

Creating a Child Friendly Environment as a Curriculum Model for Early Years Teaching

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Abstract—Young children are active learners who use all their senses to build concepts and ideas from their experiences. The process of learning, the content and the outcomes, is vital for young children. They need time to explore whether they are satisfied with what is learnt. Of all levels of education, early childhood education is considered to be most critical for the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. For this reason, the teachers for early years need to play a significant role in the teaching and learning process through the provision of a friendly environment in the school. A case study approach was used in this study. The information was gathered through various methods like class observation, field notes, documents analysis, group processes, and semi structured interviews. The group processes participants and interviewees were taken from some stakeholders such as parents, students, teachers, and head teachers from public schools, to have a broad and comprehensive analysis, informal interaction with different stakeholders and self-reflection was used to clarify aspects of varying issues and findings. The teachers' roles in developing a child friendly environment in personal capacity to learning were found to improve a pupils learning ability. Prior to early child development education, learning experiences and pedagogical content knowledge played a vital role in engaging teachers in developing their thinking and teaching practice. Children can be helped to develop independent self-control and self-reliance with careful planning and development of the child's experience with sensitive and appropriate interaction by the educator to propel eagerness to learn through the provision of a friendly environment.

Keywords— Child Friendly Environment, Early Childhood Education and Development, Teaching and Learning and the Curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE early years of a child is very critical in cognitive, physical and social sphere. Many countries all over the world have a huge investment in education policies and programme in the early years of children's education. A lot of organizations relating to education forum have emphasized the provision of equal opportunities for young children for their growth and development. Implication is still a hindrance as most crech centres are privately owned and not government.

The curriculum is a tool used by educators to capture the interest of children towards developing appropriate activities and should therefore provide a solid foundation on which children will build their knowledge, understanding and experience of the world through active play and manipulation

of materials. To achieve a child friendly environment, some basic questions must be sought after; how many opportunities do children in the early childhood programmes have to become actively engaged in creating their own curriculum experiences, selecting their own materials and finding new uses of objects? Lee (2006) showed that children's ability to construct knowledge is facilitated in an environment where learning is based on a social content. Concepts are easily developed, understood and better remembered in a curriculum that builds on children's interest (Mustard 2002). Children collaborate to pursue shared goals that are intrinsically activated and provide results to their actions that are absolutely visible. Children's learning is also facilitated when they are to use a wide variety of materials in a wide range of activities and in cooperation with adults who help them ask good questions.

II. CURRICULUM AS A MODEL IN CHILD FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Curriculum is concern with the prerequisites transactions and what actually goes on in the classroom as the essential meanings are negotiated between teachers and the taught and worthwhile activities with outcomes. Tajik (2004) states that curriculum for children includes:

- All the activities and experiences provided for them by adults;
- All the activities they devise for themselves;
- The language that adults use for them and they use to each other;
- All that they see and hear in the environment around them. The curriculum highlights the concepts, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills that a child needs to develop and carefully plan and develop the child's experiences with sensitive and appropriate intervention by the educators which will help nurture an eagerness to learn as well as enabling the child to learn effectively.

The early years curriculum as posits by Osterman (2000) sees the term curriculum as all the opportunities for learning at school, all the behaviour that is encouraged or discouraged, the school organization and routines, the way adults including parents, interaction with the children. In its broadest form, the curriculum involves a consideration of the process of learning, the learning progression and the learning contents.

The sum total of the experiences, activities and events

whether direct or indirect which occurs within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development propels a friendly study environment either overt or covert. It covers not only the activities at indoors and outdoors offered to young children but the attitudes of the staff not only towards the children but to each other, to parents and anyone who form part of the setting.

From the foregoing it is a clear identification that the curriculum is a tool used by educators to capture and direct the interest of children towards developmentally appropriate activities. A curriculum should provide a solid foundation on which children will build their knowledge, understanding and experience through active play and manipulation of materials. Obisanya (2004) identified three criterion as vital for curriculum model:

- The training programme should be interdisciplinary and appropriate to all levels of staff in the school system.
- There must be a purposeful programme that is appropriate to disadvantaged children and their families to equip the children to cope better with the demands of school, encourage parents and reduce their sense of hopelessness through the achievement of their children.
- There should be culturally sensitive approach that can help children from different backgrounds.

Bartholemew and Bruce (1993) anchored on three aspects of the early childhood curriculum which interacts with each other as the three Cs implying child, content and context. From this analogy, the salient point is that the activity and the environment of the child and involvement of adults parents and teachers are common to most of them and also include both planned and unplanned activities. This is congruent for preschool aged children who are believed to develop at their own pace with stimulation and encouragement from adults. Ekpenyoung (2007) views that most curriculum frameworks are prepared to achieve desirable learning outcomes. The content includes:

- Personal and social development
- Language and literary
- Mathematics
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development

The outcome emphasize early literary, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills and contribute to children's knowledge, understanding and skills in other areas.

Marthat (2008) emphasized the five strands and goal of child curriculum and child friendly environment for positive child growth.

Strand 1: Well being of the child where the child is protected and nurtured with the goal of being kept safe from harm.

Strand 2: Children and family feeling a sense of belonging with the goal of knowing the limit and boundaries of accepted behaviour.

Strand 3: Opportunity for learning are equitable and each child's contribution is valued with the goal of being encouraged to learn alongside with others.

Stand 4: Communicate the language and symbols of their own and other cultures are presented and protected with the goal of discovering and developing different ways to be creative and expensive.

Strand 5: The child learns through active exploration of the environment with the goal to gain confidence and making sense of natural, social, physical and material world.

The overarching goal of early childhood process is to establish a flexible open framework, operational model that supports development of appropriate education in a diverse setting for a balance society with seasoned people or citizens.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A multiple data source was employed through triangulation (Cohen 2000). This is a combination of tools like observations, document analysis, field notes, participants grouping process and semi structured interviews for a greater understanding of complex human behaviour and provides a multiple perspective (Denscombe 1988).

B. Research Context

The study was carried out in Lourdes Academy one of the private schools in Calabar Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It is one of the largest private schools in the region with one thousand students and forty teachers, four males and thirty six females. The school has ten levels, two sections for each level graded as pre-primary, primary and junior/senior secondary. The rationale for selecting this school was that it is a unique private school with a strong interest and preference for early childhood classes which provides a better choice of fitting rich data about child friendly classes in pre-school and diverse curriculum (Murtaza 2011). This was also to confirm the assertion that even though government formulate policies for the establishment of schools, the private individuals implement the policy much more appropriately than government.

C. Research Methodology

The work looked at the process of organizing general sense making, coding, drawings themes and interpreting and making meaning out of the collected data (Cresswell 2003). The participants in the research were informed about the nature, purpose, time and materials involved in the study. Each participant also had a right to see the interview transcripts for any clarification in their views.

IV. DISCUSSION

As stated earlier a child friendly environment is considered a significant source in children's better learning in early child education classes. Only data associated with child friendly environment and curriculum will be discussed. In addition this discussion will cover Miss Angela's & Charity's profiles

and teaching experiences.

Angela is a young woman with an NCE certificate. She is a committed and hard working teacher. Angela enjoys teaching children and this is the reason for her choice of ECD classes in the school. She is 24 years old and has been teaching in this school for the last four years.

Miss Charity is an average woman of 28 years. She has attended many re-training programmes about teaching children at the early years. She likes teaching in the child care classes because she loves children. She has a B.A Ed degree in Primary Education Studies and has been teaching for the past seven years. In the present school she has taught for only one year having spent the rest of her teaching years in other schools previously. The process pointed to the fact that teachers who participated in this work were used in favour of child friendly environment and appropriate curriculum. They follow the curriculum strictly and provide a friendly environment (Angela perceived a child friendly environment as where young pupils attend school with joy and happiness. They operate in a peaceful and comfortable area where their feelings and experiences are shared with peers in an amicable and siren way. Again they collate activities and learn independently (Interview, 6th March, 2015).

Charity had the same views with Angela about child friendly environment considering the prescribed curriculum and went further to imply that a kind environment where young pupils do not nurse fear and eager to attend school depict child friendly environment. In a situation where all kinds of their feelings and experiences done in a free-way, their all-round development would be perfect (Interview, 10th March, 2015).

To add, she mentioned a situation “if an environment where children can share their feelings, experiences sincerely, they can trust each other and build a confident in their concerns effectively (Interview 15 March, 2015).

One can affirm from these views that a child friendly environment encourages teachers to enhance students’ learning. In this regards, students can share their views, interact, ask questions and give support to themselves. This environment assists students to improve their learning abilities and comprehension level. When this happens, teachers see students as integral part of the environment. More all so, teachers feel that a child friendly environment expands motivation and propel interest. The teachers stressed that collaboration facilitate a child friendly environment too, example, relating feedback, co-planning, co-teaching and discussion are good for teachers’ capacity building. Sadu (2004) and Undiyaundeye (2013) further support collaborative effort and observe that “teachers’ capacity building becomes effective in situations where a culture of collaboration exist in a school.

Both teachers interview have a strong view that, children at pre-school learn better when concrete materials are used in early child classes. They learn to manipulate the materials, play and feel them with varied angles which aid them to learn more. They also agree on the use of meaningful and relevant

activity in several learning areas. Without this gingers students’ interest is put off. The conviction is that in preparing activities for teaching, teachers need the consideration of students’ abilities due to individual differences in learning IQ and level of comprehension Charity maintained.

We have individuality in ability example, slow learners and fast learners. According to their IQ, teachers are required to prepare activities involving all learners and engage them fully in the teaching and learning. No one should be free without doing anything (Interview 17thMarch, 2015).

Forming a Collegial Relationship of Teachers is a cogent requirement in effective teaching learning process.

V.RECOMMENDATIONS

A qualify curriculum and a friendly atmosphere in the classroom enhances learning through:

- Teachers should engage children both broadly and deeply with the content of the curriculum.
- Have high expectations of what children do and learning opportunities for trainers or teachers.
- Early years experience should be built on what the children already know and can do.
- Parents and practitioners or teachers should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect within which children can have security and confidence.
- There should be opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults and also those that they plan or initiate themselves.
- Well planned, purposeful activity and appropriate intervention by practitioners will engage children in the learning process and help them make progress in their learning.
- Effective learning and development for young children requires high quality care and education by practitioners.

VI. CONCLUSION

Early childhood education is a blossoming step of human personality. The development at this stage acts as a frame and basement on which the mega-structure of an individual’s personality is to be built. It is a basic foundation stage where children can develop their skills when they get a friendly environment and appropriate curriculum is put as a road map for effective teaching and learning. The participants in this work have a strong conviction of a child friendly environment in early child classrooms. They did this by affirming the compliance of an attractive environment and a well planned curriculum for learning. It is also important to state here that it is one thing to develop a model curriculum, it is of course a different matter to implement what has been developed on paper. A careful planned and developed child’s experience, appropriate and effective implementation by the educators and the provision of a conducive environment to learn are some of the basic conditions for effective curriculum for early years in the school system.

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