

An Assessment of Pre-Primary School Programme Activities in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

In National Policy on Nigerian Education (NPE, 2004) Pre-primary education or early childhood education is a process of educating young children in educational institutions prior to their entry into primary schools. This study assesses Pre-primary schools programme activities across Kwara State, Nigeria. The objective is to determine the extent to which the programme on the ground has met with the stipulated policy statement as contained in the National Policy on Education. The findings revealed the jeopardy due to: the lack of government adherence to the objectives of the policy in respect of adequate funding, infrastructural development, material and non – material resources and standard curriculum guidelines as stipulated in the policy statement. The findings in this study would thus serve as a yardstick for success or otherwise of the policy statement as contained in the National Policy on Pre-primary education which would serve in facilitating actions toward improving Pre-primary education in Kwara State and in Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Policy statement, Pre-primary Education, National policy, Assessment, Educational Administration, School Programme, Curriculum, Instructional Material

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is largely a post-colonial development. The semblances of it during the colonial era were the kindergarten and infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. As grouping for instruction in schools was not age-based during that period, some children aged six or even more, could be found in some of the infant classes. With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools. The need grew higher as a result of; increase in the number of working class mothers, changes in the economic life that warrant women picking up jobs in order to improve and support their families. Also the level of awareness of parents in terms of education gave an insight to most parents to see the need for pre-school classes, where their children could be given preparatory lessons before they attain school age. Thus, Nigerian educational administrators, policy makers and the then military government of Nigeria realized its needs for the country and gave it official recognition in the National Policy on Education in 1977. The National Policy on Education (1976, 1981, and 1998) is a document that is intended to guide the Nigeria educational system from Pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical levels and up to the tertiary level. The document presents National objectives which include: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. The objectives for Pre-primary education were derived from these national goals. The policy also stated that the quality of instruction at all levels had to be oriented towards inculcating the values of: ‘...respect for the dignity and worth of the individual, faith in man's ability to take rational decisions, moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of society, respect for the dignity of labour, promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children, and acquisition of competencies necessary for self reliance’ (FGN,2004, p 11). In the current National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), Early childhood education is labeled as Pre-primary education and is defined as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. As stated in the policy document, the purpose of Pre-primary education includes, among others:

- providing a 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;
- 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.
- teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes forms, etc. through play, and inculcating social norms.

The document lists a number of measures to be taken by government to ensure the achievement of the objectives of Pre-primary education. They include: encouraging private efforts in the provision of Pre-primary education; making provision in Teacher Training institutions for production of specialist teachers in Pre-primary education; ensuring that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the local community; ensuring that the main method of teaching in Pre-primary institutions will be through play; regulating and controlling the operation of Pre-primary education, ensuring adequate training of staff and provision of essential equipment.

The National Policy on Education (2004) placed the child at the centre of learning activities, but left out how this was to be achieved in the hands of 'private owners.' Most of the owners do not even understand the national philosophy behind the policy and lack the necessary educational background to run a school. One wonders, therefore, if these 'private owners' can implement the National policy in the way that it was designed to be done (Borishade. nd). An assessment of the running of Pre-primary education in Kwara State, Nigeria will thus serve as a yardstick for judging the policy statement as contained in National Policy on Pre-primary education in Nigeria

2. Research Objectives

The following are some objectives of this study.

- i. To examine the extent to which Pre-primary school is receiving government support to be able to achieve the policy statement on Pre-primary education.
- ii. To examine whether Pre-primary schools are adequately provided with instructional materials that can aid the achievement of the policy objectives.
- iii. To find out whether the Pre-primary schools are managed in accordance with the curriculum in order to achieve the policy statement of Pre-primary education
- iv. To examine the academic standard at which Pre-primary schools are been managed by their stakeholders so as to achieve the policy objectives of Pre-primary education.

3. Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study;

- i. To what extent does government support Pre-primary education in Kwara state?
- ii. Are there adequate instructional materials in Pre-primary schools in Kwara state?
- iii. How effective is the curriculum of Pre-primary education being implemented in Kwara state?
- iv. How adequate is the standard of Pre-primary schools in Kwara state?

4. Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used in this study, the choose of descriptive survey was in line with Akuezuilo and Agu (2003), who maintained that it is concerned with gathering of information on peoples' opinion. The population for this study comprised all the Pre-primary school Teachers. There are 823 Pre-primary school teachers in the three senatorial districts of Kwara State(Kwara North, South and Central),out of which 265 respondents were sampled. This is in line with Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgins (2001) table for selecting sample, which consisted of both male and female teachers were used for the study. The simple random sampling was used in the selection of the schools with Pre-primary classes and stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 58 from Kwara North, 74 teachers from Kwara South and 133 Teachers from Kwara Central from 35 purposely selected schools across the three senatorial zones of Kwara State.

A -24- items 4- points likert scale questionnaire designed by the researchers and consisting eight sections was used for the study. The questionnaire items were validated by experts in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin to ensure its face and content validity. A test- retest reliability method was carried out with a sample of 5 Pre-primary schools within Ilorin metropolis. Three weeks interval period was given, the scores of the first were correlated with the scores of the second using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and reliability index of 0.74 was obtained. Researchers designed questionnaire was used, it contained two sections, bio-data of the respondents constitute the first section while the second contained 20 items with 4 points responses. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents by the researchers with the assistance of five research assistants. The data collected was analyzed using Arithmetic mean rating with mean rating scores of 2.5. The mean scores up to 2.5 and above were regarded as indications of adequacy or sufficiency of the needed resources required to actualized the implementation of Pre-primary education

policy while the mean score below 2.5 were regarded as indication of inadequacy or insufficiency of the required resources for the Pre-primary education programme in Kwara State.

5. Results

The results obtained are as presented here under.

5.1 Research Question 1: To what extent does government support Pre-primary school Education in Kwara state?

Table 1: Mean scores of Government support for Pre-primary school in relation to the Pre-primary education policy statement in Kwara state (N= 265).

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Government effort in training of Pre-primary school Teachers	1.55	Not adequate
2.	Provision of Instructional materials found in per-primary school	1.98	Not adequate
3	School monitoring and supervision of Pre-primary school	2.41	Not adequate

The data in table 1 above shows that the mean scores from all the items on the teachers view on the extent of government support for Pre-primary schools revealed not adequate, because no means score exceed 2.5. By implication this shows that the government shows little commitment and support for Pre-primary education in Kwara state.

5.2 Research Question 2: Are there adequate Instructional materials in Pre-primary schools in Kwara state?

Table 2: Means score of the adequacy of instructional materials in Pre-primary schools in relation to the achievement of the Pre-primary education policy statement in Kwara State (N= 265).

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Educational Equipments		
	Toys	2.23	Not adequate
	Television	1.23	Not adequate
	Radio	1.02	Not adequate
	Mini Computer	1.01	Not adequate
	Furniture(chairs and table, book shelf etc)	2.00	Not adequate
	Art and craft pen	1.89	Not adequate
	Nursery equipment (Bed or prim)	0.69	Not available

This table shows that educational equipments in the Pre-primary schools are inadequate to take care of the pupils in the classrooms. This is because the mean scores of all the equipment examined fall below the average score line of 2.5.

5.3 Research Question 3: How adequate is the curriculum of Pre-primary school in Kwara state?

Table 3: Mean score of management of Pre-primary school in accordance with the curriculum in order to achieve the policy statement of Pre-primary education in Kwara State (N= 265).

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	No official curriculum for the smooth running of Pre-primary school in Nigeria	1.35	Not available
2.	Is the medium of instruction used in teaching and learning process done in mother tongues in Kwara state?	2.13	Not adequate
3	Are there enough textbooks written in mother tongues languages produced for use at the Pre-primary school in Kwara state?	2.06	Not adequate

This revealed that, there was no official curriculum dictating subjects and materials that could be used in the teaching and learning process of the Pre-primary school children in Kwara state. As indicated in the table with none of the three items adequate when measured.

5.4 Research Question 4: How adequate are the resources required for use in Pre-primary schools in Kwara state?

Table 4: Mean score of standard at which Pre-primary school are been managed by their stakeholders so as to achieve the policy statement of Pre-primary education in Kwara State (N= 265).

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Good and quality school structure in terms of classroom, chairs and table, well ventilated school building etc.	2.46	Not adequate
2.	Adequacy of classroom, in term of size	2.40	Not adequate
3	Teacher-pupils ratio	1.93	Not adequate
4	Adequate provision of first aid materials to handle emergence cases in the school	2.34	Not adequate
5	Appropriateness of school location to promote effective teaching and learning process.	2.40	Not adequate

From the table above none of the means showed was up to 2.50 which is the level of adequacy. Items 1,2 and 5 where very close but yet were not up to. So by implication the standard of resources provided for education in our Pre-primary school in Kwara state does not comply with the policy statement.

6. Discussion

From the finding in this study much of the shortcoming in the implementation of the national policy on Pre-primary education in Kwara state hinges on the failure of the Government to put into effect most of the measures as stated in the National Policy. These policies are aimed at ensuring that the objectives are achieved. The lack of official supervision of schools to ensure the maintenance of standards, has led to increase in the numbers of sub-standard Pre-primary schools in Kwara State. Also significant provision is yet to be made in the production of specialist teachers for early childhood education, as revealed in the analysis of data in table 2. Even if institutions are running the programmes for producing Pre-primary school teachers, the fact remains that the Federal as well as state government has established very few of such nursery or Pre-primary schools where graduates of such a programme can be employed. On the issue of the use of mother-tongue as medium of instruction, government has done little to ensure that mother-tongue or local languages are used as medium of instruction in Pre-primary or nursery schools as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004). As far as the use of the mother tongue for instruction is concerned, the values of parents seem to be in conflict with those of the policy makers who prescribed that the medium of instruction in such lower classes of primary schools should be principally the child's mother tongue or the language of the local community. Contrary to this policy statement, almost all parents, especially of the middle and high classes that patronize Pre-primary schools, wish their children to be immersed in English language as early as possible because of the advantages that knowledge of the language conveys on such children in the Pre-primary and subsequent levels of the Nigerian educational system which require the comprehension and the use of English language.

However, the fact remains that no developed nations of the world became developed by adopting another person's language to educate it citizens. The play way method of teaching that is advocated in the Policy statement on Pre-primary education is not effectively used in most of the Pre-primary schools in Kwara state. This is due to lack of material teaching resources. This indeed would require the use of mother tongue since in the act of play the child has a better opportunity to explore, discover, developed and create his or her skills and potentials to the fullest (Ellyat, 2004). What was in practice in most of the schools in Kwara State is that the proprietors and teachers provide the children with toys to play with and this are mainly for recreational purposes, not for instruction. Very few of the nursery school teachers in Kwara state have received formal training in Pre-primary education. Therefore, the use of the play method or any other type of learning activity suitable for inculcating social norms in Pre-primary school children as advocated in the policy document become difficult for them. Also government's inspection of these schools has not been serious. This amount to poor monitoring and supervision sparsely conducted, at time ones or twice in five years. The result, being the poor material and human resources available for use in the schools across Kwara State. Again, there is no standard or approved curriculum to guide the activities of the teachers as show on table 3. This creates lack of common objective and the presentation of common learning experiences which require effective teachers' guidance and stimulation as prescribed by Robinson and Robinson (1986).

The teacher–pupils ratio in our nursery school also calls for urgent attention. This is because; the proprietors and proprietresses are after making profit. They pay little attention to the numbers of pupils that enrolled in the schools compared to the numbers of teachers they employed. The policy statement said that teacher- pupil’s ratio should be 1:25. This has been abused in Kwara State by school proprietors. Most of these problems hinge on the inability of both the State and Federal governments to exercise effective control and supervision of Pre-primary schools in Kwara state. There are large numbers of unregistered Pre-primary schools in Ilorin metropolis that are unknown to school Supervisors or Inspectors. Thus, the lack of effective supervision of the activities in the nursery schools as well as to monitor their locations, infrastructures and soon have constituted problems to the ideals of Pre-primary education in Kwara State as stipulated in the policy statement.

7. Conclusion

Available evidence suggests that early childhood education has a positive influence on educational development of children in later life (Ogujiuba and Adeniyi, 2005). Also some writers on early childhood education have asserted that investing in it can yield high returns (Barnett, 2006; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003 in Ajaniyi, 2004) in terms of human capital development. This study has shown that, it is not any type of educational experience offered anywhere by any type of teacher that can have such an effect on children. Thus, objectives of Pre-primary education in Kwara State and indeed the country can only be achieved if the policy is consistently and effectively implemented. The effective implementation of the policy could guarantee moral, social, psychological development of our little children while in the pre-school institutions in Kwara State in particular and in Nigeria in general.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a. Government at the Federal, State and Local levels should show more interest in early childhood education by providing some of the needed human and materials resources to ensure the effective implementation of the stated objectives
- b. The Ministry of Education in all the states of the Federation should make sure that approval of building plan be given for building nursery schools before construction work starts with the view of standardizing infrastructural facilities. These facilities should also be inspected and certified adequate before the admissions are given to the children.
- c. The government should make sure that curriculum planners make appropriate curriculum for use at the Pre-primary schools. In order to bring about uniformity in the standard and quality of education that is being provided for at the Pre-primary level.
- d. Stakeholders in the provision of Pre-primary Education should make sure there is adequate provision of educational resources required for use in the Pre-primary schools such as, standard teachers-pupils ratio, good standard classroom as well as adequate and relevant teaching aids among others.

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