

**THE PLACE OF NURSERY/PRIMARY EDUCATION IN
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TOTAL CHILD**

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Introduction

Whenever a house is to be built the usual starting point is its foundation. And for a house to stand the test of time and serve the purpose for which it was built there is the need to make its foundation as strong as possible. If the foundation is weak, whatever comes upon it will collapse prematurely. The foundation of a house is therefore the major carrier of the entire house.

In the same vein, Nursery/Primary Education is the starting point for the acquisition of formal education. Whatever a child will become in life, it is level that the foundation is laid. If a nation will be sound dynamic and progressive and if the individual members of the society will realize their potentialities to the fullness the determining point is the lowest level of education.

It should be noted that education generally (formal or informal) is necessary for the survival of any society.

Education Defined

The various definitions of Education given by scholars and laymen have revealed the purpose and rationale behind the acquisition of education. Education is the total process through which individuals learn or acquire relevant knowledge skills and have their faculties trained. It is the process through which man is made sound so as to become self-reliant and thus, be able to aid the emancipation of the society where he lives.

Education according to Pestalozzi a Swiss Philosopher, is the through which the three H of a man are developed. This H, are the Head (intellectual aspects of man), the Heart (moral development) and the Hand (physical development) i.e Education is the means by which an individual is developed in all ramifications.

The sociologists see Education as the process of cultural transmission and renewal, that is, the process through which the culture and the entire values of a society is transferred by the adult members of the society into the younger ones who are ignorant of such values. Hence, education serves as means of perpetuating the norms, ethos and acceptable attitudes and established order of a society. It is also a medium of change. Schools are established in order to equip learners to meet modern challenges which will usher in the desired changes and expected development into the society.

Osokoya (1987) defined education as "the leading out of the in-born powers and potentialities of an individual in the society and the acquisition of skills, aptitudes

and competences that are necessary for self actualization and such that are needed for coping with life's problems.

Types of Education

Nigerian were exposed to the traditional (indigenous) form of Education before the advent of Western (formal) education which was introduced by the Christian and the British Colonial Master.

To some extent, the indigenous education was able to take care of the development and stability of the society even though it did not involve writing. Indigenous education helped in integrating the child into the main streams of the society.

All hands were on deck to forestall occurrences of liabilities and social vices. The young ones were taught the norms and values of the family and the society in order to prevent the production of vagabonds and nuisance who would distablize the society. The content of indigenous education was no designed to cater for the all around development of the child. No stone was left unturned in ensuring that each child is made to become self reliant and be a contributor to the progress of the society where they lived.

Parents and all adults that constituted the teaching force, recognized their responsibilities and discharged them unreservedly. Discipline was quiet high and purposeful. Good examples were exhibited by the adults for the younger ones to emulate. Hence, cases of smoking armed robbery, (as a result of idleness), sexual abuse, cheating corruption etc. were not common. Different vocations were learnt through well organized apprenticeship programme (Fafunwa 1974).

However, with the introduction of the formal education, the responsibility which was solely borne by the home and the society became extended to the schools, well structured and organized learning centres where children of different ages are exposed to formal learning.

Nursery/Primary Education

Nursery/Primary education is the first and the most important level of formal education. It is the starting point in the formal education ladder. The importance of Nursery/Primary education in the development of a total child cannot be over-emphasised. Child development studies carried out by several scholars revealed the

fact that by the age of 5 years, most of the behaviours acquired by a child, whether negative or positive are irreversible. Such behaviours will continue to influence the life of a child till adulthood. Thus, revealing the important place Nursery/Primary education is occupying in the development of a child and infact the entire society.

Objectives of Nursery/Primary Education

Nursery education is the pre-primary education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus, prior to their entering the primary school. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) recognized the importance of Nursery education and has encouraged the development of pre-primary education in Nigerian. Since it serves as a major preparation for the more formal primary education, and because it helps in meeting the developmental needs of the child in a safe and nurturing environment through the use of play as a medium of instruction and learning.

The objectives of Nursery (pre-primary) education as tabled in the National Policy on Education (1998) should be:-

- Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school: preparing the child for primary level of education provision of adequate care and supervision for children while the parents are at work (on the farms in the market, office etc), inculcating social norms, inculcating the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, local environment playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc. teaching co-operation and team spirit, teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters colours, shapes, forms etc through play, and the teaching of good habits especially good health habits.

One can say that our Nursery schools are making efforts towards the realization of the above listed objectives. Nigerian government is also ensuring the standardizations are not Nursery school through inspection and supervision of such schools. Although such inspections are not regularly carried out. Hence, the existence of several mushroom nursery schools where shallow attention is paid to children.

Primary Education Defined

Primary education is the education given in an institution to children aged normally between 6 years. Primary education has been recognized as the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system. As a result of its importance, primary education is expected to perform the following function.

Objectives of Primary Education

Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively, laying of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking, citizenship education as basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society, character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes, developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment, giving the child the opportunity for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity and providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality. Relevant subjects aimed at realizing the objectives are offered in Nigerian Primary Schools.

Government Efforts

National Policy on Education analysed the role to be played by the government for a quick and possible realization of primary education objectives These among other things include:-

- Provision of materials and manpower for schools, promotion of the teaching of moral and religious education, provision for effective teaching of agriculture, ensuring that memorization and regurgitation of facts are de-emphasized, encourage the development of manual skills, see to it that the medium of communication at the last stage of primary education is English, equip all schools with relevant textbooks, libraries, laboratories, teaching aids and other facilities for effective teaching.

Other steps to be taken by the government include working towards the teacher pupils ration of 1:20 at the pre-primary level and 1:30 at the primary level. Ensure that teachers are given in-service training, provision of specialized teachers for particular subjects and also to encourage voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals to establish primary school along side those provided by the government. Undoubtedly, if the steps itemized above are genuinely taken and pursued by Nigerian government, the recipient, of primary education and the entire Nigerian society will definitely reach an enviable position in all segments of development.

However, it is sad to note that most of these steps are sparingly attended to by our Government. Our Nursery and Primary schools are facing enormous problems

today as a result of lip-service paid by our government to the development of education at this level.

As noted before, the objectives and curriculum contents of early in Nigeria have been well designed to usher in all that are needed for the emancipation of our country and the building of a solid foundation that will propel the nation to a greater height.

Problem militating against effective Nursery/Primary Education

Problems that constitute major bottle necks towards the advancement of the Nursery/Primary education in Nigeria are multi-dimensional. These problems bedeviling our schools can be categorized into home-related, school-related, government -related and society-related

Government/Proprietor-related-problem

Contrary to government promises as itemized in the National Policy on Education:

- Materials and manpower needs of our primary schools have not been adequately addressed.
- Lack of teacher, textbooks, laboratories etc are still very common in our schools. Emphasis are not on qualitative education but on what to be accrued from the schools.
- Materials and equipments for the teaching of vocational subjects are sparingly supplied
- Teaching aids that could replace the use of chalk and talk methods are not available.(no enough funds to purchase them-even common cardboards)
- Due to lack of qualified personnel and classroom to accommodate the pupils, the population of pupils is yet overflowing thereby preventing meaningful teaching from taking place. Hence, to attain the standard of ratio 1 to 30 or 40 as stipulated in the National Policy on Education remains a dream meant for future realization.
- Teachers are given partial in-service training-only their salaries are paid while other financial education burdens are not attended to. Hence, teachers go for training mostly to boost their status and to increase their pay-packet not necessarily for better teaching effectiveness.

- No positive encouragement is given to teachers rather their salaries are amputated, embezzled and irregular. All these lead to frustration which leads to the movement of teachers to other greener pastures
- Specialization of teachers for better handing of school subjects is yet to be properly adopted. The system whereby a teacher handles virtually all subjects offered by a class is still very rampant. This does not call for meaningful teaching.

School-related-problems

Some problems that emanates from our Nursery/Primary schools serves as major impediments to the attainment of our primary education objectives. These are:

- Regimentary use of chalk and talk methods by teachers. Pragmatic approach is never attempted by many. Old methods are still the order of the day.
- Many unqualified teachers produce half-baked primary school graduates who are likely to have F9 parallel in their WAEC exam later. Shallow knowledge leads to shallow input on the part of the teachers.
- The knowledge of the nature of man and how best to handle him have not been acquired by some teachers.
- Some behaviours or attitudes displayed by some teachers who are suppose to serve as mentors for the pupils are appalling.(the socialization and resocialization of pupils are to be carried out through the schools. But nauseating languages castigatory and derogatory statements are copied from some of our teachers.
- Deaf hears paid to problems of some pupils leads to formations of unconstitutional groups which later become torns in the flesh of homes, schools and the society.
- Corruption and other social vices are encouraged through the obnoxious practice of dictation of correct answers to pupils during external examinations. This has made it stop the problem of examination malpractices at the higher level of education.
- Poor leadership styles of heads of school which hinders smooth interaction, unity and cohesion needed for dedication to work and good performance of pupils.

Home-related-problem

- Poverty, leading to poor feeding (when the nutrition requirement of children is not met), delay in the payment of schools fees which aids the problem of truancy.
- Unhealthy home environment leading to ill-health which hampers good performance of pupils in schools
- Poor psychological atmosphere leading to emotional stress in children. This can mar the over-all development of the child. (Lack of affection, security etc).
- Poor style of discipline when discipline is given little attention or inconsistent and faults are overlooked or lukewarmly attended to, children raised in such homes will likely become problematic and social menac in schools
- Over labouring children - some children are saddled with too many activities outside the school programme. They attend lessons, forced to read at home and yet engage in the household chores. The loss of energy dissipated on routine activities is never regained. Hence, pupils are unable to perform optimally in the schools
- Lack of spiritual atmosphere- A song says "To omo re lona ti o to, nigba to ba dagba tan, koni le kuro ninu re.(teach your child in the way he should go, so that when he is old he will not depart from it. Prov 22:36).

Society-relate problem

These are hardly any positive thing to be learnt from the present day Nigerian society. What is heard, seen and read from the radio, television, and newspaper is very much contrary to expectation. Instead of complimenting the efforts of the home and the school, they water-down such efforts. Immoral films are shown in board day light, news of corruption of public officers, armed robbery are the common news that film the page of our newspapers

How to Promote qualitative Nursery/Primary Education in Nigeria

For this to be attained the identified problems above must be fully addressed:

- Government/Proprietors should provide qualified teachers and relevant teaching materials and facilities for our primary schools
- Teachers allowances and salaries should be fully paid as at when due.
- Government should give full in-service training to teachers and encourage them to attend seminars and workshops.
- Manageable class size should be adopted and maintained.
- Teachers should maintain cordial relationship with the pupils, harsh, domineering attitude should not be displayed.
- Home and school routines to be well planned so as to allow for rest period
- Home to be ready to cater for the curiosity needs of the child by giving them the opportunity to explore and discover what obtains in their environment.
- Teachers should maintain good discipline and allow for good psychological atmosphere, provide good food and promote healthy environment for the child.
- Specialized teaching should be encouraged the more in our schools.
- All social vices-related behaviours should not be displayed by teachers who are regarded as the custodians of society moral values.
- Good and attractive salaries should be paid by proprietors of schools especially in our private Nursery/Primary schools, this will reduce the influx of teachers from private schools to the government schools.
- Discrimination on the basis of state origin or local government in the admission to colleges should also stop. This demoralizes brilliant pupils who find it difficult to find admission to good schools
- Coaching for Common Entrance Examination purpose only from primary four to six which has dominated the activities of teachers should be looked into. This prevents teachers from really teaching the children what is needed for effective living and the survival of our society.

All these suggestions, if adopted will help to a greater extent towards the production of a well developed child and a virile nation.

To the out-going pupils/student

We bless God for seeing you through your Nursery/Primary Education. You are now moving in to different secondary schools. Remember to be good ambassadors of your home and these noble schools. Do not be a source of disgrace to the school by indulging in any embarrassing behaviour. It is your progress and your contribution to the society that will bring joy to this school. Do not join bad gangs. Be law abiding wherever you find yourself.

Learn to love, cooperate and sympathize with others around you strive to excel in your studies as you are moving to the secondary schools. Right from your J.S.S.1, aim at having the best result in all your internal and external examination. Be obedient to your parents and all laws approved for the progress of Nigerian society.

Other Student

The other students who are yet to graduate should be motivated to come out of the school with brilliant result. Your own time come one day. Do not cause any problem for the schools, face your studies and discharge all duties assigned to you by the school authority diligently.

Avoid truancy, lateness and insensitivity to what your teachers are teaching you. If anything is not clear to you, feel free to ask questions from your teachers. Study at home and ensure that you help and obey your parents.

I am sure that your teachers are not the lazy type. They will not leave any stone unturned in order for your to attain successes like those who are graduating today. The teachers should continue with struggle but operating under the fear of God, by so doing, your labour will be rewarded physically and also financially.

I thank God for the effort of the proprietor and other supporters of the school, keep the flag flying any you will laugh at the end of the day.

Thank you for coming, May God bless you all amen.

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