

RE-ENGINEERING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR GOALS ACHIEVEMENT IN RIVERS STATE

By

DR. MGBECHI C. OGBUJI
*Rivers State Post Primary Schools Board,
Obio, Rivers State.*

BLESSING B. ASAAH
*Vice Principal,
Government Secondary School,
Luawii, Rivers State.*

And

DR. J. N. D. MEENYINIKOR
*Department of Educational Management,
University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State.*

Abstract

Education is the Basic instrument for development all over the world. Generally the real process of teaching and learning with actual understanding starts at the primary school which is the base and springboard of all forms of formal education since it is meant for children within the ages of 6 to 11+ inclusive. Primary education in Nigeria is for a period of 6 years and is meant to inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively. The problems of realizing its goals have been compounded by global trends and computerization. The paper therefore examines the teaching methodology and utilization of resources so as to effectively and efficiently realize the desired objectives as spelt out in the National policy on Education and global practices.

All over the world education is generally accepted as the chief means of development and advancement. In Nigeria, it is regarded as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. In fact, the government has drawn up the National Policy on Education (NPE) first in 1977, revised in 1981, 1989, 1998 and 2004 and stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the

modern world (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The NPE identifies three levels of education namely, the primary, the secondary and the higher education. This paper shall focus on the primary level of education because it is the foundation upon which all the other levels depend.

Education is not something different from life and society and as such if education is not meeting the purpose for which it is established then there should be re-engineering. Again if the society experiences generational changes, the educational system should be re-engineered to meet the changing demand. Moreso, now that education has shifted from being a social services to a form of investment in human beings (Olele 1995) there is high need for re-engineering. According to Nwagwu (1976), education yields economic benefits or returns and contributes to a nation's future wealth and development; by increasing the productive capacity of citizens.

Education has been facing problems since the introduction of western education (formal) in Nigeria. This has led to changes of the system in operation. It is on record that pupils that enter secondary school from the primary level cannot read fluently, understand what is written in English language and cannot also write simple correct sentence (Ijaiya, 2004). Education without quality is no education. It is an eroding force to the investment of a nation and also a self productivity failure.

Rivers State, Nigeria and Globalization

Nigeria as a great nation in the world and Rivers state by its strategic importance to the nation's economy based on oil exploration should be able to withstand its position in the light of evolving global phenomenon, such as: (a) Natural: Earthquake, landslide, erosion, flooding, drought and dissertation, (b) Social: Terrorism, globalization, international relations, (c) Economic: Global recess, inflation, pattern of economic tiers between nations, (d) Technological: Pollution-spillage, global system of mobile communication, introduction of E-mail, internet, face book, twitter etc.

Rivers state which is the area of study is found in Nigeria. It lies approximate on latitudes, 4012^{\wedge} and $S^{\wedge}OTC$ and Longitudes $5^{\circ}22'E$ and $7^{\circ}36'E$ (Alagoa and Tamuno 1989; Abegunde, Adegoke, Onumere and Dahiru 1999). Rivers state has 2805 primary schools and enrolment of pupils. The state also has 245,430 students according to the year 2004 school census (Planning Research and statistics Department of the Rivers state Ministry of Education. There are three university degree awarding institutions and one Polytechnic in Rivers state. These are: University of Port Harcourt - Port Harcourt; University of Science and Technology Nkpolu; Rivers State University of Education -Rumuolumeni and Rivers State Polytechnic - Bori. In the state there are two refineries in Eleme (old and new); a petro-chemical plant

also at Eleme, liquefied natural gas plant at Bonny; Fertilizer plant at Onne and head offices of major oil exploring companies in Port Harcourt the capital. The state like others in Nigeria is faced with poor quality of education. The indicators are quite visible: Poor performance in School Certificate Examinations especially in English - Language, Mathematics and Science Subjects. Those who passed could be said to have been aided through malpractice in one way or the other. Many secondary students go to other schools to register for Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) for opportunity to cheat.

In primary schools most pupils dread English Language, Mathematics and Basic Science subjects. The primary level as a foundation is very weak and creates problems for the upper classes (Secondary and tertiary schools). All these lapses call for re-engineering in the primary schools.

Primary Education

The primary level of education has a duration of six years and normally is given to children between the ages of 6 to 11+ years inclusive. Meenyinikor (1995) prescribed that a child of at most 12 years must have completed the basics and known certain things in life. The National Policy on Education specifies further that it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system of education since the rest of the education system is built upon it. Primary educational institutions are owned by the governments (both state and local) although the Government welcomes the contributions of voluntary agencies such as churches, companies, communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of primary schools as long as they meet the Federal Government Minimum Standards and requirements. At the end of the primary school, that is, at the end of primary 6, the pupils take the state's First School Leaving Certificate Examination (FSLCE) the success of which enhances the individual to proceed to the secondary school. The pertinent question here is how can quality be ensured and productivity enhanced with numerous proprietors of primary schools in a particular state in the federation?

Goals of Primary Education

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:14) the goals of primary education are to

- (a) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;*
- (b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;*
- (c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;*
- (d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;*

- (e) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;*
- (f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;*
- (g) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.*

In pursuance of the above stated goals, the NPE states that primary education in Nigeria shall be (1) Tuition free (2) Universal and (3) Compulsory. It appears, the above three conditions are not easily and willingly adhered to.

Apparent Problems

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 and 2004), Aminigo (2011) and UBEC (2000) are all in agreement that the goals and objectives of primary education are very clear and well understood but their implementation, realisation and achievement are not very acceptable generally. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) that gave rise to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is generally accepted as not been very successful, Rivers state Government (2004), UBE (2006) Ehezue (2011) Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000).

Another problem is the dreaded absence or inadequacy of educational services such as school library service, basic school health services, guidance and counselling service, Nigeria Language Services (alias Mother tongue). Others include technological and computerized teaching and learning, Huney (1978), Ijaiya (2004)

- Supervision and Inspection Services Nnabuo et al (2004)
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation. Nkwocha (2004), Nnabuo, J2011) Leadership (Nnabuo et al (2006) Esirah (2011).
- Management, Nnabuo et al (2004)
- Teachers motivation and training. Akinade(2009), Meenyinikor (2007), Zhawa (2007).
- Social services and productivity Odele (1995) Nwagwu (1976).

The first identified cause of learners inability to read or write is unqualified teachers handling the pupils and using lecture method most of the time. For example, learners ought to master reading with understanding of the alphabet A - Z and also some words and simple sentences. In most primary schools in Rivers state teachers are not specialist in English Language and Mathematics thus will not be able to achieve the expected goal - To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively.

Learners' inability to read and write is of paramount importance. Where this is not achieved the following may result:

- (1) Constant failure
- (2) Relying heavily on external cues from in solving problems rather than solving the problem him/her self (Macmillan 1977).
- (3) Poor expression
- (4) Imbedded fear
- (5) Shying away in some roles
- (6) Employing an outer-directed problem solving strategy

Another basement problem identified in primary school is mass promotion. That the major responsibility of a school is promoting and monitoring the growth and development of learners does not suggest mass promotion. The school authority know that teacher's evaluation of the learners should not be abandoned. The school authority should always liaise with the teacher to find out those learners qualified for the next level. Though this is possible in a situation where all the teachers are reliable. The teachers and school authorities should understand very well that the consequences of poor decisions made in Basic 1 and 2 can affect the individual and the society at large for a long time. This view should be emphasized in the various level of teaching and learning. Learners should be exposed to exercises for critical thinking and should be helped to discover their abilities and talents.

Apart from unqualified teachers and mass promotion, the use of variety of techniques and visual instructional materials constantly for the presentation of the lesson to learners are avoided. A good teacher is one with a positive perception of individual differences and the requisite skills to adapt the instructional material to meet such differences, teacher knows that techniques are adopted on the basis of the ability levels and learning preferences of the learners. By instructional or resource materials it should be noted this refers to those facilities, equipments and materials utilized by a teacher to illustrate, emphasize and explain a lesson with the intention of making the lesson clear to the learners (Haney 1978). Proper use of instructional material activates the 5 sense organs.

As the learners five (5) sense organs are not fully utilized in teaching - learning process in the classroom, the recognition, assimilation and retention level will be low. The learner is bound to forget easily. Primary classes 1 to 6 are very important levels for any learner. At that level, if a problem has been identified, the next thing is to find the solution. This is exactly what the Akwa Ibom Ministry of Education did by introducing new teaching - learning methods in the school system. Among the new methods was the universal concept Abacus and mental arithmetic system designed to sharpen mental alertness and arithmetic skills of school children as well as Read and Write

Now (Daily Sun 2011). This is an initiative aimed at improving the teaching and learning of English Language and Mathematics in primary schools.

Conclusion

Primary education plays a very significant role in the effective and efficient realization of the goals and objectives of education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education in Nigeria. Therefore, the re-engineering of primary education for goals achievement in Rivers State will enhance employment and self productivity not only in Rivers state in particular but also in Nigeria generally. This is because primary education provides the foundation for secondary education which in turn feeds the higher education with the students who eventually turn out to be the human capital and resources for national development and transformation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made.

1. The Government should effectively monitor, supervise and inspect all primary schools to ensure compliance with approved standards and global best practices.
2. Proprietors of all primary schools should ensure that all their teachers are academically qualified, practically and professionally sound in the arts and science of primary education.
3. The teachers in primary schools should ensure that the NPE recommended teacher - pupil ratio of 1:35 is strictly adhered to in all classes and form in their respective primary schools.
4. The stakeholders of Education at all level should be properly informed, trained and educated on the principle that the primary, secondary and tertiary education combined to form the National Education System that are interrelated and integrated.
5. Teachers in primary schools should adopt the practical, exploratory and experimental methods of teaching to enhance the effective and efficient achievement of primary educational goals.

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