: The need to acquire personal autonomy in discovering the things of his environment and to develop his conceptional skills.

- (d) Aesthetic Need: This involves learning and appreciations of artistic works, music and beauty. Children of pre-school age are curious, active in mind and they learn spontaneously especially through plays.

There is no doubt that the objectives of this level of education not only prepare a smooth transition to the primary level but also lessened the burden of parents as where to keep their kids during the working hours. It was not unrelated to these objectives that the curriculum of this level of education was prepared at different times first by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1987 titled "the Curriculum Guidelines for Nigerian pre-primary (Nursery) Schools", and Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited published its "Teachers' Guide and Scheme of Work for Nursery Schools" in 1988. The two published works formed the basis of a sound education given to pupils at this level of education; until the Universal Basic Education was introduced in October 1999. It is unfortunate that the USE did not provide for this level of education. One would have expected that pre-primary education should be the first thing to be provided for by this programme. The Universal Basic Education scheme is free and universal to all children from ages six to fifteen, accommodating them from primary school to junior secondary school.

In preparing the curriculum of Pre-primary Education NERDC observed that the objective of a good nursery programme is to engage 3 to 5 year old children in constructive play and that learning should take place informally. Activities or experiences that promote incidental learning through play should be used for the development of the child. This was why it divided the Nursery Education Curriculum into 3 stages in the following order:

#### **Age Group and Equivalent Terms**

Age	Terms
3-4 years	Nursery I
3-5 years	Nursery II
5-6 years	Nursery III

The curriculum guidelines caters for the following identified needs:

- (i) Physical needs
- (ii) Socio-emotional need
- (iii) Intellectual needs
- (iv) Aesthetic needs
- (v) Children with special needs

It further prescribed the following subjects to be taught using appropriate teaching aids and methods for each age group:

- (i) Creative Arts
- (ii) Social Norms;
- (iii) Physical and Health Education;
- (iv) Language and Communication Skills;
- (iv) Mathematical Skills; and
- (v) Scientific and Reflective Thinking.

NERDC regarded the 'Guide' as a plan of action that will enable teachers to understand the significance of Nursery Education and stimulate them on how to provide a learning programme

especially suited to Nigerian children. It equally stressed the need for lesson plans, learning resources, evaluation guide, regular meetings, proper staffing, school library, school buildings health care and parental education, noting that the guide was designed on the concept that teachers and parents will cooperate in the education of the children by seeing themselves as partners in progress. It is hoped that if the curriculum guidelines are strictly followed will lead to a better tomorrow for the child and Nigerian society.

According to Noah (1995) development has to do with the realization of the potential of human personality, social integration and collective newness. The factors which embrace this realization while including economic factors like getting food, clothing, jobs and equity- in the distribution of income also embrace others like adequate education, freedom of speech and genuine political, economic independence of the state. He concluded that, however well endowed a nation is, if there is a lack of education, organization and discipline, development does not take place in it.

Going by the above submission, it becomes necessary for a child to be well prepared for the challenges ahead, which will eventually lead to national development. If a child is not well prepared, the foundation will be weak and as such will not be able to cope with his future responsibilities, which in turn could lead to national under-development as against the national development, expected. The mere fact that the nation has witnessed prostitution, armed robbery, religious intolerance, squalor, diseases and election rigging indicate that Nigeria is still highly underdeveloped.

The child's mind is soft and if the curriculum is not good enough could lead to anti-social behaviour on the part of the child. This was why Fafunwa (1980) stated that the curriculum of the nursery school should follow the child's natural inclination. For instance as a child learns fundamental truths, concepts and manipulative skills, he begins to want to change things within his environment; he is highly imaginative and creative.

It was based on the child's positive education that could lead to national development that the following hypotheses were generated:

- H<sub>01</sub> The relationship between pre-primary education curriculum and national development is not significant.
- H<sub>02</sub> There is no significant relationship between pre-primary school curriculum and the over all course content of pre-primary education in Lagos State.
- H<sub>03</sub> There is no significant relationship between the pre-primary education curriculum and the academic development of pre-primary school children in Lagos State.
- H<sub>04</sub> There is no significant relationship between the infrastructural facilities available in most pre-primary schools and pupil's readiness to learn in Lagos State.
- H<sub>05</sub> The relationship between the attitude of pre-primary school owners towards money making and the discharge of their duty is not significantly different.

### Population

One hundred (50 head teachers and 50 teachers) of private nursery/primary schools randomly selected from 10 Local Government Areas of Lagos State were used for the study out of which 29 head teachers and 41 teachers returned their duly completed questionnaires.

### Instrument and Instrumentation

The designed instrument for this study was named Pre-Primary Education Curriculum Assessment (PPECA) questionnaire comprising 25 items, which were rated one by one on a five point scale as: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The designed instrument was vetted by ten educationists at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka - Lagos, Nigeria.

Questionnaire was the only instrument used. It was personally designed by the researcher. It is made up of 25 items divided into two sections, A and B. Section A for the biodata of the respondents while section B which is made up of 5-point Likert scale type sought the opinion of the respondents about the hypotheses formulated.

The first draft of the questionnaire was given to some lecturers for correction and panel beating and it was modified along the line of their recommendations, which help to ensure that the instrument has both content and construct validities. To determine its reliability, few copies of the 'first sets of print outs were administered to twenty of the two groups of respondents. The data collected were analysed with the

use of correlation coefficient using split-half method. It yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.83. This coefficient is a measure of reliability of the instrument. This therefore ensures that the instrument is of high reliability.

**Procedure**

The questionnaire was administered during the third term of year 2001/2002 session.

Since subjects were drawn from private nursery/primary schools they were advised to be sincere in answering the questionnaire. The investigator personally handed over the questionnaire to each subject and patiently waited until it was completed. 30 subjects did not respond immediately and therefore their questionnaires did not form part of the present study.

**Method of Analysis**

The differential statistical tools used for testing the hypothesis comprises of chi-square and t-test.

**Results**

The study focused on Pre-primary Education Curriculum as a vehicle for National Development.

**Hypothesis 1**

N	Df	X-Level	X <sup>2</sup> -Calc.	X <sup>2</sup> -Crit	Decision Rule
70	2	0.05	4.14	5.99	H <sub>0</sub> , Not Rejected

The table shows that the calculated value of chi-square (x<sup>2</sup>) is 4.14 while the critical or table value is 5.99. Since the calculated value of 4.14 is lower than the critical value of 5.99, the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This implies that the relationship between pre-primary education curriculum and national development is not significant.

**Hypothesis 2**

	X	SO	U	Df	T-Crit.	T-Crit.	Decision Rule
Teaching	1.07	0.41	29	68	0.69	2.00	Accept
Hm	1.00	0.42	41				Ho <sub>2</sub>

X-Level = 0.05

From the above table, it could be seen that the calculated t-value is 0.69 while the corresponding critical value is 2.00 at 0.05 level of significance and 68 degrees of freedom. Since the calculated value of t is lower than the critical value, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The implication of this is that, the relationship between the pre-primary education curriculum and the overall course content of nursery schools in Lagos State is not significant.

**Hypothesis 3**

N	Df	X-level	X <sup>2</sup> -Calc.	X <sup>2</sup> -Crit	Decision
70	4	0.05	1.73	9.49	Reject Ho <sub>3</sub>

For the third hypothesis, the calculated X<sup>2</sup> value is 1.73 and the table value is 9.49 at 0.05 level of significance and 4 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis of no significant difference is not rejected because the calculated X<sup>2</sup> is higher than the critical value. This means that there is no significant relationship between the pre-primary education curriculum and the academic development of pre-primary school children in Nigeria.

**Hypothesis 4**

N	Df	X-level	X <sup>2</sup> -Calc.	X <sup>2</sup> -Crit	Decision
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70	2	0.05	0.045	5.99	Ho <sub>4</sub> Not Rejected
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From the above table, the calculated  $X^2$  value is lower than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance and 2 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This implies that there is no significant relationship between the infrastructural facilities available in most pre-primary schools and pupils' readiness to learn.

### Hypothesis 5

N	Df	X-level	X <sub>j</sub> <sup>1</sup> -Calc.	X <sup>2</sup> -Crit	Decision
70	2	0.05	28.18	5.99	Reject Ho <sub>5</sub>

The fifth null hypothesis of no difference is rejected. This is because the calculated  $X^2$  value is greater than the critical  $X^2$ -value. The implication of this is that there is a significant relationship between the attitude of private pre-primary school owners towards money-making and the discharge of their duties. In other words the pre-primary school owners are not only interested in money-making as is generally assumed by the public but are also discharging their duties as expected.

### Discussion of Result

The relationship between pre-primary education curriculum and national development is not significant. This means that the curriculum is good and relevant and if properly implemented would serve as good basis for not only the development of the pupils but also for the effective national development, This is in line with the observation of Sofolahan (1987) when he stated that the composition and structure of the primary school curriculum/modules will enable all teachers to teach the same topics in detail while aiming at achieving the same objectives and practicing the same learning activities. This will in effect remove lack of uniformity in educational practices in the different parts of the federation. By implication this means developing the pupils at the same rate thereby leading to individual and national development.

The relationship between the pre-primary education curriculum and the over-all course contents of pre-primary schools in Nigeria is not significant. The second hypothesis is a further confirmation and re-enforcement on the first hypothesis. It also throws more light in the area of what is taught and what is expected to be taught at this level of education. In other words most schools are adhering to teaching what they are expected to teach which is a reflection of the burriculum. This was why Sofolahan (1987) agreed that equivalent of attainment can be made on the certificate so issued due to the fact that all teachers (by using modules) teach the same content, take their pupils through the same learning activities and use the same assessment technique to appraise and validate their pupils' learning.

There is no significant relationship between the pre-primary education curriculum and the academic development of pre-primary school children in Nigeria. In other words the curriculum content is a good predictor of academic development of the pupils at this level, i.e the curriculum is not only suitable but also serves as a good instrument for the proper laying of academic foundation of\*the pupils on which they can effectively build on for a dependable future development. This was why the modules according to Sofolahan (1987) are presented in booklet form, with each booklet produced • for each class. This is done in consonance with the common practice of assigning a teacher to take charge of a class and to teach all subjects in that class.

There is no significant relationship between the infrastructural facilities available in most pre-primary schools and pupils' readiness to learn. This by implication means that the readiness of the pupils to learn is not a function of availability or other wise of infrastructural facilities all other things-being equal. Although infrastructural facilities are learning factors, yet this study shows that the readiness of the pupils to learn is a natural endowment and so the pupils can still learn in any environment they found themselves provided that there are no constraining factors beyond their efforts or ability to cope. This explains why some pupils in mushroom unrecognized and unregistered pre-primary schools performing outstandingly. The National Policy on Education agreed that education is an expensive social service and that financing of education is a joint responsibility of the Federal, State and Local Governments and the Private Sector. However the area to be effectively monitored is the primary school sector.

There is a significant relationship between the attitude of private pre-primary owners towards money-making and the discharge of their duties. This shows that majority of private owners of pre-primary schools are discharging their duties in addition to making money like any other private business. The National Policy on Education stated that government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and other organizations in establishing schools and given qualitative education to the young ones. The government equally put up inspectorate division with qualified staff to look into the activities of private schools. To this end, it will be pretty difficult for these schools to teach contrary to the prepared modules (curriculum).

### **Conclusion**

Pre-primary education is noticeable in almost all private primary schools in Nigeria. Presently, some government primary schools have started introducing this level of education. This was why some state governments regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education as well as ensure that the staff of this level of education is well trained. The present study confirmed that the curriculum of pre-primary education in Nigeria is good and relevant, it is a good predictor of academic development of the pupils and that the teachers are teaching what they are expected to teach. Not only that the private educational entrepreneurs at this level are discharging their duties as expected. Thus one can conclude that although the National Policy on Education left the provision of pre-primary education to private and voluntary enterprises, its supervisory roles is efficient enough to ensure that the curriculum is well implemented and since the curriculum is planned to take care of the physical, intellectual, aesthetic, needs of the children as well as those with special needs i.e. gifted and socio-economically deprived children and those with physical defects, mentally handicapped and those with emotional problems, one can conclude that pre-primary education is a vehicle for national development.

### **Recommendations**

It is necessary for the government to be actively involved in terms of finance, supervision, participation, monitoring and provision of teaching aids amongst others.

The establishment and inclusion of pre-primary education in and as a pre-requisite to Universal Basic Education will encourage the public to be more serious about sending their children to school at an early age thereby aiding them to build a solid foundation for their academic pursuit in life.

It is advisable that the Government monitoring team regulates the fees charged by the pre-primary school owners as a means of curbing their excesses in term of charging exorbitant fees. •

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