
TRANSFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

¹Ibrahim, A.B. and ²Yahya, U.M.

¹Department of Primary Education Studies

²Department of Educational Psychology

^{1&2}Federal College of Education, Yola

E-mail: ibrahimbuba@gmail.com, yahyaumarmagaji@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Education has a great influence in human development. It is this development that brings about change in the educational structures. Nursery education as we all know need to be transformed since it is the basis of our educational level. Although little or no effort has the government and private individuals made in maintaining the policy standard. Some quality reform strategies were mentioned and discussed extensively; issues and challenges at stake were also discussed.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Pre-Primary Education, Human Development and Transformation

Introduction

The importance of education is a basic and essential phenomenon in the history of human existence. Education is the key to improve livelihood, healthcare, nutrition, right to life which ever politically, socially, economically, morally religiously, observe the rights and privileges of human existence. The whole idea is essentially to improve the quality life of an individual regardless of gender differences. Article XI of the UN convention –and – the OAU charter on the rights of the child says; **“the education of the child shall be directed to; the promotion and development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potentially.”** Well, on obvious reasons whether what is rightly said here, has rightly been implemented.

The world is globally transforming in every aspect of human life technologically, and education of the child is the fundamental area of concern because human rights education is empowerment tools and its very nature should be a positive intervention in the lives of children.

The Concept of Transformation

The transformation used here connotes the act or process of change at any level in our educational system but specifically at the nursery level of education. Human being is a “reformer” always trying to accommodate unyielding circumstances and creating new ones in an attempt to realize new dreams.

Change may be an inevitable and necessary process of survival and progress in the society. It shaped our belief and value system and which influences the way we interpret the world and happenings around us. We, therefore, tend to react and interpret change differently.

It is common to find the same change accepted by some and resisted by others, simply because of the way it has been interpreted (Sarason 1979). The fact that most changes affecting the educational system originate from outside does not mean that such changes are beyond the control of schools. What appears more important is a better understanding and consideration of the relationship between education and society. The rapidity of social change today, coupled with the significance of the problems on ground and the realization of the critical importance of education, changes can only take place through involvement of government, stakeholders community participation, parents, and there should be commitment and ownership are important considerations in the process or implementing changes. This fundamental change should commence from nursery education for better quality and good outputs. The productiveness of our nursery education depends squarely on the caliber of teachers and teaching that is found in it. According to Mallum (1990), we need teachers different from the majority of those that we have today. We indeed need teachers that are better trained as regards academic qualifications and professional skills. Therefore, this well give highly trained teachers to start the basis and to give children the proper orientation for life.

Government Agenda on Nursery Education

The National Policy on Education (2004) explains early childhood education, also known as pre-primary education as **“the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 years prior to their entering the primary school”** this definition has been sounding in our newspapers, books every time but nothing has been taken seriously. The facts that every successive government has its agenda on education, but this level of education should not be neglected. The National Policy on Education (2004) indicates that the government objectives of pre-primary education are among other things, **“to effect a smooth transition from the home to the primary school”**. The policy further indicates that the government shall:-

- Encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education
- Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education.
- Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.
- Develop the orthography or many more Nigerian languages and.
- Produce text books in Nigerian languages.
- 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;
- Regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education.

The concern of federal and state government in this sector of the system is to improve standards and encourage genuine private participation in providing adequate care and supervision for children. The quality assurance in education, the capacity building programmes, workshops/seminar and conferences were encouraged at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and not at the pre-primary level. The truth about our education is that the government and the society have no regards for these potential children. Therefore for better tomorrow, we have to reform the basis which is the pre-school education.

Quality Reform in Nursery Education

So many issues have dwelt on our system of education most especially our basic focus on nursery education which has been proliferated. Some of the areas we need to critically reform so that we can get the best quality both inputs and outputs include;

- **Quality of Teachers/Head Teachers:** For any organization to be productive and to have efficient and effective output products, the input process must have been good. It is applicable that whosoever wants to establish nursery school, should have received specialized training in pre-primary education with at least 5 years experience and a holder of NCE Pre-Primary/Primary or equivalent universities degree. The teachers should obtain any of the following which is acceptable – B. Ed, B.A (Education), B.Sc. (Education), Diploma (Montessori Certificate) etc. F. M.E, (2010). The system if rightly carried out and implemented, certainly the country will produce better generation.
- **Establishment:** No pre-primary educational institution may open without the approval of the State Ministry of Education. This will certainly eradicate continuous proliferation of nursery school in this country.
- **Training of Teachers:** With the paradigm shift from monitory to a new operation model of quality assurance practice, teachers need to be oriented and be trained to meet modern challenges in areas of good delivery, boost better performance. There should be quarterly training of teachers of pre-school on capacity building programmes, seminars/conferences and workshop for updating themselves with the current changes in our educational system.
- **Inspection:** Pre-primary schools should be regularly inspected by the officers of the State Ministry of Education to maintain standard.
- **Physical Facilities:** The Federal Ministry of Education F.M.E. (2010), gave a guidelines on how physical facilities should be appropriately used, among other things, pre-primary schools building should conform with standard that classroom size should be 12m by 6.5m to accommodate about 25 children (30sq. ft.) and each classroom should be adequately ventilated and well lighted. The classroom

must have storage facilities and build-in cupboards. The school should have two access doorways to serve as alternative exit and a veranda on either side of the classroom. There should be a separate staffroom, office for the head teacher, and first aid units with adequate water supply. Toilet facilities is paramount and should be provided for both pupils and teachers.

- **Furniture:** Provision of chairs and tables suitable for different ages and sizes should be of polished wood or Formica surfaces, chairs and tables should be of light materials, and carry no sharp edges. There should be a large table with drawers for teachers use. Provision should be made for books, racks and toy storage in every classroom.
- **Play Ground:** It is important that play cuts across cognitive, imaginative and motor activities, using them all and weaving them together. Through playful activity, the children organized experiences and cognitive abilities in such a way that they generate a variety of ideas. Therefore, pre-school is expected ideally to be well-fenced-in playground that has varying in size according to the enrolment of the school for security purposes. The play ground should be grassed and installed with facilities for climbing, jumping, pulling, handing, swinging, balancing, rocking e.t.c. these facilities should ensure safety of children.
- **Records:** Statutory administrative and academic records which should be kept in pre-primary schools are as follows: cash records, administration register, log book, visitors book, individual pupil's continuous assessment records, all must be ensured and properly kept.

Issues and Challenges in Early Childhood Education

There are issues that are at stake in our education industries, most especially pre-school education, and if we don't address it squarely, the quality provision we all need in pre-school education will not be objectively achieved.

Among other issues are the professional and competent teachers in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE). The government should make it mandatory for Colleges of Education and some specified universities in this country to offer courses in specialized areas of Early Childhood Education; this will minimize non-professional teachers in this area. The location and the environment where these schools are sited is much concern. In fact, you find some schools are not accessible by road because they are sited in marsh or rocky areas especially during rainy season. At times these rocky places serve as breeding ground for dangerous reptiles. This may not be the only reasons, some houses; the garages are now converted into nursery schools with no ventilation and toilet facilities coupled with other facilities. Churches and mosques are places of worship but now converted to premises of nursery school without government intervening into this unnatural human behaviour with the tendency of commercializing education.

Another area of concern is the government commitment in this sector is very important because they are the future leaders of this country. Their education should be quality based and for sustainable development which covers good quality teachers, sizable school premises self encouragement from government and parents, teaching facilities etc. The physical facilities needed in these schools are not provided at times not found completely, in many situations you find a residential house of two rooms is been converted into nursery school no ventilation and proper exit incase of fire outbreak, no playing ground or recreational park for these children.

Nursery education is fundamental to child's development and issues lamented are serious and challenging, the government and parents should seat up.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Change is important and it is very necessary to transform our educational system right from the nursery school level because that is where the basic level of our education starts. The National Policy on Education spelt out requirement necessary for any pre-school education and for better quality but do not strictly adheres to the policy. Some areas of reform were mentioned where the government should pay more attention. Issues and challenges were raised as basic focus of both government and private individuals.

Supervision and monitoring are among the impediments that brought about proliferation of nursery schools in this sector of education. The government in collaboration with Ministry of Education should set up a monitoring team and school inspectors to go round in checking this menace and to ensure that the standards are maintained.

Pre-primary schools that do not comply with these directives both public and private should be closed down, to be reopened only when the provider complies with the laid down standards. The lofty nature of the objective of pre-primary education policy, there is the need for the federal, state and local government to ensure that relevant facilities are available in both rural and urban areas. The federal government should take positive steps to create various programmes that will produce teachers who specialize in early childhood education and this can be achieved by offering various incentives to such teacher education candidates.

References

- Federal Ministry of Education (2004). National Policy on Education, Lagos NERDC Press.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2010). Guidelines on Pre-Primary Education, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Education, (Primary Education Section).

Mallum, M. P. (1990). Towards a Functional Primary Education for Nigeria, Jos Ehindero Press.

Sarason, S. B. (1979), The Culture of the School and The Problem of Change, Boston, Allyn & Bacon.

United Nation Convention – And – The O.A.U. Chapter on Rights of the Child UNICEFS Nigeria Office in Collaboration with the United Nation Information Centre's, Lagos.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Ibrahim, A.B. and Yahya, U.M. (2013), Transforming Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *J. of Education and Policy Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Pp. 13 -18.
