

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: CONNECTING THEORY TO PRACTICE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper x-rays the effective approaches to childhood education: connecting theory to practice in primary education. Primary education is the foundation of other levels of education. It is the education given to children of 6 years to 11 years or above. Also, the paper examines the concept of primary education, relationship between theory and practice and effect of practicals to primary education. This paper therefore recommended that: government should provide enabling environment for attaining of quality education in primary schools and the curriculum of primary schools should be restructured to reflect the aims and objectives of primary education. Enough funds should be mapped out by the federal government for proper caring of primary education.*

KEYWORDS: Theory and Practice, Primary Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is said or acknowledged to be the most powerful and indispensable instrument not only for economic and political advancement but also for progress in all human endeavours. In Nigeria, primary education lays the foundation upon which other levels are built. It is the education provided for children in school from the age of six (6) to eleven (11) years or more and it lasts for six years duration (Tijjani, 2014). Because it is the foundation of other levels, it holds the key to the success or failure of the whole education system of the country. This has made it imperative that effective approaches to education should be provided to these group of children.

This involves giving quality education to the children. For quality education to be attained, primary school children should be adequately provided, with necessary infrastructures in the school which later make learning conducive. The learning involves acquiring ideas which will be later transferred into practice for effective benefit to the entire human race. When ideas or theories are learnt without transferring it to practical situations, it is useless and unimportant. Think of the recent development in technology, it is as a result of ideas or theory got that has been manifested to technology. This implies that technology is the practical aspect of theory. Therefore, theory and practice should be taught to children at primary level for development of science and technology in our country Nigeria.

Concept of Primary Education

Primary education is the education given to children of 6 to 11 or more years after nursery education. According to Tijjani (2014), primary education is the education provided for children in school from the age of 6 to 11 or more years and it lasts for six years. Furthermore, the nation policy on Education (2004) defines primary education as: the education given in institutions for children 6 to 11 years. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it,

the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years.

When viewed the above, it could be observed that primary education is the foundation of other levels of education like secondary and tertiary levels of education. Therefore, the effective implementation of primary school education curriculum results in the achievement of the goals of primary education which promote other goals like secondary education and tertiary education.

According to National Policy on Education (2004), the goals of primary education in Nigeria include;

- To inculcate permanent literacy and ability to communicate effectively.
- To lay a sound basic for scientific and reflective thinking.
- To give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- To mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- To develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment. To give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child equality.
- To provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and craft of the locality.
- These laudable objectives to be attained depend largely on the administration of the school. In order to meet up with the above enumerated goals, the schools have to regularly teach theory along side with practice to the children SO that better performance would be achieved generally.

Problems encountered with Primary Education

Primary education in Nigeria is associated with many problems for its full implementation. Okwuri and Arnenger, (2014) enumerated the following as the problems;

Inadequate Funding: This can be attributed to the administration structure in Nigeria. The funding of primary schools is the responsibility of the three tiers of government namely federal government, state government and local government. Each of these tiers of government may not release funds as at when due. Some may divert the fund to other projects which are not related to primary education thereby leaving primary education incapacitated. This scenario does not augur well for effective implementation of the stated objectives or goals.

Inadequate provision of Infrastructural facilities: One of the outstanding problems of primary education in Nigeria is inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities such as school building, classroom, library, sporting facilities and equipment, etc. these are very important for effective teaching and learning. Though, these are enumerated in the stated objectives that government should provide them for proper teaching and learning in schools, but a visit to most public primary schools reveals or shows the opposite of these government statements. Most of the public primary schools in Nigeria today have buildings that are dilapidated, in bad shape,

with broken windows and doors, pot-holes on the floor etc. Worst still, there are no chairs for teachers, no functional libraries, no running taps and toilet facilities, etc and as a result of all these, most schools are often littered with dirt, urine and faeces. In addition, these, buildings become hide-out for criminals after the school hours who use the buildings for smoking prohibited drugs and cigarette. It should be noted that such conditions are not good for any meaningful learning to take place (Soliya, 2005).

Political Constraints: Another likely problem for the primary education is political instability. Politics in Nigeria is not stable and is also void of vision.

When any political party won an election in Nigeria, it plays politics with primary education rather than uplifting it. When one looks into the handover of primary schools to missions in Anambra State for example, it could be seen that it was politically motivated instead of improving the primary education. This lowers the standard of education as teachers dance to the tune of the government in power in order not to be sacked or salary being delayed.

Gender Imbalance among the primary school teachers: Most primary schools in Nigeria particularly those located in the urban areas are being dominated by women. You will believe that there are some duties in primary schools that are supposed to be executed by men such as organization of sport competition, school garden, organization of local crafts and some disciplinary measures. Furthermore, women do engage themselves in one excuses or the other like going to maternity leave, sick leave etc. With all these, there is the need to balance the population with men so as to bring discipline and to avoid goof organization to the system.

Lack of Qualified teachers: Another problem bedevils primary education in Nigeria is lack of qualified teachers in the system. Due to the fact that teaching is not a lucrative job, many people run away from teaching. This has made it imperative that low qualified personnel are being recruited as teachers in most primary schools. These teachers lack mastery of the content, lack of dedication to duty etc and as such hamper productivity among primary children.

The teacher factor syndrome: National policy on education (2004) observes that special teachers of particular subjects such as mathematics, science, physical and Health education, language arts, music, library, fine art and home economics teachers should be employed to teach these subjects in primary schools but this expectation has not been met in most primary schools in the federation.

Other teacher factors include the extent of the teacher's mastery of the content, lack of dedication to duty, problem of inadequate evaluation, poor administration of instructional methods and strategies, avoidance of the use of the language of the environment in basic 1, 2 and 3 among others. This has resulted in poor performance of pupils in schools. Teachers are custodians of knowledge and are expected to give out what they have to the pupils. When a teacher's knowledge of the subject matter is questionable, pupils understanding of topics taught are at a risk.

Relationship between theory and practice

According to Hornby (2010), theory is defined as a formal set of ideas that is intended to explain why something happens or exists. Also it is concerned with the ideas and principles on which a particular subject is based rather than with practical. Practical simply means connection with real situations rather than ideas or theories. Furthermore, it is also based on action rather than ideas. Theory and practice are, very necessary for learning especially in

primary section as it is the foundation of other levels. Practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge both are important phases of learning. Perfect combination of both practical and theoretical method is necessary for holistic learning.

Theoretical knowledge has its own importance in the learning. Theoretical knowledge is the base of doing anything practically. Anything done practically without the theoretical knowledge will be dangerous sometimes. Theoretical knowledge explains the why factor at the back of any situation and technique of working. Theory prepares a direction for the future education. Practical knowledge assists us to attain the exact techniques that become the tools of our job which in most case is much closer to our actual daily task. Practical knowledge and application skills are essential to survive in the competitive world today. It is important to understand how things actually work, especially in the professional education scenario. Practical knowledge helps in the deep understanding of the concepts along with the origin and the importance of the facts learned through theoretical knowledge. Sometimes there are some intricate lessons which are not easy to communicate at a point, so practically demonstrating it will be helpful for proper understanding. That's why practical training is beneficial to both the trainer and the learner.

Theoretical learning is what the knowledge is all about and the practical learning is how the knowledge was learned. The mode of practical learning along with theory gives students clear and contrast explanations about the facts. Philosophically speaking theoretical knowledge is intangible but practical experience made it tangible by applying those skills in day to day practice.

From the above, one can deduced that theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge must be combined together in teaching primary children at primary level. This makes learning understandable and permanent and this would be taken to other levels of education.

Effects of practicals to primary education

One may ask: "Why do we need Education and if we do, what form should it be?" This is a big question boarding the minds of pupils/students and teachers. Education is significant and must be acquired by all in order to gain knowledge and learn skills. It teaches us about various things and opens up a vast variety of career options which one cannot opt for if left uneducated. Then, a question which comes up next is "why should that type of education be taught to meet the career options available in the society?" The answer is practical education. Practical education makes pupils/students understand better. So, the following are effects of practical education to primary school children;

People are born with different talents. Some people have inborn talent of remembering everything that was read, even if they have read it once. Others have to cram it very hard in order to retain it. This is the aspect of theoretical knowledge. But when we are practically looking at things and experiencing it, we do not need to cram it Practical education makes learning to stick in the minds of pupils. It takes off loads of pressure from a pupil's brain thus helping in the learning process and relieves stress and makes learning permanent.

Secondly, practical education makes learning to be remembered. When we are cramming a lesson for a test, our brain tends to remember it for a short while which can be forgotten easily. But when doing things practically in the form of experiments, real life projects or educational trips, the knowledge and the whole learning experience stay in our mind for long. Furthermore,

practical education makes a man perfect as the saying goes “practice makes a man perfect (Aashima, 2014). Reading a lesson over and over again can be of little help. But performing activities or experiments based on it involving practice is the right answer. For example, reading a guide book for a new language without speaking that language at all, no progress will be made. But start using that language and try conversing with other people in that particular language, a great change will be made. Therefore, theoretical teaching must be converted into practical activities for great improvement to be made in an individual.

Moreover, practical education improves pupil’s/student’s skills. Training and exercise are meant to improve skills which cannot be obtained by just theoretical knowledge. Theory can provide one with lots of expertise and proficiency but it can never deliver those kind of results and improved skills that you can get from practical education. Again, reading a chapter in engineering work helps than doing experiments. Experiments will surely improve engineering skills.

It should be noted that practical education makes learning interesting. Field trips, projects, experiments makes learning interesting especially in primary level, as children at this age bracket love playing. At this stage, they prefer to see and practicalized things rather regular bookish style. They got dissatisfied with theory but are more interested in practicals.

Practicals also make learning easy. This is pretty obvious. When you find something interesting and captivating, it becomes easy to you. As such, it removes stress and makes learning easier to understand, apply and remember.

This goes with the Chinese proverb;

When I hear, I forget,

When I see, I remember,

When I do I understand.

Finally, practical education motivates team work in the sense that when practical knowledge is being imparted to pupils, most of the activities involve team projects or programs. Also, where pupils are required to work in a group or as a team, on one hand, it improves the pupil’s ability to interact with his/her fellow pupils and encourage team work spirit in them. Again, where ideas are shared among them, no pupil has monopoly of knowledge over the others. Furthermore, it builds in them co-operative attitudes and social behaviours which is one of the most aspect of social human being.

CONCLUSION

Primary education provides a solid foundation for the other educational levels and so anything that affects this level may affect other levels too. It is in this direction that much emphasizes should be given to it. Several problems confronting primary education should be looked into like inadequate hind, infrastructural facilities, political constraints, gender imbalance, lack of qualified teachers, etc. When these problems highlighted above are solved, primary education will have its proper place in our education system.

Secondly, the teaching of theory will be complemented with practicals as practical involve activities with the pupils. Pupils learn better when involved in any activity. They see, handle and participate actively in the learning process activities. This makes learning active, interactive and interesting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The obvious need for quality primary education in our country cannot be overemphasized. It is seen that primary education in our country is not yielding its fruits as a result of some hindrances, it is on this note that, the following recommendations were made:

- Government should provide enabling environment for attaining quality education in primary schools.
- The curriculum of primary education should be restructured to reflect the aims and objectives of primary education.
- Enough funds should be mapped out for proper maintenance of primary education.
- Imbalance between male teachers and female teachers should be redressed to give good morals in our primary schools.
- Teacher's welfare in terms of remuneration, infrastructures, and in service training should be taken care of on regular basis by the government.

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