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Teacher Development and Supervision for Effective Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Teacher development is crucial in any educational endeavour, more so when it concerns a head start Program – Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Teachers are very important in quality education and therefore should be properly developed. The success of early childhood education program is dependent on availability of properly trained personnel to meet the individual needs of children. This paper elucidates teacher preparation and development for effective care and education of children 0-5 years. The paper considers supervision and evaluation as a veritable tool in enhancing ECCE. Furthermore, some kinds of professional development methods were emphasized for their usefulness in ECCE program. The paper concluded with a recommendation among others that teachers in ECCE programs should receive supervision and coaching, and they should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning, to improve ECCE program in Nigeria.

Key words: Early Child Care, Education, Teacher Development, Supervision, Evaluation.

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Education is the right of every child. As a notion, this assertion was derived from the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, Eheazu (1993) in Maigida (2013) opined that: everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and foundational stages. Early childhood education is an integral component of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2004.

The importance of education cannot be over stated. Education is the knowledge of putting one's potentials to maximum use. One can safely say that a human being is not in the proper sense till he is educated Khan (2009). Education globally has been acknowledged as an instrument for individual and societal development, other benefits accruable from education are social recognition, economic propensity and political relevance. Nations, states, communities and individuals desire development, hence the training of the mind to acquire the desired development.

Education has been identified as a variable tool to bring about the development of the individual and the society and it behooves that the mind be trained early to conceive the ideals of self and thereby societal development. To achieve the training of the individual, the teacher who is a pivotal factor needs to be professionally developed and equipped in order to achieve the goal of proper care and training of the child. More so, when both children with/without special needs may make up her class.

At the World Summit in 2001, the secretary General of the United Nations reaffirmed the world's commitment to ensuring that every child has a right to the best possible start in life. He identified good quality education, opportunities to develop his or her full potential, and an enabling environment to make positive contribution to the society in meaningful ways as the thematic areas (Onu, Obiozor, Agbo and Ezeanwu, 2010).

The convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) in its article 24 on education recognized the right of persons with disabilities to education, with a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. It mandated State parties (which Nigeria is one) to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning. This therefore demands that teacher trainees at all levels of training be taught the rudiments of education for persons with special needs among others.

Supervision and evaluation are important tools in any Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program. Supervision helps teachers to improve in knowledge and skill to help their pupils perform to their fullest potentials. Evaluation on one side

helps to strengthen service delivery and to maintain the connection between program goals, objectives and services.

What is Early Childhood Care and Education?

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to the care and education that children obtain during early stages of their childhood. It is a critical step in building the foundation for a child's learning and development. ECCE as portrayed in Maigida (2013) is a pre-primary care and education given to aid physical, social, psychological and mental growth and development of the child. This form of education is variedly described as crèche, kindergarten, Daycare, Playgroup and Nursery. Wikipedia (2013) refers to pre-primary education as the formal teaching of young children by people outside the family or in setting outside the home. Continuing, it defines Early Childhood as the age before normal schooling (five years in most nations).

The national Policy on Education (2004) referred to it as education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. In the integrated Early Childhood Development Minimum Standard the NERDC (2007) gave the age range from 0-5 years, which was sub-divided into:

- i. Daycare/crèche (for ages 0-2years)
- ii. Pre-Nursery/Playgroup, (ages 3-4years)
- iii. Nursery/Kindergarten (ages 3-5years)

Early childhood education most often focuses on children learning through play. This is based on the research and philosophy of Jean Piaget. Through play-based activities in drama, art, and social games, children learn more efficiently and gain knowledge. ECCE helps to increase school readiness for primary school.

Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education

A Curriculum has been provided by NERDC and UNICEF of 8 units viz: physical development; affective development, mental and language development; food and nutrition, harmful tradition practices, health and diseases; and safety measure comparable to anywhere in most developed world. The question is, how has this laudable curriculum that took about a decade to produce been implemented. The first edition was in 1994 and a revision was attempted in 2000 to infuse some emergent issues such as HIV/AIDS, Peace and gender issues (NERDC, 2007). It is worthy of note that a Training Guide for Lead caregivers and teachers on the use of Integrated Early Child Care Development Curriculum materials has also been produced. The guide is structured to serve as window into the full content of the National Early Childhood Curriculum for ages 0-5 years (NERDC, 2007). Here again one need to ask how far has this training guide been used to improve ECCE programs across the country. From the key note address for this conference it is noted that Nigeria is far

below achieving EFA goals with Nigeria contributing 10% of the world's out of school children. Nigeria government needs to sit up to bridge the gap of myriads of education problems that beset the Nation.

Teacher Development for Early Childhood Education

One of the challenges facing the educational sector in Nigeria is the poor quality of teachers. Peter Okebukola, former executive secretary of National Universities Commission (NUC), in a report by the Daily Sun Newspaper as cited in Onu, Obiozor, Agbo and Ezeanwu (2010) stated that many teachers are exceedingly weak in the subject they teach. He further argued that very little is done to train and retrain teachers in the country and this takes its toll on the performance of teachers. This training gap as well affects teachers in early childcare programs.

The roles teachers play in any educational system cannot be over-stated. The NPE (2004) recognizing the importance of teacher quality stated that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. It also stated the responsibility of government concerning pre-primary education said that government shall promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number; contribute to the development of suitable curriculum among others.

These promises are yet to be felt taking into cognizance the quality of teachers that populate both public and private pre-primary schools. In confirmation, Maduwesi (2003) stated that teacher preparation which was promised in the NPE is not being implemented thus Nursery School Curriculum is not actually being planned by qualified teachers that are adequately trained for that level. Okeke (2011) found out in a study that the Policy is on paper but never implemented which results in mushroom Nursery schools and daycare centres.

Education is the right of every child; no child should therefore be denied of it for any reason or marginalized. This agrees with the assertion of the world summit on children on the state of global Education for All Program (EFA).

UBE impliedly included children with special needs among those to be catered for in education when it stated as one of its objectives "the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age" (UBE Digest 2001). Therefore to judiciously take adequate care of all children in ECCE Program teacher training curriculum for the early care educators need to emphasize the needs of children with special needs.

What is Supervision?

If 'Vision' implies seeing, the word 'supervision' can be read as over-seeing, looking over someone's shoulder to check them, and also 'super' in the sense of outstanding or special, helping someone to extend their professional skills and understanding (London Deanery, 2012).

Teacher supervision is an educational practice which focuses on the interactions between supervisors (school principal, departmental heads and other supervisory professionals) and teachers aimed at improving school performance and enhancing teachers' professional skills and abilities. A good ECCE Program should be adequately supervised. It does not end at employing qualified teachers.

Supervision goes hand in hand with evaluation. Wiki.org (2007) portrayed evaluation as the systemic collection and analysis of data needed to make decisions, a process in which most well-run programs engage from the onset. To improve overall pupil achievement in ECCE, and help teachers successfully fulfill their roles, effective supervision and evaluation of their work is necessary. Supervision and evaluation will help to ensure teacher professional development and improve instruction and care giving. Both help to identify weaknesses in order to make improvement.

Professional Development for Early Childhood Care and Education

There are several different types of professional development for educators, using a variety of methodologies and tools. Professional development encompasses all types of learning opportunities ranging from pre-service, in-service programs (seminars and workshops for example). These programs are designed for educators, providing continuing education to keep skills current and provide training on new initiatives. Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement (Wikipedia, 2013).

Different kinds of professional Development that may be found useful in ECCE Program as stressed by Naava, Walsh and Schuster (2011) among others include:

1. **Peer Coaching:** Educators consult with one another, to discuss and share teaching practices, to observe one another's classrooms, to promote collegiality and support, and to help ensure quality teaching for all students.
2. **Professional Learning Communities (PLC)** in which the teachers in a school and its administrations continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that students (pupils) benefit.

3. **Self-Directed Learning:** Making decisions about how to advance one's own practice including reading books that relate to what one teaches or new teaching practices, visiting colleagues in their classrooms, writing projects like journals, taking a course, going to a conference, getting trained to use a new technology of one's own.

Early childhood care and education teachers who imbibe these professional development tools will have continuous improvement that will not only increase their career development but benefit children in their care exceedingly.

Conclusion

Well designed and implemented ECCE programs produce long-term improvements and ensure school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rate of class repetition, special education and higher educational attainment. Some good programs may reduce delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood.

Recommendations

The followings are recommended for effective early childhood care and education;

1. Policy makers should put in place all necessary tools geared towards the implementation of laudable policies in early childhood education and not just promissory notes.
2. Teachers in ECCE programs should receive intensive supervision and coaching, and they should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning.
3. All colleges of education in the country should be mandated and encouraged to have departments for early childhood care and education.
4. Children with special needs should be given adequate consideration in order not to be marginalized in any ECCE program they found themselves.
5. ECCE program should regularly assess children's learning and development to monitor how well they are accomplishing their goals.
6. ECCE program, in order to produce positive effects on children's behaviour and later, reductions in crime and delinquency, should be designed to develop the whole child., including social and emotional development and self-regulatory practices.
7. There is a great need to find out if ECCE programs (Private and Public) implement the contents of the Curriculum.

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