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# FUNCTIONAL NURSERY EDUCATION FOR SOLID FOUNDATION

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## ABSTRACT

Nursery education <sup>16</sup> is the foundation stone of all other educational systems, because it is upon it every other levels of formal educational systems are built. Thus the paper examines the relevance of nursery education, problems of nursery education and strategies aimed at having functional nursery education. Functional nursery education helps in the cognitive, psychomotor and social development of the child. The objectives of nursery education can be achieved through adequate funding, adequate qualified and competent teachers, curbing problem of overcrowded classroom, improved condition of service of teachers, restructuring of the curriculum, adequate supervision and provision of conducive academic environment. It is recommended that all the stakeholders at this level of education should give it all the desirable attentions needed so that the child will contribute to the meaningful development of the nation.

## INTRODUCTION

Formal education commences from nursery education which is <sup>8</sup> the education given in an educational institution to children aged from 3 to under 6 years prior to their entry into the primary school .Okhaware (1997) sees nursery education as the education which a child receives before he reaches the age of primary education. This type of education is usually for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years in Nigeria. Federal Government of

Nigeria (2004) referred to nursery education as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary school, that is to say that nursery education is a special kind of education provided in an institution for children **6** prior to their entering the primary school. It is aimed at helping the children to move smoothly from home to primary school.

Nursery **4** education has the main purpose of:

(a) effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school.

(b) preparing the child for the primary level of education.

(c) providing **2** adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc).

(d) inculcating social norms.

(e) inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.

(f) developing a sense of co-operation and team spirit.

(g) learning good habit, especially good health habits.

(h) teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play.

Froebel cited by Okhawere (1997) considers childhood as the most important stage of the total development of humanity. Thus he believes that childhood is the formative period in the life of an individual. This implies that most concepts and principles of life are inculcated in the individual during these early childhood years. The Nursery School is not **18** regarded as a substitute for the home but as supplementary to it especially when the child lacks suitable companionship, adequate space and opportunity for play. **8** Nursery education is the bed rock and foundation stone of all educational systems. Hence nursery pupils are in the very sensitive periods for early learning and rapid intellectual development. **5** It is easier for a child to learn a particular skill during this period than at any other time in his/her life. Thus Montessori(1870-1952)writes:

1 The most important period of life is not the age of university, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six. For that is the time when man's intelligence itself, his greatest implement is being formed. But not only his intelligence itself, the full totality of his psychopowers. At no other age has the child greater need of intelligence help, and any obstacle that impede his creative work will lessen the chance he has of achieving perfection (Wolf, 1995).

Montessori revealed that 9 the importance of nursery education cannot be overemphasized.

It helps in the cognitive, psychomotor and social development of the child. Today our graduates litter the streets unemployed thereby hikening the crime rate in the country.

Expatriates are still preferred in our industries while our graduates are either rightly rejected abroad or sent back to classrooms. Despite the huge amount being pumped into education industry, the situation remains unchanged. Hence there is need to reexamine our educational foundations. We need to go back to the basis-the nursery level. How is it managed, is it appropriate, does the training of professionals commence at the nursery level. The need to lay solid foundation for our children cannot be overemphasized.

The paper, therefore examines

the relevance of nursery education.

problems of nursery education.

strategies aimed at having functional nursery education

conclusion.

## RELEVANCE OF NURSERY EDUCATION

Need for emotional, personal and social development. In the nursery school good programmes for emotional, personal and social development provide the children with the following:

Cooperate with each other

show consideration and respect for each other

develop positive attitudes to learning.

develop their understanding for other peoples and cultures

gain confidence, independence and good self-esteem.

form friendships.

make choices and take responsibility.

respond well to high expectations.

learn simple rules of hygiene, safety and healthy eating.

## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Cognition is the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience or the senses. Children at the nursery school age need a lot of cognitive exposure. This involves what they see, and what they do leading to what they eventually know through experience. This means that the children have to interact with the environment in order to stimulate his cognitive abilities and skills. Nursery education provide the child with stimulating environment which enriches the child's cognitive abilities and skills. Beck cited by Onibokein et al (1999) sited that mental retardation or backwardness in later life arise not only from lack of mothers love and warmth but also lack of all sorts of sensory stimulation. Also, Weber (1975) in his studies on human intellectual development across cultures has shown the role of early stimulation through toys and other learning and play devices. During the early education pupils are made to engage freely in various activities in the process of exploration, discovering and experimentation. In doing this, they enrich their cognitive abilities and skills and come to know more about the world around. Breed (1972) cited by Osho (1990) showed that in Britain, nursery schools foster intellectual development because they offer opportunities for experiment and exploration and that children who attend these school adjust and perform better in the primary schools than those who did not. Okunrotifa cited by Orebanjo(1977) pointed out an impressive array of psychologists who have made intensive studies of the intellectual growth and development of children have come to the conclusion that <sup>1</sup> the period from birth to about age of six is of vital importance to the individuals future cognitive development.

## MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Pre-school provide the opportunity for moral education for children. The Bible says, train up the child **7 the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it** (Proverbs 22:6). Bringing the children together and watching them at play and work will help the teachers/care givers detect early the onset of deviant, anti-social and anti-moral behaviours and check them at grass-roots level ever before such behaviours set firmly.

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Nursery Education offers the children the opportunity of exposing them to different activities and helping them to express themselves physically. Physical exercise makes the children to be healthy and retain a good shape. Physical development and movement include:

more regular use of small play equipment such as jigsaws, scissors, pencils, threading activities, computer mouse.

better use of available space and equipment to provide regular physical activity.

where appropriate, better use of local park and play areas for energetic play.

## EXPRESSIVE AND AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT

Nursery Education enable, the children to improve on their expressive and a aesthetic development. It provides the children the opportunity of experiences in creative art and craft developing role-play and drama, music making and singing.

Development needs in expressive and aesthetic development are:

a greater range of materials, techniques and textures being used in art and craft activities.

better resources and contexts for imaginative role play.

better opportunities for making and listening to music.

more opportunities for children to express themselves individually and in groups.

better use of space and display to create visual stimulation.

## DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH HABITS

A healthy man is a wealthy man. Nursery Education helps the child to form good health habits. These include hygienic use of cups, how to use the toilets, how to dress properly, how to wash fruits before eating, how to wash hands after games and plays and after going to toilet, how to report bruises and cuts for first aid treatment. Seers (1972)"In What Are Trying To Measure" submits that evaluation of development must include reduction of poverty, and general improvement of <sup>11</sup> the quality of life. Therefore a country plagued with large numbers of undernourished children must necessarily consider health a priority objective of development for health can help or hinder development.

## CUSTODIAL GUIDANCE

Nursery Education offers custodial guidance of working mothers. The introduction of UPE, later UBE made housemaids to be inadequate, hence working mothers have to enroll their children in the available nursery schools where they will be taken care of before they come back from their working place. Due to the relevance of this level of education, there is need to employ trained manpower and provide conducive environment for adequate care to be given these children. Ike(1998) pointed out that <sup>19</sup> the nursery school as a guidance centre should in the position to render individualized counsel and to take care of the special needs of individual children. This shows that nursery school is not only a custodian centre but also a place to guide and train the child. <sup>2</sup> The training of the child involves many aspects of development, such as cognitive, social, physical, emotional and personality development.

## PROBLEMS OF NURSERY EDUCATION

As seen in other levels of education, nursery education is faced with numerous problems; these include:

1. Inadequate Finance: The <sup>15</sup> National problem confronting effective attainment of nursery education objectives is inadequate fund. The finance needed to pay teachers

salary and procure educational facilities is not always available. This has affected teachers stability in the nursery school.

2. Inadequate Qualified and Competent Teachers: Inadequate qualified and competent teachers <sup>11</sup> is one of the problems militating against the achievement of nursery education objectives. Qualified and competent teachers are not easy to come by. The few available ones tend to quite the teaching profession due to poor motivation and unattractive conditions of service.

3. Overcrowded Classrooms: The recommended teacher/pupil ratio in nursery school is 1:25. But in most of our nursery schools in Nigeria, the teacher-pupil ratio has been found to be more than the recommended ratio. Thus, the classrooms are overcrowded. In an overcrowded classrooms situation, individualized method of teaching is not practicable, contemporary continuous assessment programme becomes unattainable and effective classroom management which is a necessary tool for a lofty academic achievement is not realistic.

4. Curriculum Content: Curriculum refers to the subjects included in a course of study or taught at a particular school. The present curriculum content of nursery education, as good as it is, does not address the emerging social changes. Thus, a good curriculum, must be written in accordance to the need of the child, the community and the society at large. Inappropriate curriculum leads to the problem of school dropouts and unemployment. In short, a well structured and planned curriculum should be responsive to societal changes and the needs of the child.

5. Lack of Dedication and Commitment to the Teaching Profession: Teachers are said to be the "life wire" of educational system. <sup>20</sup> Due to poor conditions of service and other problems associated with management of nursery education, most teachers are not dedicated and committed to their jobs. This made the teachers <sup>21</sup> to engage themselves in <sup>one</sup> economic activity or the other, in order to supplement the monthly salary or allowance so as to make ends meet.

6. Regulation and Control: Regulation and control has also been discovered as another



problem facing <sup>6</sup> nursery education in Nigeria. Government's objective to regulate and control the operation of nursery education has not been successful. <sup>13</sup> This is due to the fact that majority of nursery schools are managed by private individuals.

7. Inadequate Supervision: <sup>22</sup> The National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that nursery education can be run by private individuals, co-operate bodies and organization. In the same policy it is stated that government will control and regulate the establishment of this level of education. It is disheartening to note that government is not very much interested in the supervision and management <sup>23</sup> of the level of education. The curriculum content, the quality of teachers, and the academic environment are not being supervised. This level of education being the foundation stone of all other educational system, there is need for government to revisit her stand concerning the supervision and general well being.

8. Poor Academic Environment: Meaningful learning can only take place in a conducive environment. For the fact that private individuals are allowed to operate nursery education, they do this at the detriment of the children. Nursery schools are located in the environment available to the proprietors without taken into consideration the needs of the children; some are located in a noisy environment which affect the teaching/learning processes.

9. Lack of Health Officers: Ideally health givers and health officers are supposed to be employed in the nursery schools to oversee the well being of the children. But these children are expose to health hazards. The food and water taken are not checked and supervised. Thus these children are exposed to infections or diseases. <sup>24</sup> As a matter of urgency, government should make it mandatory for proprietors of nursery schools to employ health personnel that will always take care of the children.

10. Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities and Learning Materials: Ogungbemi (2002) in Ogundese (1990) opined that most private nursery and primary schools have fairly adequate ventilated and spacious classrooms. Fairly well maintained recreational grounds and audio-visual materials. He asserted that most of these schools lack adequate spaces

for playing in-door games and large assembly halls for pupils co-curricula and literary activities.

## STRATEGIES AIMED AT HAVING FUNCTIONAL NURSERY EDUCATION NURSERY

Nursery Education is the bedrock of all other educational system. We can liken our nursery education to the foundation laying of a new building which will fall if not solidified. Everyday we hear of falling standard of education. Having we revisited our nursery education? There is need to re-examine our educational foundations. We need to go back to the nursery level. This could be done by looking into the following ways:

1. Curriculum of Nursery Education: The curriculum of nursery education should be restructured to address the emerging social, economical and political needs of the society. Dare(1994) opined that the curriculum of [6 pre-primary and primary education in Nigeria](#) should be restructured to relate to the needs of the child in his community and the world at large. This indicates that the curriculum of nursery education should be functional [9 to the needs of](#) the child and the society at large.
2. Condition of Service: Teachers are the “life wire” of the educational system. So they are inevitable in the school system. Nobody can put his best in an unfavourable environment. So for the objectives of this level of education to be achieved, there is need to improve on the condition of service and welfare of the teachers.
3. Availability of Teachers: There is inadequacy as regards the number of teachers in the nursery schools. Government should increase the number of teachers in colleges that train teachers for nursery education. Government should also encourage more teachers to specialize in nursery education.
4. Establishment of Nursery Schools: Apart from government encouraging the participation of private individuals in the affair of nursery education, government should make it mandatory for state and local government to establish model nursery schools in the locality.
5. Provision of Facilities: Facilities are needed for the smooth running of schools and for

the teaching/learning processes to be effective. Thus, adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided in our nursery schools. This will reduce the problem of high population and overcrowded classrooms.

6. Funding: Finance is inevitable in the running of nursery schools. It is necessary to procure educational facilities and payment of teachers salary and other benefits.

Government should finance her schools as well as provide grants/aids to private nursery schools.

7. Seminars, Conference and Workshop: Nobody is all knowing. Government should always organize seminars, conferences and workshop for nursery school teachers. Also in-service training programme should be made available to them. This will make them to develop, keep abreast of the changing needs of our education and equip them with skills and knowledge which will enable them to achieve the stated goals.

8. Educational Policy: Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) states that the responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such institutions, set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country. The question is are all these implemented. Government should develop the educational policies that are practicable and achievable. There should be effective monitoring and supervision so that the objectives of nursery education will be accomplished.

9. Administrative and Control Committee: Nwoke (2005) opined that the Federal Government should set up Administrative and Control Committee to be titled The National Commission on Preschool Scheme (NCPS)' to monitor and control the affairs of pre-primary education. The terms reference include:

(i) To investigate similarities and differences in the rearing practices of the child among the states of (ii) the country.

(ii) To institute a division of responsibilities among the three tiers government-Federal, State and Local which each of them should perform.

(iii) To probe and bring into practice the involvement of family with special reference to mothers.

(iv) To advice on the directions of research <sup>17</sup> within and outside the nation. The membership could be made up of ten people including two or three women.

## CONCLUSION

Functional nursery education make people to be well developed, productive, self-sufficient, self-reliant and self sustaining. The objectives of this level of education can only achieved through adequate funding, adequate qualified and competent teachers, curbing the problem of overcrowded classroom, improved condition of service of teachers, restructuring of the curriculum, full dedication and commitment of teachers, regulation and control of the establishment of nursery school, adequate supervision and provision of conducive academic environment. The provision of the aforementioned will make the child to be high intellectually, which will invariably make the child to contribute to the economic, social, political and technological development of the nation.

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