

MONTESSORI EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: *The study investigated the operation of Montessori schools in the South Western part of Nigeria with due attention to Lagos and Osun State. A total of three hundred (300) teachers were selected from thirty (30) Montessori schools in the two states. Three research questions were answered in the study. A self-developed questionnaire titled “Montessori School Assessment Questionnaire” was used for data collection while the data were analysed using frequency count and percentage aspect of descriptive statistics. The study revealed that the Montessori school curriculum are not in line with the ideal one, the school and classroom environments have a semblance of Montessori schools while the teachers’ roles differ from the stipulations of what a Montessori teacher is expected to do. Premised on these, the researchers recommend that appropriate policy and curriculum should be designed for Montessori schools, Montessori school teachers should be exposed to relevant seminars and workshops.*

Keywords: Montessori Curriculum, Montessori Education, School Environment, Theory and Practice.

1. Introduction

The idea of Montessori school system has become popular premised on the view as one of the major ways through which compete citizens needed for the social, economic and political advancement of a country can be nurtured. Montessori school became profound through Maria Montessori (1870-1952) who believed that a person cannot be educated by another person as education should be based on the interest and ability of the learner anchored on the personal analytical curiosity and love for knowledge. Maria Montessori viewed education as a continuous activity which goes beyond the regimented classroom environment. Learning according to her is intrinsically motivated and the goal of early childhood education should be to cultivate this natural desire in children. According to the scholar, the most sensitive age of learning for a child is from birth to age six and the use of child-centred approach should be adopted.

The Montessori school is different from other school system in terms of curriculum in use, the role of teachers in the classroom interaction and class composition. According to Dawson (2018), a Montessori school is imbued with the following qualities;

- i. A prepared environment in term of relevant materials that are interesting and challenging to the learner.
- ii. Availability of Montessori materials. This refers to the provision of materials that are unique and beautiful based on natural quality and scientific design that could stimulate the curiosity of the learner.
- iii. Acquisition of life skills. This entails exposing the children to various activities that are needed in their day to day living. Children should be exposed to activities such as; scooping, folding and clearing amongst others.
- iv. Provision of work cycles. This involves allowing children to participate in an uninterrupted work cycle each morning in accordance with their age.

- v. Multiple age classroom. This implies grouping the learners on an average age interval of 1-3 years in order to promote the acquisition of leadership and mentoring by allowing the younger ones in a group to imitate the older ones.
- vi. Freedom of movement. This has to do with encouraging the learners to be independent and self-directed. The learners should be given the freedom to move and engage in any activity of their choice within the class.
- vii. Learners are guided to be intrinsically motivated to imbibe the principle of self-discipline.
- viii. Individualized instruction. Learners should be exposed to lessons and materials in accordance with their individual interest and development.
- ix. Teacher training. The teachers should be trained on how to facilitate learning and guide each learner premised on the need and interest.
- x. Record keeping. The teacher should keep the record of each child's activities.

The above attributes of Montessori school are in line with that of Rambush (1992). Rambush in addition, emphasizes hand-on-learning, cooperative and collaborative learning which places premium on the involvement of the learners in practical activities, children treating themselves with kindness and respect coupled with non-comparison of learners against one another as each child progresses at his or her pace. The scholar also identifies the inculcation of the spirit of universal values such as self-respect, acknowledgement of the uniqueness and dignity of every individual, compassion, empathy, peaceful co-existence amongst others in the learners. The specifications of the above authors are also attested to by the Montessori Children's Centre (2020).

Aside from the aforementioned attributes of a Montessori school, Farmiloe (2019) differentiated Montessori school curriculum from conventional school curricula premised on the following.

- i. Encouragement of independence. That is, the children are allowed to perform tasks that are of interest to them without any confinement to specific class lesson.
- ii. The curriculum does not encourage memorization of information but hand-on activities.
- iii. Cultural approach entailing the learning of valuable life lesson in all their learning activities such as treating others with respect and appreciating their opinions.
- iv. Children are opportune to direct their learning process. They are free to acquire new skills after acquiring the prerequisite one without age consideration.
- v. The curriculum emphasizes early childhood development covering the formative years which occurs before the age of six years.

In the view of Spur (2019), Montessori's method exposes children to real-life situation through rigorous training and significant emotional support. Importance is laid on creative expression and child's own interest rather than a regimented school curriculum. The curriculum of Montessori also eliminates stress related with test and examination with opportunity for children to unlock their full potentials. The curriculum also focuses on preparing the learners for later educational environment as well as work place. Children work based on their interest and happiness. The scholar asserts that Montessori's method reinforces teacher-learner relationship and the development of qualities that will make them relevant in later life.

Dahunsi (2014) posited that teachers in Montessori school require special training on how to carry out the tasks entail in Montessori school. The authors when looking into Montessori schools in Nigeria asserted that the teachers lack the skills and knowledge required of Montessori school teacher. In the finding of Kennedy (2019), many schools that claimed to be Montessori are not, in the real sense. Looking into what operate in United State, the scholars found that out of about four thousand acclaimed Montessori school in the country, only one thousand and one hundred are registered members of American Montessori Society which ensures compliance with the ethics and principles of Montessori school thereby implying that

more than half of the acclaimed schools are not regulated and therefore could fall below the specifications for the operation of a Montessori school.

Mshelbila (2015) while acknowledging the importance of Montessori education stated that the system of education is both a philosophy of child development and the rationale for guiding such growth. According to the scholar, the two edges of Montessori education are the need for freedom within limit and a carefully prepared environment which promotes exposure to materials and experiences required for overall development of a child. The scholar found positive effects of Montessori's method on the performance of children's artistic development in primary school. Somorin (2016) comparative analysis of pupils' performance in Montessori and Non-Montessori schools in vocational studies revealed significant difference in students' performance with Montessori school on the higher side.

The above postulations in relation to Montessori school have shown that it is a special school that requires special learning environment, special curriculum and teachers with some prerequisite knowledge and skills.

2.Statement of the Problem

Montessori education exposes learners to basic life skills that will allow them to become citizens that are responsible and responsive. It inculcates the skills of global citizenship in learners thereby making them to be relevant in all climes. The nature of Montessori education also requires special curriculum, teachers and school environment which are quite different from what operates in traditional classroom environment. Montessori education has also been found to be more effective in terms of inculcating necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and values in the learners thereby making its adoption attractive to those who might be interested in establishing school particularly at pre-primary and primary school levels. However, the compliance with the stipulations for the operation in terms of human, material, curriculum and environmental requirements have not been given due attention as the general curricular in operation in many countries including Nigeria have no specification for the establishment of Montessori school thereby making the adoption of the name 'Montessori' without actually complying with the specifications. This study therefore assesses the operation of Montessori school in terms of curriculum provision, environmental condition, instructional strategies and the roles of the teachers.

3.Research Questions

1. Does the school curriculum in Montessori schools in Nigeria operate in line with the requirements of Montessori school curriculum?
2. How relevant is the school environment of Montessori schools in Nigeria to the stipulations of Montessori school environment?
3. Do the classroom activities of Montessori school teachers in Nigeria go in line with the expected roles of teachers in a Montessori school?

4. Research Method

The study is a descriptive survey research design since it involves the selection of some respondents from the population in order to assess their opinions without manipulating any of the variables involved. The population is made up of all teachers in schools that claimed to operate Montessori school in Osun and Lagos States. A total of 300 teachers were selected from 30 acclaimed Montessori schools in the study area.

The instrument used for data collection is a self-developed questionnaire titled "Montessori School Assessment Questionnaire". The instrument is made up of three sections focusing on Montessori school curriculum, school/classroom environment and the role of teachers in curriculum implementation. The sections contain twelve, fifteen and twelve items respectively based on their relevance to the subject matter of each section. The items in sections 'A' and 'B' were presented on a four Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly

disagree. However, the responses of the respondents were collapsed into two, denoted by ‘Agreed’ and ‘Disagreed’ under data analysis while the responses to section ‘C’ were placed on Likert scale of always, often, rarely and never.

To ascertain the validity of the instrument, the initial draft of the instrument was given to two lecturers in the field of early childhood education to assess the suitability of the instrument in relation to the research topic. Comments and observations made by them were taken into consideration in the final draft of the instrument.

The instrument was also administered to 20 Montessori school teachers in two schools that are not part of the study. Their responses were analysed using Cronbach alpha analysis and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The instrument was thereafter, administered to 300 teachers in 30 selected schools that claimed to operate Montessori school system with the help of two research assistants. 299 of the questionnaire were returned while an average of 286 responded to each of the items on the questionnaire. Data collected were analysed using frequency count and percentage aspects of descriptive statistics.

5.Results

Research question 1: Does the school curriculum in Montessori schools in Nigeria operate in line with the requirements of a Montessori school curriculum?

Table 1: Analysis of the Montessori school curriculum in Nigeria

S/ N	ITEMS	RESPONSE			
		AGREE		DISAGREE	
		F	%	f	%
1	The curriculum stipulates what a child should learn	232	77.2	61	20.8
2	Children in the same class are exposed to the same learning experiences	194	65.5	102	34.5
3	Objectives to be achieved for lesson are stipulated in the curriculum	256	86.8	39	13.2
4	There is rigid allocation of time for each classroom activity	213	73.7	76	26.3
5	Children are graded based on the achievement of the stipulated objectives in the curriculum	240	81.9	53	18.1
6	The curriculum stipulates the grading system	252	85.1	44	14.9
7	The curriculum allows the learner to progress at their own pace	207	72.4	79	27.6
8	There are recommended textbooks and workbooks that must be used by the teacher and the learner	266	89.9	30	10.1
9	The curriculum allows each child to decide what to learn based on his or her own interest	168	59.2	116	40.8
10	The school derives her curriculum from the general curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education	260	89.7	30	10.3
11	The curriculum has no specific limit for class activities	204	71.1	83	28.9
12	The curriculum promotes hands-on activities	224	77.8	64	22.2

The respondents posited that; the curriculum stipulates what a child should learn (77.2%); children in the same class are exposed to the same learning experiences (65.5%); objectives to be achieved for lesson are stipulated in the curriculum (86.8%); there is rigid allocation of time for each classroom activity (73.7%), children are graded based on the achievement of the stipulated objectives in the curriculum (81.9%), the curriculum stipulates the grading system (85.1%), the curriculum allows the learner to progress at their own pace (72.4.0%), there are recommended textbooks and workbooks that must be used by the teacher and the learner (89.9%), the curriculum allows each child to decide what to learn based on his or her own interest (59.2%), the school derives her curriculum from the general curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education (89.7%), the curriculum has no specific limit for class activities (71.1%), the curriculum promotes hands-on activities (77.8%). It can be deduce from

the above analysis that there is no much difference between the Montessori’s school curriculum in Nigeria and that of the conventional school system thereby implying that the ideal Montessori’s school curriculum is not actually in operation in most of the acclaimed Montessori schools.

Research question 2: How relevant is the school environment of Montessori schools in Nigeria to the stipulations of Montessori school environment?

Table 2: Analysis of the Montessori’s school environment in Nigeria.

S/N	ITEMS	RESPONSE			
		AGREE		DISAGREE	
		F	%	f	%
1	The children are from different cultural background	232	80.6	56	19.4
2	The children are from different religious background	260	88.7	33	11.3
3	The compositions of the learners reflect global community	209	72.8	78	27.2
4	Classroom are arranged in such a way that different activities can be done at the same time	203	67.9	96	32.1
5	Learners work on individual or small group based on their interest	196	67.6	94	32.4
6	The teacher delivers the curriculum content for the children to learn	215	73.4	78	26.6
7	The teacher introduces the task to be learnt or concept to be discussed	184	62.2	112	37.8
8	Each classroom contains children of the same age range.	238	79.9	60	20.1
9	Children are expected to spend an average of 3 years together in a class	195	68.4	90	31.6
10	Children are involved in simple tasks e.g. wetting plants, washing dishes	225	76.5	69	23.5
11	Children in the same class serve as mentors to themselves	228	77.3	67	22.7
12	Resolution of conflict of interests among the children is the responsibility of the teacher	270	90.9	27	9.1
13	Children display values such as patience, tolerance and cooperation	242	83.7	47	16.3
14	A lot of activities take place in the classroom at the same time	173	60.7	112	39.3
15	There are natural objects within the school environment that allow learners to explore their natural environment	254	88.2	34	11.8

The respondents agreed that; the children are from different cultural background (80.6%), the children are from different religious background (88.7%), the compositions of the learners reflect global community (72.8%), the classrooms are arranged in such a way that different activities can be done at the same time (67.9%), the learners work on individual or small group based on their interest (67.6%), the teacher delivers the curriculum content for the children to learn (73.4%), the teacher introduces the tasks to be learnt or concept to be discussed (62.2%), each classroom contains children of the same age range (79.9%), children

are expected to spend an average of 3 years together in a class (68.4%), children are involved in simple tasks e.g. wetting plants, washing dishes (76.5%), children in the same class serve as mentors to themselves (77.3%), resolution of conflict of interests among the children is the responsibility of the teacher (90.9%), children display values such as patience, tolerance and cooperation (83.7%), a lot of activities take place in the classroom at the same time (60.7%), there are natural objects within the school environment that allow learners to explore their natural environment (88.2%). The responses reflect that the school/classroom environment of many of the schools has a semblance of Montessori school however, the teacher still plays prominent role in term of curriculum implementation and conflict resolution among the children which do not go in line with the ideal Montessori school system.

Research question 3: Do the classroom activities of Montessori school teachers in Nigeria go in line with the expected roles of teachers in a Montessori school

Table 3: Analysis of classroom activities of Montessori school teachers in Nigeria

S/ N	ITEMS	RESPONSE							
		ALWAYS		OFTEN		RARELY		NEVER	
		F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
1	I teach the curriculum content	262	88.2%	34	11.4%	1	0.3%	Nil	
2	I prepare my note of lesson for class instruction	219	75.8%	66	22.8%	3	1.0%	1	0.3%
3	I monitor and guide the learners	239	82.1%	50	17.2%	2	0.7%	Nil	
4	I give instruction on the task to be carried out by the learners	246	83.7%	44	15.0%	1	0.3%	3	1.0%
5	I grade the learners based on their performance in test and examination	208	72.5%	73	25.4%	3	1.0%	3	1.0%
6	I observe the children as they carry out their tasks and keep record of their progress	233	81.2%	50	17.4%	Nil		4	1.4%
7	I decide what the learner will learn	207	72.6%	72	25.3%	5	1.8%	1	0.3%
8	I motivate the children to learn	214	78.4%	53	19.4%	5	1.8%	1	0.4%
9	I expose the children to the same task at a time	242	83.7%	42	14.5%	4	1.4%	1	0.3%
10	I allow each child to engage in activities that suit his/her interest	197	67.9%	68	23.4%	15	5.2%	10	3.4%
11	I consider myself a facilitator rather than teacher	204	73.1%	56	20.1%	6	2.2%	13	4.7%
12	I resolve conflict among the learners when it occurs	222	77.6%	46	16.1%	9	3.1%	9	3.1%

The respondents agreed that the teachers always, teaches the curriculum content (88.2%); prepares their note of lesson for classroom instruction (75.8%); monitors and guides the learners (82.1%); gives instruction on the task to be carried out by the learners (83.7%); grades the learners based on their performance in test and examination (72.5%); observes the children as they carry out their tasks and keeps record of their progress (81.2%); decides what the learner will learn (72.6.0%); motivates the children to learn (78.4%); exposes the children to the same task at a time (83.7%); allows each child to engage in activities that suit his/her

interest (67.9%); considers himself a facilitator rather than teacher (73.1%); resolves conflict among the learners when it occurs(77.6%).

The analysis of the responses shows that the classroom activities of Montessori school teachers in Nigeria do not differ from that of the conventional school teachers. This implies that the expected role of a teacher in a Montessori school system is not actually implemented in the Montessori schools in Nigeria.

6. Discussion

The study reveals that the curriculum of Montessori schools in Nigeria does not operate in line with the Montessori school curriculum. This is attested to by the fact that the topics and content to be learnt are clearly stipulated in the curriculum and are religiously followed. The learning objectives are also defined and learners' achievement is assessed through tests and examinations. There are also textbooks and workbooks for class activities there reducing the acclaimed Montessori school to the conventional school system.

The study shows a semblance of Montessori school system in term of the school environment. This is reflected in the admission of children from diverse socio-cultural environment which could be attributed to the heterogeneous nature of the country since it is made up of people with different ethnic and religion background however, the teacher is responsibility for instructional delivery based on the stipulations in the school curriculum that has no difference from that of conventional school system thereby preventing the self-pace learning attribute of a real Montessori school.

The study also reveals that teachers in Montessori schools in the country prepare lesson note, determine what the children will engage in, give instructions to the children and motivate them to learn. These do not go with the expectations of a Montessori school teacher. The teacher supposed to serve as facilitator, monitor the activities of each child and allow them to be intrinsically motivated.

The findings reveal a sort of divergence in the operation of Montessori schools in Nigeria from the stipulations of Maria Montessori who was the mother of Montessori and those of scholars such as Rambush (1992), Dawson (2018), Farmiloe (2019), Spur (2019) and Montessori Children's Centre (2020). The study corroborated non-compliance of many acclaimed Montessori schools with the ideal Montessori school as revealed by Dahunsi (2014) and Kennedy (2019).

The non-compliance could be attributed to lack of enough knowledge on the part of the school owners on what constitute a Montessori school and absence of appropriate government policy to regulate the operation.

7. Recommendations

Premised on the findings, it is hereby recommended that;

- owners of Montessori schools need to acquire relevant knowledge on how to operate a Montessori school.
- there should be appropriate regulations to guide the operation of Montessori schools.
- special curriculum should be designed by government for the operation of Montessori schools.
- teachers in Montessori schools should be exposed to seminars and workshops that could enhance their performance as teachers in Montessori schools.

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