

Curriculum Content and Organization of Learning Programmes in Early Childhood Education

HASSAN, ZAINAB TITILAYO

Department of Educational Foundation and Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo - Lagos State
zaynabah4u@gmail.com

Abstract: *The fundamental step of any country's educational system, including Nigeria, is early childhood education. The curriculum is the real tool used to enthrone the need for quality education in order to get students off to a good start. This study investigates how learning programs are structured at all stages in early childhood, outlines the early childhood education landscape in Nigeria, and then details the advantages of early childhood education in relation to the objectives and content of early years programs. The report concludes with a few issues that hinder the efficient implementation of curriculum in Nigeria as well as its inherent opportunities.*

Keywords - curriculum, implementation, early childhood education, creche, infant and kindergarten

Introduction

High quality early care and education has been associated with short-term and long-term cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for young children's development. When quality is discussed, it is typically quantified in terms of two factors: (1) process variables (such as the nature of children's interactions with adult caregivers) and (2) structural variables (such as characteristics that can be governed by policy and that foster favorable conditions for children's development, such as adult:child ratios, group sizes, and teacher preparation).

Curriculum – or the material taught to children, cannot be disregarded; rather, it serves as the central tenet of good pedagogy. Curriculum must be clearly understood for what it is and for what it uniquely contributes to early care and education. Curriculum is the content of what is taught and what is learned.

Curriculum goals in early childhood education

All individuals who care about the education of children should have a good understanding of the curriculum goals (e.g., families, teachers, program administrators). To assist in achieving objectives in a unified, cogent manner, the curriculum and associated instructional methodologies should be created. Clear goals are indicated for several components of early learning.

Literacy & Reading

Interaction with books, book knowledge, story structure, environmental print, telling and retelling of stories.

Alphabet Knowledge & Writing

development stages for writing, alphabetic letters and sounds, print conceptions, name recognition, and production.

Expressive & Receptive Language

Oral comprehension, asking and answering questions, speech creation, conversation, grammar, basic and complicated sentences, sounds of language- rhyming and alliteration, vocabulary.

Mathematics & Problem Solving

Rote counting, numeral recognition, ordinal terms, simple addition and subtraction with concrete models, mathematical concepts-more/less, geometry and spatial sense, common shapes, location words, measurement skills, quantity, seriation, sequence, pattern, sorting/matching, simple graphing, time concepts, cause and effect, problem-solving skills such as trial and error, experimentation.

Science & Nature

Physical: examination of attributes, position and motion, texture, classification; the study of plants and animals, including their life cycles; Seasons, weather, and the natural world on Earth.

Physical Development & Health

Basic anatomy: bodily parts and organs; personal boundaries; nutrition; healthy lifestyles; safety; self-care and self-help abilities; gross motor skills: running, jumping, hopping, marching; balancing; coordinated movement; fine motor: grabbing; pinching; manipulating; hand-eye coordination.

Art & Music Appreciation

learning about and appreciating creativity, self-expression, and the arts; also exploring and experimenting with music, singing, and dance.

Symbolic Representation

Imitation, role play, creation/recreation of story, dramatic play with objects (dramatic & sociodramatic play; levels of block play).

Social Interactions & Community

Social participation, solitary, parallel, associative and cooperative play, classroom routines, small and large group experiences, classroom responsibilities, empathy and helping behaviors, perspective of others, social problem-solving (levels of social play; classroom community; interactions with others).

Emotions & Self-Regulation

span of attention, capacity for self-awareness and emotion recognition in others as well as oneself, connections between feelings and conduct, and capacity for emotion and behavior self-regulation. Curriculum, or what kids learn, is important for promoting and improving young kids' learning and development since it is the "front line" of what they experience. Curriculum varies depending on how one feels about children, pedagogy, academic standards, and child abilities. Yet, the curriculum is essential to the knowledge and skills that children learn, as well as to the use of certain pedagogical techniques and the dynamics of teacher/caregiver-child relationships. Given the growing number of kids enrolled in early care and education programs, effective curricula are crucial. Curriculum is enhanced and differentiated when curricular frameworks are applied alongside it. Frameworks that promote quality consensus, allow for individualization, and accept diversity are necessary for curriculum regulation in view of the growing globalization.

The Scope of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Although, quality early childhood programmes have the five elements just described in common, but also have many differences because of the children these programmes are designed to serve. This unit will identify and discuss these options:

Infant/toddler/Day care/Creche 0-3 years

This is the area of ECCE programs in Nigeria that is expanding the quickest. Most very young children used to be looked for by family members in the home; in Igbo and Yoruba, this is known as "Otaakara" and "Jeleosinmi," respectively. Yet, recent observations and research in Nigeria revealed that 55% of newborns and 53% of 1-year-olds are cared for outside of their homes (Fowowe & Akinkuotu, 2010). The family's observation also points to the likelihood that this pattern will persist due to the recession and work pressure.

Pre-school programme/Nursery 1 for 3-4 years

Pre-school programs have historically been created for kids between the ages of 3 and 5 in order to promote their social and emotional growth. This alternative for a nursery school rose to popularity in the 1990s and is still highly regarded by middle class families. Prekindergarten programs have recently been advocated by the government in Nigeria as a means of assisting at-risk children and assisting them in developing the skills they would need to be successful in later years, but to be handled by the private sector. (NPE, 2013)

Child Care programme/Nursery II and Kindergarten 4-6 years

Nursery II is for children ages 4-5 and Kindergarten is for children ages 5-6 for knowledge and practice purposes. Children will receive top-notch care and education from these programs for the duration of the day. The Federal Government of Nigeria has recognized the growing demand for child care choices for young children in the most recent edition of NPE (2013) and has given pre-schools the authority to manage it. This is due to the fact that more parents are working full-time.

Children are typically cared for by child care programs from the start of the parent's workday to the conclusion of the day, and it is no longer unusual to have some children in the care setting from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Nonetheless, in places where it is offered, other kids may go to part-day pre-school.

Programme for Children with Special Needs

In the majority of Nigeria's States, LGEAs, and Towns, there are also early childhood programs for kids with special needs. For the past ten years, this significant alternative has been made mandatory in our educational system by the federal and state governments. This clause mandates that, starting at age 3, all children with special needs must receive a free, suitable education in a public school across the country. (NPE, 2013)

Kindergartens

In Nigeria, at least in the public schools, it is a relatively new endeavor. Although it isn't technically considered kindergarten instruction, many private schools offer it to parents who can afford the cost of the service. Primary schools in Nigeria have been implementing this choice since it first made an official appearance in the National Policy on Education (2013) edition.

NB: However, all the five (5) programmes discussed under the scope of ECCE may exist together or interdependently and may be home-based, Centre based or mobile. In establishing any of these in Nigeria, there are prescribed minimum standards needed to be met.

It is important at this juncture, to reproduce the levels of education as it affects ECCD in Nigeria and Lagos State in particular because, Lagos State was the first state to produce scheme of work for ECCDE program:

Day care/Crèche (0-2 years)

Pre-Nursery/Play group (3-4years)

Nursery/Kindergarten (3-5years)

FGN (2007)

Day care/Crèche/Reception (0-3 years)

Nursery one (3-4years)

Nursery Two (4-5 years)

Kindergarten (5-6 years)

Lagos State (2005)

What are the benefits of early childhood education in Nigeria?

In Nigeria, many parents are unaware of the advantages early childhood education has for their kids. Some parents don't even perceive the need to enroll their kids in preschool or kindergarten since they don't value this stage of education. This is incorrect because early childhood education is essential for your child's growth and development.

1. Improved Social Skills

Young children like playing and interacting with their friends, and the preschool setting allows them to do both. Also, the environment aids in the development of critical skills that enable children to listen to one another, share their opinions, make friends, and collaborate. By directly affecting motivation, which in turn encourages engagement, social skills have a vital role in a student's success in reading and mathematics. This is one of the key advantages of social skills in early childhood education in Nigeria.

2. Eagerness to learn

This is a fact, even though you might disagree with it. According to reports, students in Nigeria who receive high-quality early childhood education are more self-assured and inquisitive, which improves their performance at higher levels. Early childhood education is given to young children in Nigeria to assist them learn how to handle difficulties and develop resilience. Preschoolers who start school typically acclimate to the environment well and show a lifelong curiosity in picking up new skills, such as music, acting, singing, etc.

3. Encouraging Holistic Development

Young children in Nigeria are given a firm foundation for their development by early childhood educators. It helps develop a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills, preparing them for challenges later in life. Children are curious to study from an early age. Thomas (2016) states that "early math instruction helps youngsters acquire critical and reasoning skills.

4. Boost Self-Confidence

Children gain a positive mindset and sense of who they are through interactions with other kids and teachers. The teaching of early childhood education results in a child at three years old displaying a level of boldness and articulation when compared to other children who may be older.

5. Enhances Attention Span

In a school situation, young children frequently find it difficult to pay attention, especially between the ages of 3 and 5. Educators and teachers have always been concerned about how long preschoolers can focus. But, young children in Nigeria will become more attentive if early childhood education is provided to them from a young age. For young children to play with toys, paint, and draw, all of which can improve their ability to concentrate, their motor skills must develop. There are numerous more benefits to early childhood education in Nigeria. The curricula of educators should include early childhood education. It is essential to have access to high-quality early education in Nigeria. Both a demand for and high standard of services must exist. Parents must be encouraged to make decisions as well.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONTENTS OF NEW NERDC ONE-YEAR KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

According to Nigeria's new education and curriculum policy, the one-year kindergarten program is only available to children who are between the ages of 5 and 6. The ECD curriculum uses an integrated strategy, although it has become important to move away from the unit method to theme approach in content presentation since it is thought to be more stable and allows for the flexible integration of current events. The five (5) major themes adopted are:

Physical development

Social and financial literacy

Emotional

Cognitive; and⁷

Creativity.

Curriculum Contents Highlights:

1st Term

Domain – Physical development

Theme – Gross motor development

Domain – Emotional development

Theme – Expression of emotions

Domain – Cognitive development

Theme – Language development

Domain – Social development

Theme – (i) Awareness

(ii) Relationship

Domain – Creativity

Theme - Expression and Exploration

2nd Term

Mental development

Food and Nutrition

Citizenship

Financial literacy

3rd Term

Health

Child Protection Issues

Science and Technology

Sub Themes: Exploration and Discovery

Theme – Safety.

(FGN/NERDC, 2016).

Summary of the content is hereby highlighted below:

Domain – Physical Development

Theme – Gross motor development

Sub themes:

Personal Data

Fine motor development

Gross/large motor development

Domain: Development

Theme – Expression of emotions:

Sub themes:

Self expression

Confidence in making independent choices and decisions

Control of feelings and emotions

Respect for self and others

Child resilience (recovering from failure)

Making friends irrespective of gender differences and physical challenges.

Domain: Cognitive Development

Theme: Language Development

Sub-theme/Topic

Listening and speaking

Speech

Reading

Writing

Simple instruction

Greetings

Domain – Social Development and financial Literacy

Theme: Awareness

Sub-theme/Topic

Self concept

Domain: Social Development and Financial Literacy

Theme: Awareness

Sub-theme: Self care & Hygiene

Theme: Relationships

Subtheme: Relationships & Culture

Subtheme: Relationship with empro

Domain: Creativity

Theme: Expression and Exploration

Subtheme: Writing

Drawing and colouring

Modelling/Molding/Construction

Expression of self & appreciation of arts and crafts.

2nd Terms

Theme: Mental Development

Sub-Theme: Number (Quantity), Numerals and Counting

Classification & ordering of objects

Identification and construction of shapes

Time, date and season.

Theme: Food and Nutrition

Sub-Theme:

Healthy foods

Food hygiene

Adequate diet

Food taboos

Food supplements

Theme: Citizenship

Sub-Theme: Good citizens (school, community, country)

Singing (poetry) and music

Dancing

Story telling

Printing.

Theme: Financial Literacy

Sub-Theme: Money and its use

Water

Use of toilet

Faecal-related diseases, transmission and prevention

Sanitation and diseases

Disposal of refuse and waste

3RD TERM

Theme: Health

Sub-Theme: Prevention of common childhood illnesses

Management of common childhood illnesses

Recognition of danger signs in childhood illnesses for referral.

Drug use and abuse

Care of the body

Theme: Child Protection Issues

Sub-Theme: Child abuse

Children with special needs and vulnerable children.

Theme: Science and Technology

Sub-Theme: Exploration and Discovery

Use of measurement

Patterns and Designs

Problem solving

Pre Basic Science I

Pre Basic Technology II

Theme: Safety

Sub-Theme: Accident and their preventions

Safety skills

First aid.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD) EDUCATION (NCECE)

The NCECE is divided into two parts namely:

☐ National Early Childhood Care Curriculum for Ages 0 –3years.

☐ National Early Childhood Care Curriculum for Ages 3 –5years.

NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM FOR AGES 0 – 3YEARS

This curriculum focused on children within age bracket 0 –3years and the content areas of this curriculum are made up of Eight (8) themes namely:

☐ Physical Development

☐ Affective/Psychosocial development

☐ cognitive Development,

☐ Food and Nutrition,

☐ Health

☐ Water and Environmental Sanitation

☐ Safety Measures and

☐ Protection issues.

NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM FOR AGEAS 3 – 5YEARS

The content areas of this curriculum comprise eight themes

Viz:

☐ Physical Development

☐ Affective/Psychosocial development

☐ Food and Nutrition,

☐ Health

☐ Water and Environmental Sanitation

☐ Safety Measures

☐ Protection issues, and

☐ Protection issues.

Subjects, performance objectives (for Parents/Caregivers/Teachers), teaching/learning tools, and an evaluation guide are all included in each subtheme, and they are all based on the National Early Child Curriculum for ages 0–3 and 3-5, respectively. Teachers, caregivers, and parents can review the early childhood education and primary education curriculum content areas to analyze the achievement trends of preschoolers and students. Teachers and caregivers are in responsible of the entire curriculum as well as inspiring all children to reach their greatest potential. Using the learning/teaching resources that are available, educators and parents/caregivers should address the special requirements of each kid, including those who have learning challenges and able-bodied youngsters. instruction is more important. To encourage happy cooperation, good behavior, and effort among the preschoolers and students entrusted to their care, staff members should place a high priority on children's attitudes toward learning. They should also be committed, caring, enthusiastic, supportive, patient, and tolerant.

Problems of Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria

1. Lack of Sufficient Finance: The absence of funding significantly slows down the implementation of curriculum since the expensive workshops and seminars required to sensitize educators nationwide are prohibitively expensive. As a result, the teachers lack adequate training in every aspect of the curriculum.

2. Unstable Turnover of Teachers: There are numerous reasons why professors change frequently. The excessive number of temporary and/or part-time teachers is one aspect that is a major contributing element. For instance, Youth Corpers are stationed at

schools all around the nation. In less than a year, they are replaced by a new core group of teachers. There isn't enough time to get used to the system and effectively use the material. Also, a host of these temporary teachers are usually not dedicated, while others don't have the zeal and skill to teach.

3. Policy Changes: Another factor that affects curriculum development is the constant updating of educational policy. Take, for instance, the 1976-instituted universal primary education (UPE) program, which aims to register all kids who have reached the age at which they are prepared for school. Thereafter, the 6-3-3-4 system emerged. The 6-5-4 system and other others also emerged.

4. Gain in Knowledge: The world is gaining knowledge at an astounding rate. It is more challenging since knowledge quickly becomes outdated due to advances in science and technology, necessitating continuous examination of the curriculum, the delivery method, and the teaching materials.

5. A lack of ongoing reviews: In Nigeria, curriculum reviews only occur when a serious problem is identified. This is false; ongoing curriculum evaluations are necessary to keep the country competitive with the rest of the globe.

6. Inadequate ICT: The world is changing so quickly, even when the curriculum is updated, a new problem of meeting the requirements of the newly presented curricular items occurs. Because of how swiftly technology is developing around the world, it is becoming a requirement in curricula that students have knowledge of and proficiency with computers. Nonetheless, the majority of them talk more about familiarizing themselves than using a computer.

7. A lack of knowledgeable and educated educators: It is impossible to give away something you do not possess. As a result, when teachers and curriculum facilitators lack the required skills to instruct effectively in step with the developing technology, pupils cannot learn. As a result, the curriculum has no purpose.

8. The rigidity of Nigerian curricula: This makes it difficult for instructors and students to make the most of them. A difficulty occurs when the curriculum does not work in any of the several situations.

9. Willingness to Change: A lot of teachers still instruct their courses in the same way they did in the past. Due to their resistance to change, introducing a new curriculum is difficult.

10. A Variety of Exam Bodies: Several exam bodies have different criteria and operating procedures, not to mention different approaches to the questions. It is difficult to effectively satisfy the demands of these bodies. Additional issues consist of: Lack of educational resources, a poor reading culture, and unfavorable learning environments

PROSPECTS OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

1. Nigeria is experiencing a sharp rise in the number of people who own mobile devices. This is mostly attributable to how much less expensive and accessible these technologies have become. Nigerian kids would eventually be able to at least keep up with the pace the curriculum is operating at.
2. The curriculum and syllabuses are becoming more and more familiar to teachers, who are aware of what to read and how to prepare.
3. Examining bodies are also becoming more synchronized as a result of increased globalization, and in order to achieve this, they are using identical strategies for their inquiries.

Suggestions

1. Seminars are getting more appreciated by Nigerian instructors. In order to better train these facilitators, the government should host more seminars and encourage them to attend more.
2. Extended vacation periods should be scheduled when the curriculum is changed to provide teachers time to become comfortable with the new material.
3. There should be more and better supervision to make sure that teachers are genuinely following the curriculum and aren't just doing what they like or find most convenient.
4. Teachers should be included in the design process to make the implementation of the curriculum easier. Via seminars and workshops, they ought to also receive training in becoming more sensitive.
5. It has been noted that technological advancements, which undoubtedly have an impact on curriculum development, also have benefits with less expensive technical instruments. Information and communication technology are crucial to both teaching and learning, and this cannot be emphasized enough. This must be emphasized throughout teacher training in order to enhance teachers' capacity to execute curriculum. Also, it's expected that this will improve teachers' ability to teach the curriculum.

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