

Early Childhood Education in Uganda Primary Schools

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Abstract

Early childhood education is a starting point for a child's development and the key foundation of the Uganda Educational System. This type of education is recognized by the Uganda Early Childhood Education. In the Policy provisions were made stating the objectives and guidelines taken by the government to achieve meet early childhood education goals. It unfolds the diverse socio-cultural meanings of the notion of quality in relation to teacher-child relationship, pedagogical instruction, learning environment and learning outcomes. The thesis demonstrates the need to locate Current policy initiatives and quality measures (including the notion and development of quality care and learning) within the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that surround its provision. This policy encourages and endorses private participation in the provision of pre-primary education. This article examines the implementation of the policy, pointing out the purposes of early childhood education, achievements made so far, current problems, and recommendations to address these problems.

Key Words

Early Childhood Education, Primary Schools, Pre-Primary Education

Introduction

In every modern society it is believed that education is the key to national development and there is a need to maintain every level of education especially the pre-primary stage, because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels build. Once a child misses that early stage it is usually difficult for the learner to get back to the basics. Pre-primary education is a common practice in most societies; they make provision for early childhood education programs of various types for children below the official school age (usually 6 years) mainly to prepare them for the rigors of primary education and beyond.

It should be noted that not everyone is in support of early childhood education. Robinson and Robinson (1968) hold the view that young children are not mature enough to learn complex task or skills that are required of them in the pre-school programs. They also argue that the love and warmth of a mother is more important than any educational program. On the other hand some research evidence shows that early childhood education has a positive influence in children's affective, conceptual and social development in later years (Baker 1973; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips and Dawson 2005; Rolnick and Grunewald 2003). 2 Early Childhood Education in Nigeria, Policy Implementation: Critique and a Way Forward

Despite the different views on early childhood education by scholars, the Uganda Early Childhood Education stipulates that it should be included in mainstream education. Formal education begins from pre-primary education as provided in day-care centers and nursery schools to children aged 3 through 5 years. It is enriched by the informal traditional upbringing given to children from 0 through 3 years which makes them ready for school. Although the government is not directly involved in the establishment of day-care centers and nursery schools, it maintains oversight for the;

- Provision and distribution of policy guidelines for the establishment and management of pre-primary institutions.

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- Production and development of appropriate national curriculum and textbook in Ugandan languages.
- Approval of relevant supplementary reading materials and teachers/instructions' manual.
- Provision and approval of appropriate certification of work done and training received.

Early Childhood Education

Pre-primary education is the education given to younger learners before the age of entering primary education (6 years). Early childhood education or pre-primary education is defined by the Uganda Early Childhood Education as education given educational settings for children aged 3 through 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school.

Early childhood education can be traced to the efforts of prominent European education experts like: John Amos Comenius (1590-1690), J. J. Rousseau (1782 - 1788), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1748-1827) and Friedrich Froebel (1782-1751). These experts championed the right of children to early education. Many educationist and scholars including Maduwesi (1992) and Fafunwa (1967) support and advocate for the views held by these earlier educators that there is need for good early childhood education to help students' develop their full potentials.

The first pre-primary education was founded in 1816 by Robert Owen. The early experts in childhood education were anxious to see the children of the rich and the poor have the opportunity and privilege to be educated. With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools; the demand for nursery education was however very low in Uganda until recently.

The operational objectives of pre-primary education as stated in Uganda Early childhood Education include;

- Effecting a smooth transmission from the home to the school.
- Preparing the child for the primary level of education.
- Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.

- Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit.
- Inculcating social norms.
- Learn good habits, especially good health habits.

Methods of implementing early childhood education in Uganda

The implementation guidelines states by the government in order to achieve these objectives are as follows:

- To establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education.
- To make provision in teacher child hood education programmes for specialization in early childhood pre-primary education.
- To 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 many more Ugandan languages and ○ Produce textbooks in Ugandan languages.
- To 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, regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education.

Set and monitor minimum standard for early childhood centers in the country and

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Ensure full participation of government communities and teacher associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities

While the Uganda Early Childhood Education specifies the methods for operating preprimary education in Uganda, it did not specify the care and support requirements for children from 0 years to 3 years of age. This is a major gap that has left the operation of early childhood care and pre-primary education more in the hands of private operators without adequate standard methods. The comprehensive education analysis jointly undertaken by Uganda's government, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed the enormity of this problem and underscored the urgent need for government action to provide adequate policy provision for child health care and educational programming to enhance early childhood education. Also a pilot study of early childhood care facilities and practices by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF as well as the Education Sector Analysis by Ministry of Education, UNESCO and other development partners such as USAID, World Bank and Rotary club.

Results of Pre-Primary Education

The importance of pre-primary education cannot be overemphasized, it enables children to improve on their self-confidence since they are given opportunity to interact with their peers and adults too. Pre-primary education enhances independence and helps curb the tendency of children that are highly aggressive during group activities. Children's interactions with their peers and adults help to widen their scope of understanding and they also gain mastery of the world around them. Pre-primary education is vital to the child, parents and society because it permits smooth transition from home to school, because it enables the child to feel free to interact with other people outside his immediate family members. The pre-primary school helps to sharpen the children's cognitive domain through learning rhymes and songs, while playing on the slides and swings help in physical development and build their muscles. Structured play with building blocks and puzzles, baby dolls, and teddy bears helps in emotional development of the children.

At the pre-primary school stage, children learn to share and co-operate with others instead of developing the selfish tendencies. Exposure to pre-primary education goes a long way to teach each child how to understand and manage their emotions. The provision of pre-primary education assists working class parents who have no relation or house help to take care of their children while they are at work. The children will be exposed to reading and writing. Statistical research has shown that children who have experienced early childhood or preprimary programs are more likely than other children to remain in primary school and achieve good results.

Uganda's National Policy on Education has made some tremendous achievements in the area of the official recognition of pre-primary level of education in the policy document and this has made it possible for the establishment of pre-primary schools in Uganda. This has raised the status of pre-primary education to the lime light and it is no longer a backyard issue.

The government stated that it will encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education. Today private individuals have been allowed to set up nursery schools.

Discussion

There should be effective implementation strategies not just a policy on paper. If the preprimary education is to benefit from this national policy there is a need for the country, state, and local governments to ensure that the necessary educational facilities are available in both rural and urban areas. Through the various departments of the Ministry of Education implementation of effective monitoring, supervising, and inspecting of pre-primary school facilities should be mandated. If any of the private entrepreneurs does not meet the national standards or specifications for pre-primary schools, then they should be closed down and their license revoked until the owners meet the quality and standards required to maintain effective pre-primary education.

The government in conjunction with tertiary institutions, institute of education, and colleges of education should take positive steps to produce adequate numbers of teachers and specialists in early childhood education. This will help in the methodology and the teaching curriculum

of early childhood education. In addition each state of the government should add a nursery section in their existing publicly funded primary schools.

Government should ensure that pre-primary school proprietors implement the policy statement on the medium of instruction in their institutions to maintain the mother tongue or language of the immediate community as the medium of instruction. To support this implementation, government should encourage and facilitate the writing of textbooks in Ugandan languages beyond the two major languages (English, Kiswahili). This will enhance the children's cultural identity development. Government should ensure that the main method of teaching in pre-primary institution is through Montessori play and that the curriculum of teachers training colleges is oriented to achieve this.

Conclusion

Evidence has shown that the pre-primary school has a positive influence on a child's educational background later in life; therefore the national policy statement should be effectively implemented to achieve and maintain its objectives and goals. For this to be possible, the government should provide adequate facilities, fund, and encourage teacher training programs in early childhood education program. Additionally, there should be effective control in the establishment and approval of nursery schools. As with primary and secondary schools, approval should be given to a nursery school building plans before their constructed in order to monitor the standard of facilities. These facilities should be inspected before students are admitted into the schools and monitored and maintained to ensure quality pre-primary learning institutions.

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