

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

BY

Yahaya Mohammed Ndagi: Department of Early Childhood Education, Kwara State
College of Education, Ilorin; E-mail: ayindeagan750@gmail.com

Adedeji Grace Bola: Department of Early Childhood Education, Kwara State
College of Education, Ilorin

Adeoye Christy Iyabo, Department of Psychology, Kwara State
College of Education, Ilorin; E-mail: coluwasogo@gmail.com

&

Salihu, Umar Olaitan, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Kwara State
College of Education, Ilorin, E-mail: osolihu656@gmail.com

Abstract

The need for quality assurance in early childhood care education cannot be swept under the carpet. It's enhanced the quality of the process that produce the children who would be the leaders of tomorrow, these include policy documentation and implementation as it's affect national development in the scope of child upbringing. The quality of the process depends largely on proper supervision, monitoring, assessing and evaluation of the system. Therefore, the paper will examine the concept of education, concept of quality assurance, as its affect early childhood care education, the challenges of that as it hinders quality assurance in early childhood care education, concept of national development, suggestions and conclusion. The paper ends by recommending that there should be a good and equipped quality assurance unit in all our early childhood care development centres and institution to enhance quality service delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Quality assurance, Early childhood care, National development

Introduction

Education is one of the veritable tools that can be used to transform a person or group of people into a valuable and functional people in the society. Its gives people the opportunity to explore their intelligence in the field of development and by extension enhanced both physical and spiritual development of the people. Wasilat (2012) defined education as a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, competencies and aptitudes to fit properly into the society in which they belong and contribute their quota its growth. Therefore, early childhood care education has been general phenomena in the Nigeria education system. It involved all round development of the child right from the age of 0-5 which includes, the health, nutrition, shelter, care, cognitive, language, emotional, social and moral intents. Okewole (2012), defines early childhood care education as the form of education that is given to a child right from birth till age eight. Okewole (2012), stressed further that there seems to be misconceptions about pre-primary education and early childhood care education. These two concepts are not synonymous in scope; early childhood care education is broader than pre-primary education or nursery education. While, nursery education could be equated with pre-primary education. Early childhood care education transcends both concepts of pre-primary and nursery education. Pre-primary and Nursery education are integral parts of early childhood care education.

Therefore, to facilitate and enhance the quality of the system that shall produce efficient and effective children for national development. The instrument quality assurance must be effectively put in place. Hence, quality assurance determines both the quality inputs and the quality output of the system. John, (2012) defined quality assurance in any educational institution as that which indicates the pre-eminence and special features that makes the institution distinct from other forms of institutions. John (2012)

further examined the nature of quality in education and stated that quality is perceived as the level of achievement or performance and this is linked with the ability to function well in the school environment and to meet the needs of the entrepreneur. Adam (2014), defined quality assurance using system approach that involves a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the higher education system. It equally ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds on education. The inputs segment includes students, teacher, curriculum and facilities on the process side, emphasis on teaching /learning interactions, internal efficiency, research, evaluation procedure and management practices. The output includes the quality of graduates as well as the system's external efficiency. Hence, it is important to note that the holistic adherence to the minimum standards of establishing early childhood care education centers will have a lifelong all round development of the child by extension national development.

Consequently, development involves the society's transformation through its established institutions, organizations, social-rules, customary usages and attitudes to an extent that makes the society and the nation grow positively to a desired modern change. This transformation can be felt in economy, health, science and technology, social and political life of the people and by extension the entire nation. Emmanunel (2014), defined national development as the advancement from a low level to a higher level of all social and economics stratification. From the forgoing it is to enhance crystal clear to state that early childhood care education is one of the veritable tool national development and the quality assurance unit remains one of the fundamental instrument through which this can be achieved.

Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Care Education

Quality early childhood care education at the early year of a child is very germane and a most sure way of achieving national development. It is important to note that these formative years impact greatly on the later life of the child and the society at large. Adamu (2012), stressed that quality is most often defined as fitness for purpose in relation user and customers need. Quality also means product conform to standard, specification and requirement. Adamu (2012) stressed further that assurance is a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organization. Sunday (2010) characterized quality by three interrelated and inter dependent strands;

- i. Efficiency in the kneeling of its goals.
- ii. Relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs.
- iii. Something more that is the exploration of new ideals, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity.

Hence, quality assurance is the systematic coordination and regular assessment in procedure initiated and domesticated by valid education institutions and systems, in order to supervise and monitor performance against objectives. UBE (2013) emphasized that quality assurance is a major challenge in Nigeria's early Childhood care education. Most pre-school lack essential infrastructure to enable if function affectively, they lack adequate support services both from the government and the society at large to this end, Federal Ministry of Education (2010) stressed that quality assurance in Nigeria is a paradigm shift from the former practice of school supervision and inspection to a monitoring and evaluating process that provides a new operative mode of evaluation. Evaluation process and practice are now carried out according to set standards that bring about improvement in teaching. Hence, the goals of early childhood care education is to assist the quality assurance unit to be successful as outlined by Oluwadare (2015),

- i. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
- ii. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- iii. Provides care and support to the children in form of:
 - a. Good nutrition and health for children
 - b. A healthy and safe environment
 - c. Psycho-social stimulation
 - d. Protection and security.

- iv. Inculcate social norms.
- v. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity, through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- vi. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit.
- vii. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.
- viii. Learn good habits, especially good health habits
- ix. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letter, colors, shapes, form etc.

Consequently, for the above goals to be achieved Ikuenomone and Olaniran (2012), stressed that quality assurance should be focused on quality improvement. This includes staff development, a strong hold or monitoring, reflection on feedback, a clear emphasis on teaching skills and curriculum contents.

Secondly, Early Childhood care centre has the responsibility to evaluate and document its own actions and performance continuously at least once in a year as well as self-evaluation in conjunction with an external body. Likewise, pupils' parents' comments or reactions in each centre should be taken into consideration as a type of evidence, newly appointed caregivers are to participate periodically in basic pedagogical training and should be offered follow-up development opportunities regularly. Thirdly, the centre administrators should ensure that the continuous improvement in the process and system are fully documented for each module. Caregivers should be encouraged to keep records not by creating special documents through normal process such as taking minutes of school meeting, filling of working papers (scheme of works and preparing some copies for the policy makers to reflect on. This will serve as a baseline for the quality monitoring and supervising agents to ensure quality assurance in early childhood care education for national development.

Fourthly, the caregivers should be properly introduced and inducted with the interpretation of the educational policies prepared for the children and they should promptly be aware of the rights of the children and know how best to protect them to enhance quality assurance in the process. Apparently, there is the need for the centre administrators to learn and unlearn research findings from other scholars in the field of early childhood care education to enhance and facilitate quality assurance for national development. Parents of the pupils can serve as quality assurance implementations by regular monitoring and assessing the performance of their pupils. It is important to note that the quality of education given to a child before transition to primary school has a lifelong effect on the child's intellectual ability and these can only be achieved by putting in place effective and efficient quality assurance units.

Concept of National Development

Development in early childhood care education is the gradual process of change in the child which is exhibited physically, internally, socially, emotionally, spiritually and morally. Developmental change may take place as a result of genetically controlled process of maturation or consequences of environmental factors and learning. In most cases, development involves an interaction between the two (UBE, 2013). Development in the general sense is gradual advancement through progressive stages of growth from within. It is the systematic process of training and growth and through it, the individual gains and applies knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes with which he/she manages profit seeking and other work organizations effectively (Ogundele & James, undated). Therefore, National development involves the society's transformation through the institutions, organizations, social rules, customary usages and attitudes to an extent that makes the society more and more positively responsive to desired modern changes. This transformation can be felt in modern health, science and technology, socio-political life of the people and by extension the entire nation. (Emmanuel, 2014), stressed that national development involves the total transformation of the society, making humanity the focus of the development drive and seeking to develop man's potentialities in a total sense. National development includes reduction of poverty, wealth creation and equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring nutrition and health, housing and ordinary services, social security and welfare. It entails building capacities to advance material and human capital for affective productions of goods and services (Okemakinde, 2012).

The National development goals of Nigeria as stressed by Okemakinde (2012) formed the foundations upon which the national policy on education is built. It was formed with the belief that education would serve as instrument for national transformation. Unfortunately education is yet to achieve its objective in Nigeria not to talk of early childhood care education policies. The country is still trapped in vicious cycle of under development and political/religious upheavals which continues to threaten national unity. The people are still engulfed in ignorance, disease and poverty.

The precarious situation the country is going through and the national development goals can only be realistic through effective and functional early childhood care education system. In a realistic term this type of education is made possible through effective, efficient teaching and learning, taking note of the philosophy of early childhood care education in addressing national developmental problems. For national development to be attained there is the need to give sincere priority to investments of human capital through early childhood care education. If children are well grounded in their early years in the real sense of it, they would not wait for government to provide them with job when they grew up, they will engage themselves in a sincere and profitable profession, thereby enhancing the growth and development of their society and the nation at large by emancipating themselves from the grip of poverty, and consistent unemployment. Therefore, in Nigeria it has become imperative for us to invest and embrace qualitative early childhood care education program in order to move our society and the nation forward, socially economically, and emotionally.

Factors that Hinders Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Care Educational

No matter how good policy is it will be hindered by some shortcomings. One of the more reasons we do have policy review in our educational system periodically. However, Oluwadare (2015) stressed that a working definition of quality ECD programme is “one that meets the developmental and cultural needs of giving children and their families in ways that enable them to thrive. Hence because of the change in political hand no policy of the child has been achieved as a result of continuous change in hand, this affects quality assurance unit of any educational system and policy implementer. Oluwadare (2015) outlined some of hindrance as follow:

1. There is the problem of inadequate strategic planning. Strategic planning is a process that enables the institution to set target and identify the means by which we can achieve such targets in other words, it enables us to identify where we want to be at specific points in time and how to get there. Unfortunately, however our strategies plans wherever they are evolved are not based on either available data nor do they relate to the outcome of research findings. Most of the time, such plan and policies are announced before any form of planning is done and this is lack of continuity leading to the begin again syndrome. We are merely drafting into the future rather than planning for and as some once remarked, we take one step forward and two steps backward.
2. There is the lopsided value system in our education system that affects quality assurance in early childhood care education which also impacts on happening in the school. This is one of the reasons why many stakeholders, within and outside the country once doubt the quality of what our schools produce. If a child is given over schools produce. If a child is given over assess and enabling environment to discipline his/her intellectual ability without been properly monitor can abused the opportunity which is very common in society

Conclusion

Stem from forgoing, early childhood care is a veritable tool for the national development to make this possible there is need to put in place effective and efficient quality assurance unit. The government should involve all stakeholders in education industry the need to put quality assurance unit in place for effective and efficient service delivery. Therefore it is important that government put all necessary machinery on ground to see to the holistic implementations of early childhood care education programme for national

development as it affects the Child's health, nutrition, care, stimulation and shelter. The conducive environment for the child will allow them to play their vibrant role items of creativity and exposing them to new innovation that will make them to become efficient and effective member of the society and world at large.

Suggestions

1. Government should fund early childhood care education program promptly and see to the holistic implementation of the quality assurance policies i.e. organizing periodic seminars, workshop and conference to discuss fundamental through early childhood care education.
2. Government should sponsor reasonable research finding to learn and unlearn all the nitty gritty in the field of early childhood care education as it affects national development.
3. Parents need to serve as quality assurance agent since education giving to their word will have either positive or negative impact, in their life long activities. Hence, the parent are the best quality assurance assessor.
4. Adequate logistic should be made available to the quality assurance unit to assist them in discharging their duties effectively and efficiently.

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