

EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS THAT ACCELERATED THE DEVELOPMENT AND NURTURING EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION

BY

OLAYANJU OLADAPO JOHNSON, Ph. D.
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SPECIALIZED AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
EMMANUEL ALAYANDE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, OYO, NIGERIA
+2348034876223
johnsonyanju@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper takes a panoramic view on the innovations that accelerated the development and nurturing excellence in early childhood education in Nigeria through functional education. The conceptual framework on which the paper is hinged centered on innovation and functional education while the theoretical model adapted was the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model. Historical method of enquiry was used to collect data for the paper. Equally discussed in the paper were: the Historical Antecedents and the objectives of early childhood education in Nigeria. Findings revealed that Early Childhood Education had impacted in nurturing excellence in pupils into basic education. Based on the discussion of this paper it was recommended that governments and individuals, private sectors, corporate bodies and philanthropic organisations should collaborate in funding early childhood education in Nigeria. Government should motivate early childhood teachers to update their knowledge by attending conferences, seminars and workshops locally and internationally.

Keywords: Educational Innovations, Nurturing Excellence, Early Childhood Education, Functional Education and EFQM Model

Introduction

A major obstacle to the globalization of early childhood in Nigeria is the lack of attention paid to emerging innovations in education. The success of early childhood education depends upon its ability to identify and respond to technological changes in order to elevate teaching and learning process Ololube (2009, p. 143). Over the years, a number of technological changes have taken place that involves the introduction of modern advancements into the teaching and learning process in basic education. These advances have created a rich global resource and collaborative environment for the dissemination of literacy material on early childhood education.

There is currently a high proliferation of institutional early childhood education in Nigeria, to this end, most government schools now have early childhood classes. (Crèche, Nursery and kindergarten). This is an indication that there is a market for it in meeting the yearning of the people. Though, the Federal Government of Nigeria recognises the existence of pre-primary institutions, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education.

In his own clarification on the introduction of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria, Ejieh (2006) reported that this level/component of education is a post-colonial development and the semblance of it during the colonial era were kindergarten and infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. With the phasing out of infants classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools.

Early childhood education provides the vital physical, psychological, affective, cognitive and social potentials which are functional to human life which will also play very essential roles in the academic performance of children in the primary component of education.

Since the world is gradually becoming a global village, our future teachers must imbibe the new technologies and methodologies like the advanced countries of the world and

be current in the operation of modern pedagogical facilities effectively and efficiently. Teacher constitutes not only a vital input to education, but also a major drive in the production process and in the determination of the output.

The demand for nursery education as it is sometimes called was however very low until recent times. A study of the provision for nursery education in Lagos by Makinwa-Adebusoye in 1981, for instance, showed that only 7% out the 948 parents in her study sent their children to either a nursery school or a child care centre (Ejeh, 2006). The results of this study and several other related ones did not however mean that Nigerians at the period did not recognise the importance of early childhood education.

Attah (1981) reported that children have attended pre-schools in Nigeria before the official involvement of the government through the first policy statement made in 1977. He further pointed out that most working mothers are traders, top government executives and professionals who invariably spend many hours at work. This means that mothers today spend many hours each workday away from their homes and children.

Attah (1981) stressed that the great population of working mothers must have their children in safe hands, and this has necessitated the provision of pre-school facilities. To this end, the private sectors dabbled in to the establishment of pre-primary or nursery institutions in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that the author has decided to examine the historical development of early childhood education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian education has not been functional because too much emphasise has been placed on theoretical and academic knowledge (Asaju and Adagba 2016). as a result the author therefore felt that there is need to examine whether the education given at the pre-

primary level of education have any effect on the academic performance of pupils in nursery and primary schools. This paper is undertaken to provide answers to the following questions.

1. How did early childhood education originate in Nigeria?
2. What were the objectives of early childhood education and the extent to which these objectives were met in the management of early childhood institutions in Nigeria?
3. In what ways has government of Nigeria contributed to the growth and development of early childhood institutions in Nigeria?
4. Identify various innovations that accelerated the development and nurturing excellence in early childhood education in Nigeria?
5. What were the challenges facing early childhood institutions in Nigeria?
6. What is the way forward in overcoming these challenges?

Methodology

The author adopted the historical method based on the primary and secondary source of historical information to collect data for the paper. Secondary sources used were federal government's policy document the National Policy on Education and other documentary analysis through library and internet search, journals, and textbooks relevant to early childhood education in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

The paper is hinged on educational innovation through functional education as conceptualized by Fuandai, Shraki, and Gbari (2007). Ortyoyande (2005) and Adagba (2011), quoting Locke in asserting that the mind of a new born child is like a blanktablet (tabula rasa) upon which experience writes ideas. That is to say that, education is acquiredthrough initiation and inculcation. This process involves content (knowledge) and

methodology. Hence education takes place through inculcation of moral values, observation, discovery, experience, information as well as training someone to acquire skills.

Okezie (2018) defines Functional education as the type of education that equips the recipients with the knowledge and skills needed for the performance of productive task. It is one that helps the society to meet their developmental needs. While Fundai, Shiak and Gbari (2007) stressed that Functional education is being characterized by the following features; relevance, practicability, accessibility, empowerment, involvement of stakeholders in its design, equipping recipient to harness their potentials, emphasise the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge for gainful self-empowerment and self-reliance.

Asaju and Adagba (2016) confirmed that functional education is a kind of education that emphasizes practice more than theory. They posit that the Nigerian education has not been functional because too much emphasis has been placed on theoretical and academic knowledge.

Historical Antecedents of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Early childhood education is a heritage of the colonial masters like other system of education in Nigeria (Osanyin, 2002 and Olayanju 2018). The period 1842 -1848 was one of intensive missionary activities. When the colonial masters first arrived, their wives were left at home gradually; the wives came to join their husbands, the need to have a British model school for their children like what was operated in England was felt. This was made possible because of the improved health conditions in the country. The schools in Nigeria established by the missionaries in Badagry in the 1840s was called the “Nursery of the Infant Church.” However, contrary to its name, the school was a primary school. The then colonial masters paid no attention to pre-primary school education (Fafunwa, 1974, 1991; Taiwo, 1980; and Osokoya, 2011).

It is pertinent to note that without any iota of doubt, in every primary school, there was a nursery attached and the nursery classes so established served as feeder schools. These schools paved the way for the first group of educated Nigerians who were either slaves or had been rescued from twin murder and were fostered by the government.

Incidentally, the 1969 National Curriculum Conference was the very first time mention was made of the education of children between three and five years of age. They were to be enrolled in nursery and kindergarten classes to prepare them for lower primary level of education. The declaration eventually led to the emphasis placed on the preparatory role of pre-school institutions. In effect, every state government administers and controls pre-primary education through the appropriate local government authority. Private individuals, voluntary agencies, churches, philanthropic organizations, can establish and run nursery schools after receiving the due approval from the state welfare office.

On the realisation of the numerous objectives of pre-primary/nursery/early childhood education, in Nigeria Osanyin (2002) has this to say:

The appropriate level of government will review and enforce the educational laws that relate to the establishment of nursery school to make sure that schools that are opened are well and that pre-primary teachers are qualified and other infrastructures provided. Ministries of Education will make regular inspections to ensure the maintenance of high standards (Osanyin, 2002 pp.27 - 28).

Osanyin (2002) went down the memory lane by reporting that many parents were not willing to release their own children for conversion into Christianity. As a result of their exposure to western education, these Nigerians were able to take up jobs in the commercial and administrative life of the country.

Consequently, these few educated Nigerians constituted the then privileged members of the society and their change of status enabled them to join the lifestyle of their white

overlords. This included sending their own children either to the “masters” schools at home or to the few prestigious ones established in Nigeria for the high income group. The sheer financial cost of education in these schools placed limitations on the number of people who could benefit from such opportunity. Osanyin (2012) acknowledged that early childhood education existed since the creation of kindergarten in the 19th century and that early childhood education encompasses the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from the early years.

Kolawole (1989) went down the historical lane by reporting that early childhood education otherwise known as nursery education dates back to 1970, and for a long period of time it remained church based. It is logical therefore, to state that the foundation of early childhood education was laid by the various Christian Missionaries. The non-involvement of the colonial government left early childhood education under-developed and in private hands (Abdullahi, 2003). However, Akinbote, Oduolowu & Lawal (2001) confirmed that the oil boom in Nigeria in the 70s accelerated the rapid growth of Early-Childhood Education in the country.

A survey of early childhood education in Nigeria was carried out in 2001 (Osanyin, 2002). The survey study involved seven states of the Federation: Lagos, Edo, Delta, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Osun states. It was found that there were 1,190 early childhood institutions with a total of 303,073 children as indicated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Spread of Pre-Primary Institutions across some states of Nigeria

S/N	State	No. of school	Male population	Female population	Total
1	Delta	97 (8.15%).	8,441	8,565	17,006
2	Edo	58(4.9%)	6,668	6,111	12,779
3	Lagos	608(51.1%	85,875	82,979	168,854
4	Ogun	136(11.4%)	18,684	18,066	36,750
5	Ondo	68 (5.7%)	9,597	9,303	18,900
6	Osun	122(10.25%)	12,853	12,966	25,819
7	Oyo	101(8.5%)	11,794	11,171	22,965
	Total	1,190	153,912	149,161	303,073

Source: Osanyin (2002) and Olayanju (2018)

Provision of the National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria Education (2014)

A. Early Child Care Development and Education

Early child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from 0 -4 years in a crèche or nursery.

According to the National Policy on Education FRN (2014) the objectives/purpose of Early Child Care Development and Education shall be to:

- a. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b. Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- c. Provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work;
- d. Inculcate social, moral norms and values;
- e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys. etc;
- f. Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- g. Stimulate in the child good habits. Including good health habits; and
- h. Teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colour, shapes. Forms, etc. through play.

Government Efforts in Promoting and Maintaining Quality Control on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Then government shall:

- a. Set and monitor minimum standard for ECCDE centres;
- b. Develop and disseminate curriculum materials such as the Integrated Early Child Care Development (ECD) Policy, National Minimum Standard for the establishment of Early Child Care Education Centers. IECD Curriculum, IECD Implementation Guidelines and all other materials that will enhance the implementation of ECCDE;

- c. Encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of ECCDE centres based on set standards;
- d. Make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early child care and education, and for retraining of teachers;
- e. Ensure that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way method;
- f. Ensure that ECCDE Centres adopt the following caregiver/infant ratios: (i) Creche 1:10; (ii) Nursery 1:25;
- g. Develop suitable ECCDE curriculum for nationwide implementation;
- h. Supervise and control quality of ECCDE centres;
- i. Make provision for the production and effective utilization of learning and instructional materials in adequate numbers; and
- j. Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother – tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will;
 - ❖ Develop the orthography of, more Nigerian languages; and
 - ❖ Produce textbooks, supplementary readers and other instructional materials in Nigerian languages.

Innovations that Accelerated Development for Nurturing Excellence of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Various innovations that accelerated development for nurturing excellence of early childhood education in Nigeria. To buttress this, Gabriel (2013) reported that the Early Childhood Education (ECC) facilities metamorphosed into Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) programme of the NERDC and provided access for children in disadvantaged and low socio-economic status; especially those based in the rural areas who were previously deprived of any form of pre-schools such as a Day care, Play Group, Nursery or Kindergarten schools.

This programme was community based, low-cost and affordable. It stressed early stimulation of the child, improved mothers' child rearing skills in creating the awareness for the use of local resources creating a stimulating environment for learning. Indeed, the inter-sectoral approach used as a strategy for implementing the LCCDE was helpful UNICEF supervised the facilities and with Bernard Van Leer Foundation sponsored the development of relevant curriculum and other materials for the programme NERDC therefore was able to produce the following:

1. Guidelines for establishing ECC centres/ Resource Training Centres.
2. ECCDE curriculum that was approved by the National Council on Education (NCE) in 1994)
3. Pre-school readers for different age group
4. A handbook for care givers titles: caring for the African Child.
5. Training Manuals/ Guides for lead trainers, Child educators and care givers.
6. Modules for Training Early Childhood Educators and Care-givers (in collaboration with the regional resource and training centre (RTRC), Kenya Institute of Education) such as Module Child Development Health and Nutrition in Nigeria for education, health and social services professional.
7. A textbook on child Development Health and Nutrition in Nigeria for education, health and social services professionals.
8. Survey reports on child rearing practices in 5 pilot States and 10 UNICEF assisted states
9. An anthology of Nigerian songs, games, poems riddle and tongue-twisters for children.
10. Development of a Child Assessment Instrument.
11. Posters on Child Stimulation and Educational Development (CSED) (Maduewesi, 2005a)

Theoretical Framework

Excellence Model

The EFQM Excellence model is presented in the diagram below. The arrows emphasize the dynamic nature of the model and demonstrate that innovation and learning help to improve enablers and, in turn, lead to improved results.

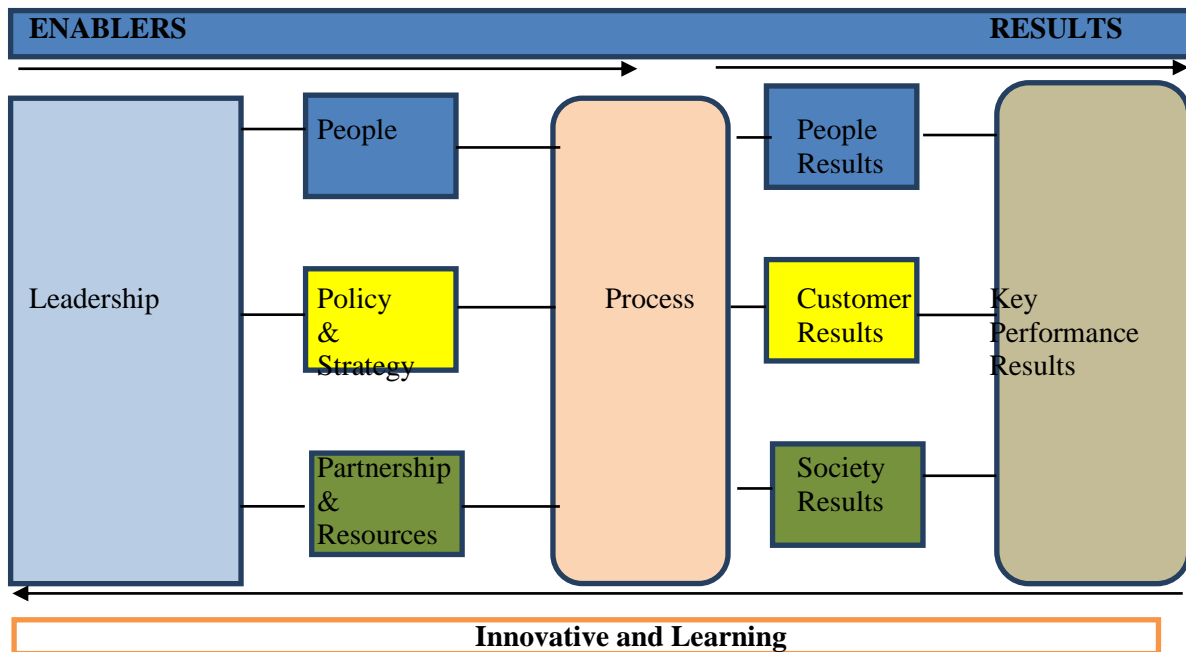


Figure 1: EFQM model

Source: The European Foundation for Quality Management (2013)
Adapted by Olayanju (2014)

The process of influencing employees towards the achievement of organizational goals and organizational excellence is known as leadership (Naylor, 1999). Teachers have a vision for their institutions. They have a picture of the preferred future, which is shared with all in the institution and which shapes the programmes of learning and teaching as well as organizational justice and equity in policies (Aslam et al., 2013), priorities, plans and procedures pervading the day-to-day life of the institution (Bear, Caldwell and Millikan, 1997). Leadership in the educational context is also the ability to anticipate the future. Through words and examples leaders in education inspire the whole system by effectively influencing the behaviours, thought and feelings of those working within it, and ensure their vision by

creating a strategic alignment across the whole system (Peremotode, 1991). Globally, no matter how effect teachers are, they are faced with numerous obstacles which they must manage and contain order to succeed.

Warren Bennis in Anyamele (2004) contended that education innovating and initiating the Early Childhood education teachers look at the horizon and not just at the bottom-line. A path, and a reach. According to Bennis, a leader does the following:

- Create a compelling vision: Leadership has to get people in the organization to buy into a shared vision and then translate that vision into reality.
- Creates a climate of trust: Leaders must know how to generate and sustain trust. In order to do this leaders must reward people for disagreeing, reward innovation, and tolerate failure.
- Creates meaning: a leader creates meaning by maintain an environment where people are reminded of what is important.
- Creates success: effective leaders perceive and handle ‘failure’ differently – they embrace error and vow to learn from it.
- Creates a healthy and empowering environment: effective leadership empowers the workforce to generate commitment, and developed the feeling that organisation members are learning, and that they are competent.
- Creates flat, adaptive decentralised systems and organisations: Bureacracy does not create leaders, bureaucracy creates managers and bureaucratic

Justification for using European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)

Excellence Model

Durkheim (1956) was of opinion that education exist to teach morals, values, beliefs and good behavior to children and youth. These morals, values, beliefs and behavior are those that society has identified as desirable for all individuals and there is need to teach them in a

school rather than a home setting to avoid different interpretations and incidences of rule-breaking among families. The school is better place to teach these necessary values, beliefs and good behavior. To this end, schools also teach children that they must become a contributing part of society and maintain pro-social ties to society for the benefit and health of both the individual and the social system (Ololube, 2009). From sociological perspective, Carr and Kemmis (1986) note that the principal functional requirements of education are first, to socialize the young into prevailing norms and attitudes so as to preserve social stability, and second, to stratify individuals in accordance with the complex network of roles that sustains the existing social order.

The critical idea here is that schools do not operate in isolation and their function within society is imperative to the overall development and continuity of society. Carr and Kemmis also contend that the functionalist sociology of education provides insight into how the social mechanism is already operating in educational institutions and so could be modified to ensure that the equilibrium of society and its development is maintained.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1989) has non-specific strategies and operational methods for educational management as set out in the National Policy on Education (1989). However, (FRN, 2014) addressed these lapses by putting in place the strategies and methods that describes the plans and purposes of the nation's educational policies aimed at best practices and better quality educational services in early childhood education. Best practices are described as the process of seeking out and studying the best inner and outer practices that produce better – quality performance in the education sector to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens. To this end, the Ministry of Education has to adopt an approach that will support and nurture sustainable educational development and institutional changes in an holistic and innovative manner. The EFQM Excellence model offers a comprehensive approach to global institutional leadership and management not found

in most other management approaches. It is clear from the Excellence Model that regardless of sector, cultural setting, size, structure or maturity, to be successful, institutions must establish an appropriate management framework in the running of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE).

Challenges facing Early Childhood Institutions in Nigeria

Below were the Early Childhood Institutions in Nigeria

1. Federal government of Nigeria's inability to implement the UNESCO convention on the benchmark of 25% of the country's budget on funding of education has impacted negatively on early childhood education sub-sector.
2. The nation's economic downturn from the late 1970s, 1977 precisely to the 1980s which culminated in the adoption of the structural adjustment policy (SAP) in 1986 partly accounted for government's (both Federal and state) inability to establish pre-primary schools or centres.
3. It is pertinent to note that, up till 1998 the revised National Policy on Education did not show any improvement on Early Childhood Education in the country.
4. Childhood education in the 1970s was not guided by any government designed curriculum. As private entrepreneurs, individual and non-government organisations and religious bodies provided this level of education for profit, their curriculum varied and so did the qualification of teachers.
5. Most of the teachers did not specialise in nursery education, even many of the proprietors. This situation implied that the Federal and State Ministries of Education did not effectively perform their supervisory, regulatory and quality control roles.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion of this paper, the author hereby recommends the following as the way forward:

1. Government should make fund available for the training of early childhood education teachers.
2. Funding and management of early childhood education should not be left to government alone: individuals, private sectors, non-governmental organizations, philanthropic and donor agencies should collaborate with government in funding early childhood educational institutions in the country.
3. Quality control of early childhood institution should be maintained through supervision and inspections of schools at regular intervals by the Federal and State Ministries of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) to ensure quality control in the field early childhood education in Nigeria.
4. Early childhood education teachers should endeavour to be Information Communication Technology compliant so as to be relevant in the current labour market.
5. Government should intensify efforts by sponsoring early childhood education teachers to conferences, seminars and workshops locally and internationally from time to time to update their knowledge and thereby improve their job performance.
6. Periodic review of NCE curriculum by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) whereby Minimum Academic Standard be maintained through quality control mechanism should be put in place so that our students will be relevant in the current labour market.

7. It is imperative for early childhood proprietor/proprietresses to employ specialist to teach in Early Childhood Educational institutions in the country

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSED	-	Child Stimulation and Educational Development
ECCDE	-	Early child Care Development and Education
ECCE	-	Early Childhood Care Education
ECD	-	Early Childhood Education
EFQM	-	European Foundation for Quality Management
FRN	-	Federal Republic of Nigeria
IECD	-	Integrated Early Child Care Development
NCE	-	Nigeria Certificate in Education
NERDC	-	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council
RTRC	-	Regional Resource and Training Centre
SAP	-	Structural Adjustment Policy
SUBEB	-	State Universal Basic Education Board
TRCN	-	Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria
UNESCO	-	United Nations Education and Scientific Organisation.
UNICEF	-	United Nation Children Fund.