

REVAMPING ADULT LITERACY: PANACEA FOR EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF HOME - SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Home-School Relationship which is the connection between the family and educational setting is especially important at the pre-school level where a smooth transition from the home to school is most significant and desirable. This paper discusses the feasibility of effective relationship between the home and the school in the context of Nigeria's high adult illiteracy rate. Arguing that an effective home/school relationship may not be established with illiterate parents, the write-up recommended that as a cornerstone of the Early Childhood Care and Development Education programme, adult education must be actively promoted among parents. That government should re-organize the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme to bring all the basic education components (ECCDE), Adult literacy, Nomadic Education, Primary and Junior Secondary Education) under one single structure and ensure equality in terms of government's commitment to funding.

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) is now widely available as a result of government Policy establishing early childhood education in existing public schools in the country. Traditionally however, child care services were provided in the home including learning in the early years of a child's life. They were without doubt the roles and responsibilities of the family, neighbours and the larger community. Though, informal and unstructured, the child acquires the foundation upon which further knowledge is built as he/she grows older into adulthood, today child care services that offer different packages are found in many formal settings such that the issue of where a child is best cared for whether in the home or by substitute mothers has ceased to be very important. These childcare centres

include Day care, Crèche, the Nursery and Kindergarten. The goal of some services may not be strictly education in the real sense, (e.g, workplace centers and community playgroups) nevertheless, learning activities form a major part of their activities. In general, therefore, activities of childcare centres are aimed at preparing children for the formal schooling and thus fall under the wide-ranging term pre-schooling.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defines pre-primary education as the "education given in an educational institution to children between the ages 3-5 years prior to their being enrolled into the primary school" and its goals are to; effect a smooth transition from the home to the school, prepare the child for the primary

level of education, provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents are at work, inculcate 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 habit, especially good health habit.

The aim was to teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play. The advocacy for universal provision of ECCDE in the country had always recognized and emphasized the role of the home in the success of the programme. However, it must not be assumed that parents and in particular uneducated parents automatically possess the relevant knowledge and skills to ensure an effective partnership with the school. A strong home-school relationship may not be well established as required with an illiterate home or family due to paucity of essential skills.

Development of ECCDE in Nigeria

The present drive for universal provision of ECCDE in the country can be traced to a cooperation agreement signed in 1986 between the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on collaboration with Van Leer Bernard Foundation (UNESCO, 2003). The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), the implementing agency of the FGN began a pilot project in 5 Local Government Education Authorities in 1987. However, it is only the last two decades that Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) in Nigeria became a nationwide concern. Before then, it had remained on the fringe of the nation's educational provision available only to the privileged few. Commenting on the neglect of the sector by

government, Olabode (2008) wondered whether government owned a single pre-primary school while Nwaugo (2008) reported that a mere 10% of pre-primary centres were operated by government agencies as model schools while the private sector accounted for the rest. Quadri (as cited in Ovigware, 2008) believes the attitude of government was to blame for the problems of the sector in terms of quality of the available service.

The government's hitherto lack of interest is perhaps tied to the history of ECCDE in the country which dated back to the colonial era when only the children of the colonial administrators had access to this service run by the missionaries and organizations. Day care centres and nursery schools then catered for the early education of children and child-minding needs of working parents mostly expatriates. But since independence, several factors have led to the increasing support and upsurge in demand for this level of education.

According to Ogundele (2002), the growth of education has resulted in an ever-increasing number of mothers either engaged in working outside the home or going to school (tertiary education) and thus needing others to provide care for their children. Rapid urbanization occasioned by development is also eroding the extended family system which had hitherto provided this service as an accepted part of its obligation worldwide; there is a growing realization of the importance of early childhood care education to the future development of the child. So, these forces both within and outside the country have helped the progress of early childhood education compelling the government to consider a provision for the establishment of pre-primary sections in existing public schools under the basic education

programme as well as encouraging community/private efforts in its provision. The public provision of ECCDE is enabling millions of excluded Nigerian children to access this fundamental level of education considered important for both the child and the nation.

Significance of ECCDE

The belief in education as the effective instrument for nation development is well established. Education is believed to be crucial for the overall development and progress of nation; an instrument of change in any society's rational and social worldview, (Morrison, 2002). While the primary education level continued to receive government's attention as the foundation level of education some see it as the beginning of the whole education enterprise. Several recent studies reported by Eze and Onuigbo (2008) suggested that the experience acquired by a child during the early years of life is of crucial importance on its subsequent development. Bruce cited in Kembe, (2008) asserted that eight percent of child's intelligence is already developed by the time the child is eight years. The period is therefore considered very significant not only for rapid physical growth but for the development of cognitive achievement. It is argued that the rate at which children develop academically and learn is dependent on their nursery education orientation (Aderounmi in Olabode, 2008). Momoholle cited in Olabode (2008) considered Nursery education for example as the concrete foundation and floor upon which sound and progressive educational development, in term of acquisition, retention recall, manipulation, analysis, synthesis, application and appreciation of knowledge is based. (Olabode, 2008).

Even dissenters on the appropriateness of structural learning programmers for

children of pre-school age agreed that learning during the early years for a child is important. The dissenters defended the importance of learning in early years by describing those years as the "perfect time to provide an atmosphere where the child can dream and play and explore and grow in both body and mind". (Greenberge, 2011).

Home-School Relationship in ECCDE Programme and the need for Mass Adult Literacy.

Home school relationship in the early childhood years has been defined as "the formal and informal connections between the family and educational setting" (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006 p.2). It is one of the three identified family involvement processes which research has shown to support positive outcomes for children. The other two are parenting and responsibility for learning outcomes. Unfortunately, here in Nigeria, the processes are indistinguishable and the common understanding of the concept is limited to parental membership in a Parents Teachers Association (PTA) or more recently a role in the school-Based Management Committee (SBMC), (Ogundele, 2002). Communication with the home too is often limited to invitations to school regular events such as Open Days Annual Sports and Speech and Prize Giving Days. Home-school relationship in early school years however is about both participation in school-based activities and regular communication between families and their children's early childhood education centers. Parental participation which can include attending parent-teacher conferences, participating in extended class visits and helping with class activities is associated with child language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive and basic skills (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006. P. 2), while effective communication with families is vital to providing a

consistent and congruent experience for young children (Essa, 1999). Studies indicated that pre-school participation of parents, frequent contact with teachers and involvement are associated with school performance, higher rate of high school completion and lower anti-social behaviours even in later years thus making the benefits persistent over time (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006. P. 2).

Though a strong home-school relationship is a quality indicator of early childhood education programmes, it is not actively promoted by many schools in the country. For example, whereas evidences suggest that children benefit when their parents are involved in instructionally related activities at home or schools (Zeigler cited in Ogundele (2002), rarely however, are parents' talents, abilities or expertise put to good use in curriculum expansion or in supporting the teacher in the classroom as is suggested by Essa (1999), and while communication should enable a sharing of information between parents and teachers about children's achievements and activities, establishing mutual trust and solving problems or discussing specific issues (Essa, 1999), these seldom take place. The importance of ensuring a close school-home relationship was pointed out by Ogundele (2002) when he summed up Meighan's view of the work of parents as 'only being augmented and amplified by school rather than substituted or taken over'. He therefore emphasized the significance of cooperation between the home and the school because of the firm connection established which linked children's development outcomes and parental involvement in their education during those early years.

However, in spite of the benefits accruable to the child from a strong home-school

relationship, the practice lacks enough support from the major stakeholders as very few schools actively promote it and parents too do not so much appreciate its importance. The reasons may not be unconnected with the fact as observed by Morrison, (2001) that: many parents feel inadequately prepared for example to follow up or work jointly with the school on say behaviour problems. While this feeling may sometimes be unfounded among educated parents, with illiterate parents a lack of competence is most often true and genuine due to the absence of fundamental skills and knowledge acquired as a result of education, increasingly, time is constraint for many of today's parents and so most often informal contact with the school as they drop and pick up their children seemed to be what parents manage, For illiterate parents who more often than not do not need to drop the child at school, contact is not made either.

Schools too are often uncertain about the level of parent's involvement. Even progressive schools have difficulty determined when parental involvement becomes interference; most professionals are more comfortable with the traditional approach to parents' involvement in which parents assist the school completing a specific task like raising funds for school projects. Although this is beneficial for both the school and the child, it is however not enough involvement to make significant difference in the level of a child's learning achievement (Morrison, 2001).

The written word still remains the most common and most used medium of communication by schools to pass information to parents/home (Essa, 1999). Whether it is through text messages, newsletters, memos or other written communication, when family members do

not possess the reading ability, a wide communication gap could be created between the school and the home. With an adult literacy rate of 38% in the country and in some regions as high as 71-75% among women (National Population Commission [NPC, 2011]), this poses a serious difficulty in the promotion of home-school relationship. It is most likely to result in parental inability to actively participate in for example school-based activities such as classroom support to teachers or extra-curricular programmers.

The high illiteracy rates reported by UNESCO (2003) in Nigeria, therefore clearly does not portend well for the expected role of the home in establishing a strong relationship with the school in ECCDE programme. This role may not be adequately played by many parents and so put children at a great disadvantage in realizing the benefits associated with this level of education said to be the foundation of lifelong learning (Maduewesi cited in Nwugwo, 2008). Parental illiteracy being a constraint to parent's active involvement in their children's education has since been realized that some developed countries tackle the problem through various school/home partnership programme. In one particular programme, Morrison, (2001) observed that the Chicago child-parent centre (CPC) provides pre-school education for low-income children from 3 years as well as various family support services in and outside the centre. Most of the support was directed at enhancing involvement in children's education at home and in school which may include a wide variety of activities, such as parent volunteering as classrooms aides, interacting with other parents in the Centre's parent resources room, participating in educational workshops and courses, attending parent-teachers

meetings. This involvement strengthens parenting skills, vocational skills and social supports (Harvard family Research Project, 2006).

Introducing any parental education programme in Nigeria whether it is a regular adult education programme or aimed at supporting early childhood education programme will no doubt face many challenges. A major problem is the high opportunity cost involved in parents going on any education programme particularly illiterate parents who more often than not are also poor (Greenberge, 2011). Without a state social security system in place, the pursuit of livelihood objective may be far too strong to be replaced with a desire to learn for whatever purpose. Illiterate adults are unlikely to put in the required time and effort in an education programme if they are not convinced that doing so will have an impact on their daily concerns. To be attractive therefore, parents' education programme in support of early childhood education must provide a total package that includes knowledge and competencies to enable parents tackle the challenges of their life situations

Conclusion

The ECCDE programme is adopting an integrated curriculum aimed at ensuring the best care and support for a child during those vulnerable early years while laying a solid foundation for subsequent learning. The thematic approach to the learning content recognizes the role of parents as facilitators. This is very significant as it addresses a fundamental concern in a child's learning particularly at the pre-school stage not only because living and learning success but also helps to affect a smooth transition from home to school making especially a child's early days experience of school positive. As a right-based approach to

development, ECCDE is providing an unprecedented opportunity to all children regardless of their social circumstances in life to get ahead. It is worthy to note the planned approach to the delivery of the curriculum. There is a fusion of the home and the school where both parents and care givers/teachers are expected to facilitate the activities and their evaluation. This no doubt brings to the fore the need for a close connection between the two most important worlds of the child; the words of the school and the home which will undoubtedly be dependent on parents' possession of the pre-requisites for the task, in particular literacy skill.

With the provision of ECCDE in public schools set to capture mostly children from poor background and whose parents are more likely to be uneducated particularly those at the rural community level, it is difficult to see how parents with very little skills or indeed none at all would build a strong link between the home and the school setting. To overcome this constraint, the government must ensure that these children's particular disadvantage of coming from illiterate homes does not hamper their progress by actively promoting functional adult education programmers. This should be provided as a matter of urgency emphasizing the essential links underlying an ECCDE home/school partnership programme.

Recommendations

1. Existing schools should be required to extend their services to cover adult education programmes such that there is an immediate links between parental education and children's learning and development.
2. The government should support sensitization activities to create

awareness on the new ECCDE curriculum and the role of parents.

3. Government should ensure quality in terms of commitment to funding of adult education programme.
4. Government should re-organize the implementation of the universal basic education (UBE) programme to bring all the basic education components (ECCDE, Adult literacy, nomadic education, primary and junior secondary education) under one single structure and ensure equality in terms of government's commitment to funding.
5. Adult education centres should review current adult education programme.

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