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ASSESSMENT OF PRE PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICIES IMPLEMENTATION IN KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Pre-primary education plays significant roles in the development of young Kwarans and Nigerians at large. These roles may not be properly achieved if the right policies are not been followed. Thus this study investigated implementation of pre-primary education policies in Kwara State. The purpose of the study include to examine the extent to which government established pre-primary education section in existing basic schools; the extent to which pre-primary schools use play method to teach; the extent to which pre-primary education use mother tongue to teach; and to investigate how adequate is the government monitor standards in pre-primary education. Research questions were set to address the purpose of the study.

Descriptive research design was adopted in this study. The population comprised 1,359 head teachers in Kwara State. The sample of the study includes 494 head teachers of basic schools in Kwara State. Proportional sampling technique was used to select the sample of the study. A researchers'-designed questionnaire titled "Assessment of Pre-primary Education Policies implementation of Questionnaire" was used to collect data. The reliability of the instrument was ensured by using test-retest method and the reliability coefficient was 0.61. The data collected was analysed using frequency count and percentage.

The findings of the study include: that;

the government has ensured that 53.5% (more than half) of the existing public basic schools have pre-primary section while all private schools made provision for the section;

the extent of usage of mother tongue to teach in at pre-primary level in public and private schools in Kwara State is very low;

private schools with higher percentage of 89.2% used play-method

for teaching than public school with a little above percentage of usage(57.5%); and

government's monitoring of standards in pre-primary level is grossly inadequate.

The following recommendations were made; that: government should ensure 100% compliance with the policy by building pre-primary school section in existing public pre-primary schools; monitoring effort should be intensified by the government to ensure that pre-primary schools (public or private) fully comply with the policies of using mother language and play method to teach.

Introduction

The development of any Nation is hinged on education of its citizens, as evident in the Federal Government of Nigeria, (2013) declaration that education is an instrument par excellent for the development of any Nation. This is one of the major reasons why the Federal Government of Nigeria supports education in the country. The educational system in Nigeria is divided into basic, secondary and tertiary education. Pre-primary education is education before the basic education. Invariably, it serves as the foundation for every other levels. This makes Pre-primary education very important in the development of an educated Nigerian. Modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones for obvious reasons. It is common practice in most societies to make provision for early-childhood or pre-school education programmes of various sorts for children below the official school-going age (usually six years) mainly to prepare them for education in primary schools (Ejeh, 2006).

Pre-primary education is the education given in an education institution to children prior to their entering the Primary school. It includes the Crèche, the Nursery and Kindergarten. Pre- primary education according to the Federal government of Nigeria (2013) stands to achieve the following objectives: effect smooth transition from home to school; prepare the child for primary education; provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work; inculcate social norms; inculcate the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys; develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; learn good habit especially good health habit; and teach the rudiments of numbers, letters; colours, shapes, forms among others.

The Government envisaged that in order to ensure that these objectives are

achieved; there is need for the stakeholders in the level to follow certain guidelines which are referred to as Pre-primary education policy. Policy is defined as a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in a particular situation that has been agreed officially by a group of people, a business organization, government or a political party. In order to ensure effectiveness of Pre-primary education the Government shall: (a) establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community and private effort in its provision; (b) make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education; (c) ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; (d) ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; (e) regulate and control the operations of pre-primary education and to this end ensure that the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1: 25; set and monitor standard for early childcare centres in the country; and (f) ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers association in the running and maintenance of early education facilities (FGN, 2013).

Some early writers were of the opinion that no matter the level of implementation of policy, pre-primary education will still be ineffective (Robinson & Robinson, 1968). This is because young children are not mature enough to learn complex skills demanded by pre-school educational programmes and that the warmth of mother love and the fostering of children's emotional security are more important than any form of educational programme (Robinson & Robinson, 1968). Some contend that early childhood years should be utilized in firmly grounding the child in his/her sub-culture and that exposing him/her to pre-school programmes which emphasize intellectual skills would impose middle class values on the child and destroy the positive aspects of his/her sub-culture (Reissman, 1962). Furthermore, some leading scholars in early childhood education have also doubted the wisdom in exposing young children very early to formal education (Marcon, 2002, & Weikart, 2000), expressing the fear that the short – term academic gains would be offset by the long – term stifling of their motivation and self – initiated learning. Moreover, some research evidences indicate that early childhood education have positive influences in children's affective, conceptual and social development in subsequent years (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2005; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003).

Pre-primary education serves a very important function in the transition of pupils from home to school in Nigeria. Thus, its importance cannot be over emphasised. It is therefore justified, that numerous studies have been carried

out on Pre-primary education and related variables. Buckingham and Coffman (2000) carried out a study on parent perception of their role in Early Childhood Education and Care in Queensland, Australia. The study focussed on two related aspects of the role of parents. Namely: the role of parents in using Early Childhood Education Centre services and the role of parents in shaping ECEC public policy. Twenty six parents participated in the study. The findings of the study identified factors perceived by parents as influencing their participation at ECEC and discussed their implication for both policy and practice. Bulach, Lunenburg and Potter (2012) also examined the perception of early development education programmes held by parent in disadvantaged communities regarding the impact of early development programmes on parents' lives in Michigan, USA. The findings of the study was based on in-depth interview of parents who had children in early education programmes and participated in parental programmes offered by early education programme in Michigan.

Abdulkareem and Sheu (2014) also carried out a study on integrated early childhood development and national transformation: managerial structure as an imperative. The study showed that early childhood education is under developed and underutilized in Nigeria. Considering the importance of pre-primary education to the development of Nigerian child who is the leader of tomorrow, there is urgent need to investigate the root cause or causes of the underdevelopment and utilization of pre-primary education in Nigeria. The National policy on education (2013) stated categorically the objectives of pre-primary education and the policies to be followed to achieve these objectives. There is possibility that the causes of underdevelopment, underutilization and underachievement of pre-primary education in Nigeria are caused by non-implementation of these policies. Thus, this study focussed on assessment of the implementation of pre-primary education policy in Kwara state. Specifically the purposes of the study include to:

1. Investigate the extent to which government established pre-primary sections in existing public schools in Kwara State.
2. Examine the extent to which public and private schools use mother tongue to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State.
3. Investigate the extent to which Public and private schools use play method to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State.
4. Examine the extent to which government monitors standard for Pre-primary education in Kwara State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to sharpen the focus of the study:

1. To what extent has government established Pre-primary sections in existing public schools in Kwara State?
2. To what extent do Public and private schools use mother tongue to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State?
3. To what extent do Public and private schools use play method to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State?
4. To what extent do government monitor standard for Pre-primary education in Kwara State?

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted. It was appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to collect data from a sample of a population, analyse the data collected, arrived at logical findings, conclusions about the whole population. The population of the study consist of 774 public basic schools and 585 private basic schools in Kwara State. The sample of the study is therefore 260 and 234 public and private basic schools respectively in Kwara state. The sample was selected using proportional sampling technique with the aid of Kreijcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample determination. Therefore 494 head teachers of basic schools in Kwara state constituted the sample of the study. A researchers-designed questionnaire was used to collect data from headteachers of the Basic schools. The reliability of the instrument was ensured by using test-retest method and the reliability coefficient was 0.61

In context, the study covered four of the policies recommended by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) in order to ensure that Pre-primary education achieve the objectives for which it is meant to serve. These policies include: establishment of Pre-primary education sections in existing public schools; monitoring of standards in Pre-primary schools by Government; the usage of mother tongue and play way method to teach the pupils at this level. Percentage was used to answer the research questions raised.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: To what extent has government established Pre-primary sections in existing public schools in Kwara State?

Table1: Establishment of Pre -primary Education Section in Schools

Type of School	No	%
1. Public Basic Schools with Pre - primary Section	774	53.5
2. Public Basic Schools without Pre -primary Section	674	46.5
3. Private Basic Schools with Pre -primary Section	585	100
4. Private Basic Schools without Pre -primary Section	nil	nil

Source: KWME (2010)

Table one revealed that there are 774 (53.5%) existing public basic schools with pre-primary education section while 674 (46.5%) are without pre-primary section. The table also showed that all the 585(100%) existing private basic schools have pre-primary sections. It therefore showed that government has performed above the average level in the implementation of the policy of establishing pre-primary education section in existing public basic schools in Kwara state while establishment of pre-primary education section in private basic schools is at the optimum level. The 100 percent compliance by the basic schools may not be unconnected to the profit making objective of the private owners. Since many of the parents want schools to take care of their wards while they are away at work thus there is high demand for pre-primary schools. The private schools owners see the avenue as money making venture and as it is expected, pre-primary education section is usually the section private owners develop first when establishing new basic schools.

Research Question Two: To what extent do Public and private schools use mother tongue to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State?

Table 2: Use of Mother-tongue to Teach in Pre -primary Section

S/N	Item	Public schools		Private schools	
		Agree/Disagree		Agree	
		total	total	total	total
		No (%)	No(%)	No(%)	No(%)
1.	There are different ethnic groups in my school (classes) so teachers cannot use one language as mother - tongue.	162(62.3)	98(37.7)	234(100)	nil(nil)
2.	Many parents appreciate schools where their children can speak good English language not mother tongue	190(73.1)	70(26.9)	200(85.5)	134(14.5)
3.	Only Yoruba/Hausa language is taught as subject (not as language of teaching) in my school.	205(78.8)	55(21.2)	117(50)	117(50)
4.	English Language is the main language of instruction because it is the lingua franca in Nigeria	260(100)	nil	(nil)234(100)	nil(nil)
Percentage Average		78.6	21.4	83.8	16.2

Source: Field survey (2016)

From Table two, it can be deduced that 78.6 percent (on the average) of the public basic schools head teachers agreed that: teachers cannot use mother tongue to teach in pre-primary schools because there are different ethnic groups in their schools; many parents appreciate schools where their children can speak good English language not mother-tongue; only Yoruba or Hausa language is taught as subjects in their school but not use in teaching other subjects; English language is used as the main language of instruction because it is the lingua franca of Nigeria. However 21.4 percent (on the average) disagreed.

In the same vein, 83.8 percent (on the average) of the private basic schools head teachers in Kwara state agreed that: teachers cannot use mother tongue to teach in pre-primary schools because there are different ethnic groups in their schools; many parents appreciate schools where their children can speak good English language not mother-tongue; only Yoruba or Hausa language is taught as subjects in their school but not use in teaching other subjects; English language is used as the main language of instruction because it is the lingua franca of Nigeria while 16.2 percent (on the average) of the head teachers disagreed. The finding on table 2 revealed the extent of usage of mother tongue to teach at pre-primary level has indicated by the sampled headteachers is 21.4% and 16.2% in public and private schools respectively. Thus, the extent of usage of mother tongue to teach at pre-primary school level in public and private schools in Kwara state is very low. This findings is in agreement with that of Ejieji (2006) who found out that government (state or federal) in the country has not done anything to ensure that mother-tongue or local language is mainly used for instruction in nursery schools as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria; 2013). Enforcing the use of mother tongue in the schools will even run counter to the interests of parents of the children in such schools most of who are anxious for their children to acquire the official language (which is English) as early as possible. Until recent times, the provision of pre-primary education was the sole preserve of private proprietors who had to provide their services in line with the values and priorities of parents in order to remain in business. 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 institutions and lower classes of primary schools should be principally the child's mother tongue or the language of the local community. Contrary to this, almost all parents, especially of the middle and high classes that

patronise pre-primary institutions, 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 primary and subsequent levels of the Nigerian educational system. The ease with which children require and speak English language is one of most important criteria parents use to assess the quality of pre-primary institutions in the country.

Research Question Three: *To what extent do Public and private schools use play method to teach at Pre-primary level in Kwara State?*

Table 3: Use of Play Method to Teach in-Pre primary Section.

S/N	Item	Public schools		Private schools	
		Agree total	Disagree total	Agree total	Disagree total
		No (%)	No(%)	No(%)	No(%)
1.	Toys are mainly used for recreational purpose not for instructional purpose	190(73.1)	70(26.9)	201(85.9)	33 (14.1)
2.	Teachers in my school use Toys, Games and rhymes to teach	100(38.5)	160(61.5)	200(85.5)	34(14.5)
3.	Most of teachers in pre-primary Schools section are not trained on the use of play method of teaching	260(100)	nil(nil)	234(100)	nil(nil)
4.	Provision of needed resources contributed to teachers adoption of play method of teaching in my school.	48(18.5)	212 (81.5)	200(85.5)	34(15.5)
Percentage Average		57.5	42.5	89.2	10.8

Source: field survey (2016)

Table 3 revealed that the extent to which public and private schools use play method to at pre-primary level in Kwara State as indicated by the sampled head teachers is 57.5% and 89.2% respectively. It is obvious that private school with higher percentage of 89.2% used play method for teaching than public school with a little above average percentage of usage (57.5%). According to Ejieh (2006), play method of teaching that is advocated in the National Policy on pre-primary education is not effectively used in most of the schools, as most of the teachers are not trained on the use of it. Proprietors and teachers provide the children with toys to play with mainly for recreational purposes and not for instruction. Very few, if any, nursery school teachers in the country have received formal training in the use of the play method or any other type of learning activity to inculcate social norms in preschool children as advocated in the policy document.

Research Question Four:*How adequate is the government monitoring of standards in Pre-primary education in Kwara State?*

Table 4: Monitoring of Standards in Pre-primary Schools by the Govt.

S/N	Item	Agreed Total		Disagree Total	
		No	(%)	No	(%)
1.	Government agencies visit our school regularly to monitor standards	181	(36.3)	313	(66.7)
2.	The monitoring agents give objective assessment	99	(21.3)	395	(78.7)
3.	Many of the public and private Pre -primary schools are government approved	99	(21.3)	395	(78.7)
4.	Government employs qualified personnel to ensure standard in Preprimary schools.	67	(13.6)	427	(86.4)
Percentage Average		23.13	.	76.87	

Source(field survey, 2016)

From table four, it can be deduced that there are low agreements (36.3%, 21.3%, 21.3% and 13.6%) with the statements that: government agents visit our school regularly to monitor standards; monitoring agents give objective assessment; many of the public and private pre-primary schools are government approved. It is suffice to conclude that monitoring of standards in pre-primary education in Kwara state is grossly inadequate considering the average percentage of 23.13 percent agreement and 76.87 percent disagreement. This conforms to the observation of Ejieh (2006) that State Ministry of Education officials are, in principle, supposed to visit and inspect the physical plant, the human and other resources available in a proposed nursery school and if these are found to be adequate, the Ministry would approve the school for operation. In most cases these visits are made a long time after the school had become operational and had been paying the prescribed taxes whether or not the infrastructure is adequate. Under such circumstances and with lobbying by the proprietors of such schools who often form powerful pressure groups, the ministry officials find it difficult not to recommend the schools for approval. This explains why nursery and primary schools can be found any type of location, making use of any type of facility. This problem is hinge on the inability of both the State and Federal governments to exercise effective control on the establishment and running of pre-primary schools in the Kwara State. Lack of adequate number of inspectors to regulate the establishment of, and to monitor the activities in these nursery schools pose a great challenge. Part of the problem is that the

locations of some schools are not known to inspectors. Another related problem is how to detect and close down unregistered ones that spring up here and there in almost equally large numbers.

Conclusion

It is not a gain saying that pre-primary education is very important in the development of children especially in Kwara State where many mothers and fathers are either away at offices, market or farm looking for means of survival. The economic situation of the country in recent time may not give opportunity to parents to stop work in order to take care of their wards. Since every parents seems to be 'working class', there is need to ensure that the children are in safe hands thus pre-primary school becomes inevitable. More so, pre-primary education is the first form of formal education children encounter and therefore serve as a crucial factor or point in the development of the pupils.

As good and important the pre-primary education is and as brilliant as the objectives of this section of basic education are, it is bound to be inefficient and ineffective if the proper guidelines and policies are not followed as evident in this study. There is therefore an urgent need for government and other stakeholders to do the needful as rightly pointed out in the recommendations of this study.

Recommendations

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

The government should endeavour to put more effort in establishing more pre-primary schools in the existing public basic schools to the extent that no basic school will be without pre-primary education section as it is evident in private basic schools in Kwara state.

The government should also ensure that the required resources like television set, toys, projector, games and pupil-friendly school environment are adequately provided.

Proper monitoring mechanisms must be put in place to ensure quality assurance. In doing this, the government must eradicate corruption in the ministries by given them adequate incentives, good working environment, given them power and authority to act right and punish offenders (to serve as deterrent to others).

Government should also ensure that due process is followed during recruitment and placement of personnel. This is to ensure that qualified

personnel are employed to monitor compliance of schools (especially private schools) with the policies.

All the stakeholders need to support the use of mother tongue in the teaching of pupils at this stage as it has been found to be effective in enhancing creativity, innovativeness in the children, government agencies should educate other stakeholders on this or find a mid-way through which learning outcome can be aided through appropriate medium of communication.

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