

# IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES IN NURSERY EDUCATION; PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the implementation issues in Nursery Education: Problems and prospects. Education transmits worthwhile values to individuals who are exposed to it. Nursery Education is the education for children between 0-6 years of age. It covers Early Child Care (ECC), Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE), etc. It should provide a smooth transition from home to the school. Government in Nigeria bid to ensure the success of this, raised some objectives for Nursery Education in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and issues for implementation such as the establishment of pre-primary Education in existing schools and provision of teacher education for that level. However, the implementation is beset by problems of infrastructure, professional teachers, awareness, text books, etc. Expectations are that pre-primary education has come to stay with the hope that these infrastructures will improve, necessary books produced and professional teachers made available to ensure growth and development of the nursery education. The recommendation is that every child should start with nursery education for better production of true leaders of tomorrow.

## **Introduction**

Ordinarily, education is about a system by which one generation imparts the ideals and cultural practices of its society to the next generation in an unending process (Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PDE) 103, 2007). Still on, education could be seen as the transmission of what is worthwhile to individuals to make them knowledgeable and contributing members of the society (Peters, 1972-in Aguba, 2006).

Categorically Nursery / pre-primary education is the early childhood education. It refers to the education given in an educational institution to children before their entering into the primary school (NPE, 2004). This form of education could also be looked upon as the education given to children between 0 — 6 years (pre-school years) just before the start of formal primary schooling or before the age at which children are generally expected to attend schools (Maduewesi, 2005).

Nursery education is not mainly about reading, writing and arithmetic but a deliberate national framework which has provisions for Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCE) for a smooth entry into the primary school (Nasir and Ors, 2007). Due to its low profile the, nursery education in Nigeria started making waves through the activities of the colonial officials who saw the need, as masters, in sending their children to such a separate school system (Associateship Certificate in Education (ACE), 1999). Although, given to believe that the only existing levels of education were the primary, secondary and the tertiary schools, Nigerians started eyeing nursery education from the activities of the said Colonial officials. During that period, it seemed to be preserve of the children of the Colonial officials to attend pre-primary schools (ACE, 1999).

Nursery education is classified into day care / crèche (0-2 yrs), pre-primary/play ground (3-4 yrs) and the nursery / kindergarten (5-6 yrs) (Nasir & Ors, 2007).

## **Objectives of Nursery Education**

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004 P.11) stated that the establishment of the nursery education in Nigeria has 8 points of agenda to accomplish. These are

- (i) Effect a smooth transition from home to 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 the farms, in the markets, offices, etc),

- (iv) Inculcate social norms,
- (v) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.
- (vi) Develop 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.

Be that as it may, the attainment of these goals became very critical for the educational and overall development of every Nigerian child (Nasir & Ors, 2007). That is why to instill life into this project (nursery education), efforts were directed into putting words into actions through the implementation issues.

### **Implementation Issues**

At the inception of this new idea (nursery/preprimary education), the Federal Government of Nigeria believed that the implementation of certain issues would amount to the realization of the goals of the nursery school education. Accordingly, the NPE, (2004) spelled out these issues as:

- (a) Establishment of pre-primary sections in existing schools and encourages both community and 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 the language of the immediate community; and to this end, will (i) develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, and (ii) produce text books in Nigerian languages.
- (d) 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; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end, the teacher - pupil ratio shall be 1:25.
- (e) Set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country and,
- (f) Ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities.

The mouth - watering nature of the above implementation issues notwithstanding, not much have been realized and felt by the people and the government in relation to the nursery education in Nigeria, suggestive of an intention beset by acute problems.

### **Problems**

Plum benefits are yet to reach the Nigerian populace over the implementation issues of the nursery education. Reasons range from lack of awareness on the communities, administrators and other stakeholders, inadequate facilities and personnel, lack of transparency and commitments on the part of those responsible for its implementation at [lie Federal and State levels (Tahir, 2006 in Nasir & Ors, 2007).

But by far, the greatest challenge appears to be the teacher - factor. In other words, many of the nursery school teachers do not seem to have acquired the adequate professional preparation required to handle the nursery education classes. Besides, by merging these classes with the regular basic education, the teachers tend to use the same old methods in these pre-school classes they have been using in the regular primary classes. This calls for the retraining of teachers already in service. Moreover, accepted that nursery schools could now be seen in most of our existing primary schools, they still suffer from inadequate classrooms with poor sitting arrangements for the children (Bathurst, 1905 in Van, 1974).

Because of the nonchalance on the part of the government, Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education are yet to offer relevant courses for would-be nursery school teachers. Austria started with a training college for kindergarten teachers (Froebel, 1837 in Van, 1974).

.So far, in Nigeria nursery education is still being taught in English language and not in our mother- tongue or language of the immediate environment. Elaturoti (1991) had proposed the use of beginner books, fiction and non-fiction books as well as children's library. None of these instructional materials are in use.

Play is the highest level of child development (Froebel 1837 in Van 1974). Hardly is this adopted due to inadequate space for the children to operate. Teaching of the children is not based on

official curricula but one's ability to keep the children busy within the stipulated time which often revolved around singing and clapping.

The absence of full participation of the government in the running of the nursery education in Nigeria has created a big vacuum for the provision of adequate and proper facilities required. The private sector is in great control - milking the people dry and making the project unaffordable for many its main objective is income maximization and not really quality service delivery (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2001 in Maduewesi, 2005).

### **Prospects**

Despite the problems already highlighted, nursery school education has come to stay. Early pioneers of nursery education such as Oberlin, Marbeau, Froebel, Owen, Montessori, etc sang the same tune and are today eulogized for leaving their foot prints in the sand of time. And because the early years of a child are too vital to be left unattended to, (Plowden, 1967 in Van, 1974) opined that there are critical periods in the life of a child when learning is at its height. This is why Austria in 1872, adopted nursery school education as part of the country's education system.

For the same reason too, between 1987 & 1990, Nigeria in conjunction with UNICEF and Barnard Van Leer Foundation conducted a pilot survey on establishing ECC facilities in Oyo (Oyo State), Owo (Ondo State), Ogun (Osun State), Yamaltu/Deba (Bauchi State) and Calabar (Cross River State) for children below 3 years (Maduewesi, 2005).

As a way forward, Nigeria also adopted the 1990 World Conference on Education for all (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand. Added to this; was the FGN/UNICEF (1991 -1996) programme of cooperation in which ECE was accorded full attention. When in the year 2000, EFA time target was extended to 2015 in Dakar in a World Education Forum to expand and improve on ECE especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, Nigeria was conspicuously in attendance. Earlier on, Nigeria had infused nursery education in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) as a demonstration of efforts towards the realization of the goals of ECE.

Again in 1990, Nigeria accepted and indigenized an 1989 UN General Assembly on the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). This convention defined education as, the right of all children. It required all nations to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children (Maduewesi, 2005). For 20 years now, Nigeria has produced two national curricula for pre-primary education which are the curriculum guideline for Nigerian pre-primary (nursery) school (NERDC, 1987) and the Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) curriculum (NERDC, 1974). The ECCDE curriculum was approved for use in 1994. It was reviewed in the year 2000 to infuse some emergent global issues such as HIV / AIDS, peace and child right to education as well as gender sensitivity (Maduewesi, 2005). In all, Nigeria has succeeded in translating global goals into national goals (Maduewesi & Nneji, 1993).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the importance of this paper, recommendations are thus stated:

1. Nursery Education as the root of the education system, should no longer be trivialized by the Federal Government of Nigeria but that the government should courageously begin to heavily inject fresh funds into it for the brighter future of the Nigerian youths.
2. The year 2008 needs to be made the year when nursery education is really adopted as part of our national education system. Austria did this in 1872.
3. Majority funding, quality control and policy guidelines should be the focal point of the government than allowing the private sector to continue commercializing and restricting it to the Urban Centres.
4. If government could retake schools in the 80s, the same spirit should be fostered in this case of nursery education which basically, is the first among all the other levels of education.
5. Enlightenment programmes should be organized to educate everybody on the need to have every child acquire the nursery education first before the others.
6. ECE should constitute a course of study for our Universities and Colleges of Education to enhance the production of ECE qualified teachers so that the saying that "no education (nation) can rise above the qualities of its teachers" should continue to guide us, and
7. Every Nigerian child must be made to acquire nursery education first. It should also be made

to be a basic requirement for entry into primary school.

### **Conclusion**

Nursery Education has been found to be interesting and hope - rising. A good knowledge of it would amount to assurance to academic freedom and excellence.

Tactical avoidance of nursery education by the government is not the way out. Rather, it should be embraced with both hands wide open. Mere government pronouncements on lofty ideas about nursery education are misleading. Once these cautions are taken, then, the goals would have been realized.

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