

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (NURSERY) IN NIGERIA

Dr. (Mrs) Celestina Imade Harry
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt
Choba, NIGERIA
Email: celestina_imade@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Pre-primary education is as old as the Western education. Nursery education started since 1842 by Thomas Birch Freeman and William De Graft when it was introduced into the church to cater for children during the missionary stay in Badagry. The Nigerian Educational System recognizes the importance of the little children that is why the National Policy on Education (2004) stated the purpose of this type of education. Although many of our schools today do not implement the policy to the later. This paper tends to investigate the historical beginning of nursery education in Nigeria and also treated the development policy of early childhood education from 1960 till date and the socio-political impact that gingered up activities towards a National Policy on Education as well as Guidelines, Training and Purposes of Early Childhood Education.

INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of the Republic of Nigeria (1977) and (1981) respectively, in that document, pre-primary education is described as education given in an educational institution to children of 3-5 years, prior to their entering the primary school. It is conceived of as nursery education. Pre-primary education is labeled as pre-primary education in the current National Policy of Education (2004 revised edition) and it is defined as the education given in an educational institution to children aged three to five plus prior to their entering the primary schools. As stated in the policy document, the purpose of nursery education includes, among others:

- i. Providing a smooth transition from the home to school
- ii. Preparing the child for the primary school level of education
- iii. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.
- iv. Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.
- v. Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play.
- vi. Teaching good habits, especially health habits.

Nursery Education

Nursery Education before Independence in 1960

The Home: Education is the cardinal programme of every society whether simple or complex, Nigerian traditional society is not an exception because it has always had a system of educating their young. In other words, Nigeria has educational provision for young children right from the beginning of the geo-political entity, that made up the present day country. Therefore,

nursery education in this context is not originated from Western World Meiziobi, K.A., Nwosu A.D. and Opara, J.M. 2008.

Before 1960 Nigeria's year of political independence from colonial rule, children aged 3-5 in the villages were given education informally either by parents relatives in their homes, by the community members in their neighbourhood, by members of the same religious groups such as Christians or Muslims. The nature of education given to these children within this age range followed the indigenous African pattern of child rearing or training (Obidi, 1990). In some villages even today, the same pattern of child-rearing still exists. Some scholars describe it as follows, that children learn the language of their immediate environment which is usually mother tongue such as, Kalabari, Ikwerre, Esan, Edo, Urobo, Ibo, Ibibio, Ijaw, Itselari, Yoruba, Igbira, Hausa, Kanuri, Nupe, Gwari, etc. These languages are learnt by the children at home and school both at work and at play. With these interaction some of these children become multilingual.

According to Omojuwa and Ajayi (1981) on the role of mothers as the 'Prime' teacher of the pre-school confirm these observations on pre-school age children in Nigeria in different ways. Usually children in the traditional Africa setting were close to mothers. They pick up the norms and traditions of the community from parents and neighbourhoods through approval and disapproval of behavior signified by punishment and rewards. Storytelling and communal practices enriched methods of promoting native culture. In each community, adults other than parents correct young ones in love. Moral education was acquired through both imposed discipline at first and later through self discipline from places of religious worship and through socialization. These and other processes were the informal forms of nursery education before independence. According to Durojaiye (1977, p.9) traditional child-rearing practices of Africa (Nigeria) have found their ways into modern pattern of nursery education often attached to primary schools where teachers operate as co-parents, the medium of instruction today is often English, contrary to mother tongue used in old Africa. It is a known fact these days that teacher influences moral behavior of children under their care as regards honesty hard work, punctuality and cleanliness. The school community has been gradually replacing the family and the neighbourhood community in this regard especially since the end of the second world war (1939-1945).

Sunday School Classes

Educating children aged 3-5 years through Christian missionaries and in Koranic schools during pre-independence years prepared way for organizing nursery classes soon after independence (1960-1976) and later the period of working on strategies towards qualitative nursery education between 1977 and 2000. During early period of the Christian missionary endeavours (1842-1925) the ultimate aim of the missionaries was to win converts. The Bible was the main source of inspiration for evangelizing and for training the young and the old. Through the Sunday school and orphanage programmes, the young child was exposed to the scriptures. He was taught singing, reading, dancing and writing along with the older folk grouped in a different class or in the mission compound.

However, with the advent of Western education in Nigeria, formalized nursery education began to spring up but few natives knew the value of nursery education at that period pre-nursery education started since the inception of education in 1842 by Mr. and Mrs William De Graft when it was introduced into the church to cater for children during the missionary exit to Badagry along with Rev. Thomas, Birch Freeman under the auspices of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission did arrived Badagry and planted the first ever nursery school called – The

Nursery of The Infant Church in 1846. In 1846 Rev. Hope Waddel arrived Calabar and established the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission. In 1857 the Church Mission Society (CMS) sent Rev. Ajayi Crowther and Rev. J.C. Taylor who arrived Onitsha for Missionary work. As the early Missionary work grew, so also the missionary nursery schools grew from one missionary station to the other.

Koranic Classes

Koranic classes admit primary school age children to study the Koran. Koranic lessons prepare the young child with basic training in Islamic education. By the 16th century when traditions had been accepted in Northern Nigeria – According to Fafuwa (1974, pp.50-61). Islamic traditions include the teaching of the Koran and Arabic. While the first stage of Koranic education may be regarded as an educational equivalent of the Western nursery class, the second stage, the primary level of the system. The Koranic students sat around their teachers to learn Koranic verses which were chanted and memorized in the same way as the Sunday School Pupil learned in Sunday School classes.

Nursery Education since 1960

Gradual Evolution of Modern Nursery/Primary School

Most expatriate/missionaries who came to Nigeria during this period sent their pre-school children to nursery school to be taught in Western tradition. The expatriates were largely Christian missionary and government officials from Europe, Canada and North America, some of the home-based lessons organized informally were into classes whose curriculum and syllabi. Since independence the expatriate proprietors accepted Nigeria children who could afford the cost of their education programmes into classes organized for their children. By the 1970's Nigerians also organized Nursery primary schools in similar pattern. Among such schools are: Norwegian International School Worji Road, Port Harcourt, Play Pen Port Harcourt – these school catered for Shell, Agip and other oil companies and their workers. One of such schools in the North is Therbow Nursery/Primary School in Zaria, it provides quality education for both Nigerians and expatriate children who choose to attend the school. The curriculum largely satisfies both Nigerian and Western culture.

The Socio-Political Impact that Gingered Up Activities Towards a National Policy on Education

The events that gingered up activities towards a national policy on education generally also affected nursery education politically the Richard's Constitution of 1945 divided the country into three regions (East, West and North). Each of these had a concentration of one of the three largest ethnic groups: East with Ibo, West with Yoruba and North with Hausa-Fulani. Socially, the ethnic groups influenced political parties formed along tribal sentiments. Eventually these had impact on government policies and education aspirations of the political groupings formed. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was led by Azikiwe, the Action Group (AG) was led by Awolowo and the Northern People's Congress was led by the Sardauna of Sokoto. These were the leaders that led political parties which controlled educational policies largely in each of the three regions provided for in the 1951 constitution enhanced by the regionalization policy of Macpherson. Macpherson's administration assigned increasing measures of responsibility to the region in 1951. Consequently, by 1954, Nigeria as a federation of three regions each with its power, had Lagos as the Federal Capital. The Western, Northern and Eastern regions, each took new steps in the management and control of education in their respective areas. The Western Region enacted an education law in 1954 which introduced Free Universal Primary Education (UPE) while the Eastern Region Followed Suit in 1956 and the Northern Region also published an education law in 1956. With this development several

commissions were set up in the 1960's to review education programmes in each region in preparation for Universal Primary Education (UPE). It is interesting to note that in all the committees and commissions set up in the fifties and sixties to review education programmes for specific region, or state or the federation in preparation for UPE and independence none except Taiwo's Commission (1968) reported concern about nursery education or early childhood education. Taiwo's Committee in its report to the government of the Western State in 1968 said,

“There should be encouragement and promotion of nursery education” (Fafunwa, 1974, p.233).

The education ordinance of 1926, 1942 and even of the fifties and sixties did not show government concern for management and control of nursery education. Government's concern was usually for primary, secondary and teacher education, and later higher education. Since the 1969 curriculum conference however, remarkable efforts have been made to show government's interest in educating young children of pre-primary school age group. During the curriculum conference the Women Group (WG) and the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) presented papers which attracted the attention of the organizers. In the women's paper presented by one Mrs. Omolou's remarked.

“Nursery education is a new introduction into the Nigeria educational system. Children from the age of two are admitted into nursery schools, where they remain until they are four and a half, at this age, they start primary education.”

The Women Group highlighted the need to review the types of institution and education which should exist in Nigeria to be able to achieve the aims listed. The idea of university, secondary, primary and nursery education was reflected in the memorandum on women's education listed in the memorandum were

1. Pre-primary institution (Nursery Schools)
2. Primary schools
3. Post primary institutions and
4. Tertiary institutions: Universities Technical Colleges (Adaralegbe, 1985, p.139)

The following remarks were also made under pre-primary institutions (nursery school) in the memorandum – women education. There are still people in various parts of the country who collect large number of children of pre-school age and keep them under unsuitable conditions, while they charge the parents daily for teaching them to recite letters of the alphabet and numbers. This has shown that there is need to provide proper nursery schools for children between the ages of three and five. It is recommended that such nursery schools should be attached to primary schools (Adaralegbe, 1969, 266-267).

During the national curriculum conference, 1969, the National Union of Teacher (NUT) also expressed a view that the Nigerian education system should have a definite structure beginning from pre-primary to university level. They remarked. “We consider as faulty the present system whereby it is possible to talk of primary education without talking of what comes before or after”.

The following structure were suggested: pre-primary, primary, post-primary/vocational apprenticeship 3-5, 6-12, 13-15. Secondary schools, 2 years – National University, General Grammar, Commercial Service 18-19. Technological, Professional Technical 13-17 and Teacher Education 19-22.

The NUT suggested in their presentation that government should begin to show concerns for education of the three to five years old. They strongly objected to the present system whereby

nursery schools are allowed to be established by individuals with varying degrees of sanitation, equipment. Teaching only existed in the cities. The teachers suggested that state-owned nurseries should be established throughout the federation, as a long term aim: however, for the present, only individuals who could establish nurseries to meet the state prescription of a nursery should be allowed to operate included in the NUT, recommendation were the following:

1. Purpose of nursery education to be a safe and secure place for children whose parents go to work.
2. For any child, his home should serve as a good base for his pre-school age. To ensure this, a home keeping child care and code of conduct course should be made compulsory for all persons who are sixteen years and above. This at least will ensure some basic uniformity in what the nation's children will be exposed to before they attain school age.

Another major recommendation at the curriculum conference of 1969 was that girls should be trained early to fulfil their roles as the boys. The implication of this is that both boys and girls should be exposed to the same learning experiences, even at the nursery school level (Adaralegbe 1985, pp.283-284).

Guidelines on Pre-primary Education

The National Policy of Education (1977) which evolved from the National Curriculum Conference 1969 provided in section 2, guidelines on pre-primary education which can be summarized into two parts:

Part A: The nature and role of pre-primary education (nursery schools).

Part B: The level of government participation in the organization and management of nursery education (quality control). Part A deals with the objective of pre-school education, its curriculum and guide to the teacher on what to teach and how to teach at this level for Part B. It is quality control by government.

The appropriate level of government will review and enforce education laws which relate to the establishment at nursery schools so as to ensure that those that are opened are well-run and that pre-primary teachers are qualified and other academic infrastructure provided (NPE, 1977, p.6:12).

In another federal government guideline, ministries of education should make regular inspections of nursery schools to ensure maintenance of high standards. The federal ministry of education published these additional guidelines later spell out again the objective of pre-primary education, its requirement for site, and implication for boarding or residential nursery school. Included were requirements for physical facilities playgrounds, furniture, fees, teachers qualifications, medium of instruction, books, records, handicapped children and closure of pre-primary institutions if they did not meet the requirements, religion and health inclusive (FMOE, 1980, pp.1-6).

Nursery School Population

The Federal Ministry of Education is aware of approved and unapproved nursery classes exist in Nigeria. According to studies and observations of some scholars for example Orebanjo (1980, p.13) said,

“Although private nursery primary schools had been in existence prior to the launching of the UPE scheme, the last two years witnessed nursery schools and pre-primary institutions mushrooming all over different parts of the country...”

Another scholar also agreed that

“there was proliferation of private pre-primary institutions indicative of the fact that the society is in need of nursery education which could also be called foundation education” (Awoniyi, 1978, pp.57-58).

In a one day conference organized by Teacher Education Department, in the University of Ibadan, on October 29, 1977. There was a report released, it was stated that more than twenty institutions from all over Oyo State alone sent representatives. Over twenty years after the conference, it would be a good guess that hundreds of private pre-primary institutions exist throughout the federation of scores of in every state, located especially in urban settlements. According to Harry (2015) only two nursery schools were well known in Kwara State in 1965, five years after Nigeria’s independence. These were located at Offa and Bacita. Thirty years later, in 1995, there were 74 approved nursery schools on the register of nursery schools in the state ministry of education male and female 17,762. Although no record of growth between 1995 and 2000 was provided, casual observation would indicate that the figures would be appreciably higher, presently there is no comprehensive nursery schools statistics covering all the states of the federation.

Training in Nursery Education Methods

Teacher trainings of 1940’s and the 1950’s emphasized infant methodology that encouraged utilizing the environment to create interest in learning for the young child. Organizers of nursery school got support from various sources to enhance the quality of their institutions since independence. These institutions included in their curricula infant methods and examined children the end of their course in the subject unfortunately by 1970s and 1980s, emphasis shifted from infant methods in teacher training colleges to higher elementary methods that is methodology for upper classes of the primary school. However attempts were made through the co-operation of university at ABU (Ahmadu Bello University and University of Ife to provide the missing link by creating experimental and research centres in the university to replace the lost methodology. For instance, recent studies and publication that enhance training in nursery school since 1960 – these include publications by Awoniyi (1975) and Oregbanjo (1980). They discuss nursery education in Oyo State, in the Northern states. The Institution of Education of ABU produced a publication on pre-primary school curriculum. The publication listed recommended nursery school activities after several seminars with staff of the local education officers in the Northern states were held in the department of educational foundations, university of Ilorin Oyedele (1999) and Abidogun (1999) carried out a surveys of nursery institutions in Kwara State and Oshun State respectively. Oludare (1995) in the same department studied parental expectation of pre-school institutions in Ondo State. Earlier in Minna Niger State Njoku (1988) studied curriculum content of nursery education in the state, and Durojaiye (1974) studied nursery education in an urban area in Nigeria – a case study of Ibadan metropolis. In 1980, the federal government via Ministry of Education listed the following as institutions which offered courses in pre-primary education.

- (a) Institute of education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- (b) Institute of Education Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- (c) Institute of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Choba
- (d) College of Education, University of Ife, Ife
- (e) College of Education, Minna
- (f) College of Education, Sokoto (FMOE, 1980, p.6)

Source of Support for Early Childhood Education

Besides the institutions: organization for early childhood education (OMEPE) a non-governmental organization contributed immensely to the quality of nursery schools in the Northern states and throughout the federation where branches were established between 1970 and 1980. It was very good support for UPE to maintain standards required in some states, serving as model schools for untrained and unqualified teachers and head teachers and proprietors. Another source of support for nursery education since independence, or rather since the introduction of UPE were publishers such as the Macmillan, Longmans and the University Press. These companies contributed significantly in publishing nursery materials at the initial stages of implementing the national policy on education in the early 1980s.

Changes in the Aims of Nursery Education

Is it possible to say that the aim of nursery, education changed over the years? This is an important and challenging question to guide educational planners for the 21st century. In earlier discussion, the aims of pre-primary education initially was to mould the child to become a practicing Christian or Muslim. It was also intended to prepare the child for life, just like primary education. In more recent times an additional aim was to organize classes as business venture. Even though this aim was not always declared as the major one by proprietors, but rather than that of preparing the child for overall development, the aim for economic gains was obvious. Another aim in recent times was to help working mothers shed the responsibility of child-minding while at work as stated in the National Policy on Education. The overriding aim of pre-primary education in Nigeria in 21st century should be to prepare the young child to face the realities and challenges of modern life, especially of modern science and technology in a rapidly changing society. The operation of all nursery schools should reflect the accepted values of the society, fear of God, virtues which ought to be inculcated in children right from the pre-primary school age as catalyst for national growth and development.

Purposes of Early Childhood Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria has four editions of the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 1998 & 2004). These four editions clearly spelt out the purpose of pre-primary education as:

- Effecting smooth transition from the home to the school.
- Preparing the child for the primary level of education.
- Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc).
- Inculcate in the child 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 and colours, shapes, forms etc. through play.

The purpose of pre-primary education is to prepare the children physically, emotionally, socially and mentally to enter primary 'one' one level. This preparation is considered the foundations for further psychological development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures have to be taken by government in order to achieve the above stated objectives:

- (i) Encouragement of private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education.

- (ii) Making provision in teacher training institutions for the production of specialist teachers in pre-primary education.
- (iii) Ensuring that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the local community.
- (iv) Ensuring that the main method of teaching in pre-primary institution will be through plays.
- (v) Regulating and controlling the operation of pre-primary education ensuring adequate training of staff and provision of essential equipment.
- (vi) Appropriate levels of government are required to review and enforce educational laws that will ensure that establish pre-primary schools are well-run, pre-primary teachers as well as well qualified, and other appropriate academic infrastructure provided, ministries of education are expected to ensure maintenance of high standard (NPE, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In order to ensure a good quality of nursery education in Nigeria, it is necessary for the government, private individuals, voluntary agencies and other stakeholders to consider the following suggestions.

- a. Good quality supervision by government, through ministries of education should ensure good quality supervision and best practices of nursery education in the country so as to enhance maximum standard. This has two dimensions namely external and internal according to Meziobi et al. (2008). Only professionals should be appointed as supervisors of schools.
- b. Nursery school teachers should avail themselves with on regular basis of the opportunity provided by professional programmes and activities. This will make them contribute meaningfully to the quality of teaching in the pre-primary school system.
- c. Officials of the ministries of education should visit and inspect the physical plant, the human and other resources on ground in a proposed nursery school and these are found to meet up with the stipulated standard and then the school can be approved for operation Micheal (2006) noted that in most cases, these visits are made a long time after the school had become operational and had been paying the prescribed taxes whether or not the infrastructure is adequate. By this, the officials find it difficult not to recommend the school for approval.
- d. Relevant curriculum that would meet the overall needs of children of nursery school age in Nigeria should be developed and implemented. Furthermore, the curriculum prescriptions should be guided by an articulate philosophy of nursery education.
- e. Adequate educational services should be provided in areas of school library service, basic health centre scheme counseling services, educational technology and educational resources.
- f. The textbooks and other teaching and learning materials should be appropriately selected, bearing in mind the criteria for evaluating textbook which Harry (2015) outlined as mechanical features, readability content features and supplementary features.

REFERENCES

- Adaralegbe, A. (ed) (1989). *A Philosophy for Nigeria Education*. Ibadan Henemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd.

- Ade Ajayi C. (1988). *The Changing Role of Mother as the Prime Teacher of the Pre-school Child: The Nigeria Experience*. Lagos OMEP Publications.
- Awoniyi (1975). *Nursery Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan Henemann.
- Durojaye (1974). *Nursery Education in Urban Areas. A Case Study of Ibadan Metropolis* Department of Education. Ibadan (A Masters Thesis).
- Harry, C.I. (2015). Equalization of Nursery Education in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. *The Academia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
- Harry, C.I. (2015). Therapeutic Solutions to Problems of Learning Possibilities in Early Childhood. *A Journal of Qualitative Education*, Published by Association for Encouraging Qualitative Education, Nigeria 11 (1) 86-95.
- Meiziobi, K.A., Nwosu, A.D. and Opara, J.M. (2008). *Nursery Education since Independence. The Pre-school Child*, Lagos OMEP.
- National Policy on Education (2004).
- Obidi, S.S. (1990). "Indigenous Moral Education of the Yoruba. University of Ilorin Nigeria. *Journal of Education, Department of Educational Foundations*, 1(2) 29-44.
- Omojuwa, A.O. and Ajayi, S.O. (1981). Competing language policies Late English Medium (LEM) and the Early English medium (EEM), ABU Institute of Education, Nigeria Educational Forum. *A Journal of the Institute of Education*, 4(11) 57-64.
- Oyedeji, A.O. and Adidogun, C.A. (1999). "An Appraisal of Pre-primary Education in Iwo and Osogbo L.G.A of Osun State. 1996/97" Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria.