

ENHANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE EDUCATION GRADUATES' QUALITY IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES

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Abstract

The quality of the products from teacher training institutions determines the pace of the nation's development. A cursory look at Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) graduates from colleges of education in Nigeria indicates that most of the certified graduates lack acceptable level of competence in their area of specialization. This paper examines the need to take cognizance of academic quality assurance practices in improving the quality of graduates of ECCE being turned out on yearly basis into the labour market from colleges of education in Nigeria. Recommendations were made that management in colleges of education should be mandated to set up quality assurance units, where they are not available, to supervise and monitor academic activities on campuses while capacity building should be continuously given to teacher trainers to develop their intellectual capabilities and keep them abreast of development in the system.

Introduction

Education is a social service whose benefits cannot be quantified. The invaluable roles and contributions of education to the development of an individual and the society are enormous as it is through teaching and learning that education is made possible. The fact remains that teaching and learning rest on teachers, and, there can be no meaningful socio-economic and political development in any nation without teachers. Teachers are the prime executors of government policies on education and, as such their operational performance and vision could make or mar the future of the nation.

Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) refers to the education given to children in an educational institution prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten (FRN, 2013). The early years are precarious and critical in an individual's life because it is the time the foundation for adult

development is being laid. Based on the need to provide quality care or attention, including early stimulation for children at this crucial stage, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has developed a curriculum for teacher education to produce professional caregivers who will manage, provide quality care and stimulation to children.

In recent times, a cursory assessment of graduates of early childhood care and education in Colleges of Education in Nigeria indicates that most of them lack acceptable level of competence in their area of specialization (Adeyemi, 2005; Ebisine, 2014). It is quite unfortunate that comments of employers of labour on the competencies and performance of graduates of early childhood care and education from Colleges of Education in Nigeria in recent times reveals that characteristics such as analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills among

others are lacking (Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012).

Also, Okebukola (2005), Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2007) and Jekayinfa (2007) stressed that high grades on the certificates of graduates from our teacher training colleges are not sufficient to enhance the expected results, but the quality of training received. They stressed that the general public perceives tertiary institutions as the breeding centres for half-baked graduates where students have inadequate practical experience in their chosen fields to prepare them for the world of work. The place of early childhood care and education programme in teaching and learning process cannot be over-emphasized as the quality of their products determines the pace of the nation's development.

The efficacy of teacher training programmes in Nigeria to prepare teachers for the 21st century has been questioned by a number of studies (Obanya, 2004; Ololube, 2006). According to Kuiper (2008) and Sodipo (2014), there are serious complaints about newly appointed teachers, who have low level of numeracy and literacy skills as well as inadequate knowledge in their chosen areas of subject specialization. The low quality of graduates of ECCE from Colleges of Education in teaching profession is a major issue.

Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2007) opine that quality education is very vital in every human existence and societal development. It facilitates the rate of development and increases the standard of living, paving way for national ability as an educated society is a wealthy society. When a man acquires quality education, he becomes a free thinker and creator of wealth, he understands the society he lives in better and becomes more useful to it.

The situation has reached an alarming proportion that urgent decisive measures should be taken by the stakeholders to address the problem of ECCE graduates low quality, considering the fact that the teacher is the pivot of any educational achievement. The quality of the education outcome depends on the quality of the teacher. For the teacher to be of good quality, he must have undergone adequate academic preparation. To ensure that Early Childhood Care and Education graduates from Colleges of Education are of good quality, the relevance and professionalism academic quality assurance practices should be encouraged in the institutions.

According to Joseph and Agih (2007), academic quality assurance has to do with setting standards for the various processes and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions. These processes include requirements for entry into educational programmes, programme duration, course content, quality of teachers, standard of instructional infrastructure and facilities, the school environment from a holistic perspective and examination, i.e. quality of examination items, supervision, moderation of results, grading system, etc. It is against this background, this study examined the need to embrace academic quality assurance practices in Colleges of Education to enhance ECCE graduates' quality in Nigeria.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in Nigeria

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is defined, by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), as education given to children aged zero through 5 years in preparing their entry into

primary school. It is the education given to younger learners before the age of entering primary education (Nkechi, 2015). Early childhood care education is a starting point for a child's development and the key foundation of the Nigerian educational system. As stated in the policy document, the objectives of pre-primary education includes, among others:

- (i) Providing a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- (ii) Preparing the child for the primary level of education;
- (iii) Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work;
- (iv) Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.
- (v) Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play, and
- (vi) Inculcating social norms (FRN, 2013).

Concept of Quality Education

Ebong and Efue (2005) perceive quality as a standard against which to measure performance or actions. Quality has to do with comparison, measurement and degree of conformity to standards. Consequently, it helps to improve productivity, competitive edge and position, knowledge and power, and reduces wastages and cost.

Quality education is a multi-dimensional concept which should embrace all function and activities: teaching, and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building facilities, equipment, services to the community and academic environment

(Onuh, 2007). In early childhood care education programme, the quality of graduate teachers could be measured by the extent to which they have been prepared and how they are able to meet the challenges in the teaching field.

In order to ensure that educational programmes meet up the national objectives, the FRN (2013) section 1; subsection 8 states that the quality of instruction at all levels of Nigerian educational system should be oriented towards inculcating the following values:

- Respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals;
- Faith in man's ability to make rational decision;
- Moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations;
- Shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
- Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children and;
- A c q u i s i t i o n s o f competencies necessary for self reliance.

Ugodulunuwa and Mustapha (2005) opine that quality in education has to do with factors like articulated national goals; well planned curriculum at each level, assessment procedures and instrument; capacity for processing examination data; utilisation of assessment outcomes; and quality of students enrolled, serves as a serious pointer to the exact roles of the administrations of early childhood care education programme.

Quality Assurance Practices

Akpan (2014) described the concept of quality assurance as involving all

the policies, systems and processes directed to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of educational provision within an institution. The definition depicts that quality assurance involves the process of demonstrating excellence and value for money. It is therefore, a regulatory mechanism focusing on accountability and improvement, thus, establishing confidence in stakeholders that inputs, processes and outputs of educational system fulfil the expectations or measure up to minimum standards or requirements.

Okebukola (2004) opines that academic quality assurance is a process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities which will be achieved via pathways of employing mechanisms (internal and external) to the system. Joseph and Agih (2007) assert that academic quality assurance has to do with setting standards for the various processes and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions. These processes include requirements for entry into educational programmes, programme duration, course content, quality of teachers, standard of instructional infrastructure and facilities, the school environment from a holistic perspective and examination, i.e. quality of examination items, supervision, moderation of results, grading system, etc.

Quality assurance in education is achieved when authorities concerned with the management of the system prescribe some minimum standards of operation at all levels. In order to promote quality assurance, the roles of Universal Basic Education (UBE) on basic education, National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Universities Commission (NUC) and both

States and Federal Ministries of Education should be firmly rooted in the prescription of benchmarks, accreditation of courses, inspection, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the educational institutions (Durosaro & Akinsolu, 2007).

Strategies for Enhancing ECCE Graduates Quality from Colleges of Education in Nigeria through Academic Quality Assurance Practices

It is obvious that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teachers are the prime executors of government policies on education and, as such their operational performance and vision could make or mar the future of the nation. Salisu and Olusanya (2007) are of the view that no meaningful development can take place without competent teachers who are the products of good teacher education. The following academic quality assurance practices must be put into action in order to enhance ECCE graduates quality in colleges of education in Nigeria.

National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), as the body entrusted with the responsibility of setting Minimum Academic Standards, must give approval to colleges of education when guidelines have been met.

The link between available facilities, the programme curriculum and minimum standard must be adequately maintained. This means that no curriculum can be adequately covered without enough facilities to work the curriculum out and the issue of standard should not be mentioned when the curriculum is not adequately covered.

Management should ensure that qualified numbers of academic and non-academic staff are recruited for enhanced

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graduate quality of ECCE in Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Student's enrolment in the ECCE programme should be in line with NCCE guidelines as the quality of entrants determines the outcome.

Adequate funds should be released regularly to Colleges of Education in Nigeria to secure necessary training facilities, lecture rooms, laboratories, and libraries for academic activities

The management in Colleges of Education should ensure that effective teaching practice exercise is observed with seriousness so as to know whether teacher trainees undergoing the programme have mastered the rudiments of teaching.

Conclusion

The idea of good quality graduates is strategically imperative if our nation must survive. If quality education at primary level for effective nation building depends on ECCE graduates from Colleges of Education, then their targets should be quality oriented. Ensuring Early Childhood Care and Education graduates quality in Colleges of Education in Nigeria through academic quality assurance practices will make the teacher trainees to acquire the needed skills and talents in the programme and to ensure quality in the preparation of teachers, relevance and professionalism so as to face challenges of life.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to achieve graduates quality in Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

- Management in the colleges of education should be mandated to set up quality assurance units to supervise and monitor academic activities on campuses
- Regular in-service programmes, workshops seminars and conferences for both academic and non-academic staff in the tertiary institutions must be intensified to keep them abreast of innovations and development in their respective fields.
- National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should penalise colleges of education that flaunt regulations on quality assurance.
- Politicization of educational system in terms of admission and appointments should be discouraged. Appointment and admission procedures should follow due process in order to enhance internal efficiency in educational system.

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