

REAPPRAISING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR FUNCTIONALITY AND SELF RELIANCE

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Abstract

Primary education is the foundation upon which subsequent education in one's life is anchored. The National policy on Education NPE (2004) espoused guidelines on policy implementation for the over all aim of achieving the desired results. Unfortunately, there are some constraints on the way to the attainment of these goals. The paper in the light of reappraising primary Education for functionality and self reliance in contemporary Nigeria, examined the supply of teachers, facilities and other concomitant variables as factors impeding policy implementation at the primary level. It also elucidated on other challenges in the sector and ends with some far reaching recommendations.

Introduction

Primary Education is the foundation where all levels of education supposed to anchor. The National Policy of Education in line with the above (NPE) (2004) described primary Education as the key to the success or failure of the whole education system. In pursuance of the goal of providing a sound primary education, the policy stated among others that

- (i) It shall be free, universal and compulsory.
- (ii) duration shall be six years
- (iii) It shall be for children aged 6-11 plus
- (iv) Educational services (Library, health scheme, counseling, resource center and specialist teachers) shall be supplied.
- (v) Teachers pupils ratio shall be 1:35 and
- (vi) Primary school leaving certificate shall be locally issued by the schools' head-teacher.

In order to achieve the objectives of primary education, Maduewesi (2005), posited that resources must be carefully managed. According to her, resource management involve adequate supplies and handling to achieve success. She advocated co-operative management.

As usual, resource supplies and handling have remained the critical factors influencing policy implementation at this level of education. In the first part of this paper teaching personnel and facilities supply as interrelated factors are explored. The second part of the study which is re-appraising primary education for functionality and self reliance are examined in the face of contemporary realities.

Quality of Teachers Recruited and their Retention

In Nigeria, education is perceived as an instrument "per excellence" for effecting National development. (NPE, 2004:4). While the belief and confidence in education as the process of unlocking the doors to development subsist, it is also argued that the teacher holds the key to that door. It is also agreed that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004:39). Also, Adewumi (2004) asserted that, "the teacher is the key person in the nations education enterprise whose quality of training could make or mar the learner.

Starting from the point of their admission as they enter the teacher education institutions, the Nigerian teachers including those for the primary schools suffer low morale, such as poor salary package, and other built in incentive. In the days past, training institutions according to Okeke (2004) had the opportunity of being involved in the process of selecting their prospective entrants for certain desirable

qualities. Today, recruitment into the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E) and the first degree in Education programmes is the prerogative of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

So far, those recruited into the teacher education programmes are generally of poor quality. Trainees with low academic qualifications go into teachers education perhaps because they lack alternative professional choices. Teachers in the system are traumatized and de-motivated. In this regard, Njoku (2005) posited that even when they retire from service, some of them are not paid their retirement entitlement till they die. He added that this phenomenon does not only affect job performance but also the psyche, hence retaining teachers on the job is difficult. The situation is that people stay on the teaching job while waiting for better alternative. This tendency has continued to rob the teaching profession of the quality and experienced teachers and therefore places the education of our children in the hands of inexperienced and half baked teachers which does not guarantee quality instructional delivery.

Dearth of Instructional Aids in Schools

Facilities are the part of the major production variables in primary education. Facilities required at this level other than those included in educational services are furnished classroom, science/vocational studies laboratories, sports equipment, and playground. Over the years these kind of facilities have dwindled in schools. Where they once existed, they are not made available (Adewola 1999). Whereas the NPE (2004) provides that science, agriculture, Home economics and computer education be taught at the primary level, in many schools, particularly those located in the rural areas facilities for instructions in these subject areas were never supplied adequately (Adewola 1999).

Facilities supply have been very epileptic, while its management has been very porous in the primary schools. Facilities are seen as government properties and are therefore poorly handled. In many public schools, children sit on bare floor in the 21st century.

Issues and Discussion

Nwoadaya, there are a number of factors that threaten and challenge appropriate implementation of primary education programme in Enugu State. Specifically, educational planners and administrators desire to address the issues of multiplicity of private schools, politicization of the system, admission of under-aged, examination frauds, elongated school hours, and non application of collaboration by school administrators. This is with a view to minimizing and if possible eliminating current and emerging sources of crises in the implementation process.

2. Multiplicity of Private Schools

In the last few years, there is an upsurge of privately owned primary schools across the country. In Enugu State, records indicate that the number of such schools is 487 while those owned by government is 1158 (ESUBEB, 2007). If the statistics of unapproved schools in Enugu State is added, the number of private primary schools will no doubt out number that of the government.

Although the increasing number of privately owned schools could be seen as a preference against the public schools, the operation of these school deserve attention. The private schools, most of which are not government approved, operate in uncompleted buildings, where pupils are stocked in little spaces, ordinarily built as bedrooms and garages.

Similarly, observation indicates that teachers in most private schools do not have the qualifications stipulated by the national policy on education NPE (2004) in any case, the growing number of private schools and visible

inadequacies in their management outfits are enough to attract attention.

3. Politicization of the System

The politicization of primary education in Nigeria in recent times is one of the factors giving rise to crises in the implementation process. In terms of control, the external bodies in charge of management of primary education are the State Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Board and Local Education authority (Obi 2004)

As usual, appointments into the governing boards and councils of these bodies are often politicized. Serious considerations may be given to professionalism and competency at the federal level. At the state and local government levels, appointments into these bodies are mainly based on political consideration. This is because the governing boards of these bodies are seen as financially attractive. As a result appointees into the boards are cronies of the state chief executives and party loyalists. The over bearing influence of government extends beyond the composition of these boards. It is visible in the recruitment and promotion of teachers.

It should be noted that Politics and intrigues can only breed incompetence and crises in the system management particularly at the primary school level. In effect policy implementation is jeopardized.

4. Admission and Graduation of Under-Aged

The required age of those entering the primary school is six years. The duration is also six years (N.P.E, 2004:14). The same policy document recognizes early childhood or pre-primary education. Early childhood Education (ECE) was initially conceived to help working mothers to care for their children. In other words, it started as a mother concept in order to release the women to join the world of work.

However, due to the changing phase of economic life, women engaging in a variety of duties and changes in the global idea regarding child care, it has become mandatory to extend the concern for child care and education to those who are below three years. (Maduewesi, 2005:39).

These days, as noted by Asogwa (2004) the emphases on early child education now generate children between the ages of 4-5 years as potential entrants into the primary school. In the same manner, the six years duration for primary education has been reduced to five years by most private primary school operators. In effect, children now graduate from the primary schools between the ages of nine and ten years. This phenomenon is a distortion of the policy and has serious implication for the management of the system. In the circumstance, teachers and school heads are being compelled to dish instructions to under-aged children.

5. Examination Frauds

It has been asserted that our school leavers are not exhibiting the kinds of behavioural pattern that the schools are expected to transmit to them for the social conduct of the nation (Tahir, 2007). This raises the question of efficacy of the entire production process particularly the final examinations which mark the end point in the quality control efforts in the system.

Certification at this level, is expected to be based only on continuous assessment and to be done locally by the head teachers of the school. Unfortunately however, the prevailing practices is that certification is done on the basis of examination administered for the purpose by the state's ministry of education. Most times, the conduct of these examination are usually shrouded with malpractices, a phenomenon which has rendered most Nigerian certificates inferior in the outside world. It is highly contended that no problem is as threatening to the primary education system as that of

examination malpractices. This is because subsequent level of education would be built on porous foundation.

Examination malpractice is a product of corruption and social decay of the Nigerian society. This situation has become a pull down factor in the policy implementation efforts in the schools. As things are now, there may be no solution to this phenomenon. This is because, teachers and even parents are collaborators in the shameful game. The situation is likely to be worsened when head teachers starts to issue certificates locally. At that time, certification especially obtainable grades are likely to be on “cash and carry” basis.

6. Elongated School Hours

Earlier, it was stated that private sector participation in the provision of primary education is on the increase. As a private business, it is profit driven. This situation coupled with the need to keep children busy beyond 12 -1 pm as their mothers remain at work, has forced many private school owners to introduce after school ‘lesson’s. These lessons last up to 4pm and even beyond in some schools. Since after school lessons have become a veritable source of additional financial resources to the school and the teachers, many public schools in the urban setting have joined in the practice.

Although the policy did not prescribe the number of hours which constitute a school day, the extension of the school day by a minimum of two hours can be counter productive. As the popularity of “after-school-lessons” increases in the primary schools, there is need for a more result-orientated management approach in the circumstance. This should be with a view to enhancing productivity and protecting the physiological development of the child.

8. Dwindling Collaborative Efforts

The management of the school is not the sole responsibility of the head teachers and his colleagues. It was in this regards that Parent-Teachers-Association, School Committees, Board of Governors were formed and encouraged as collaborative outfits in school management. The NPE (2004) gave impetus to this when it started that “government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and organizations”.

Until recent years, these collaborative outfits were used to source for resources for schools, to ensure the provision of teachers where they were found to be under supplied and in some schools, ailing buildings and equipment rehabilitated. The efforts of these bodies were even noticeable in private schools which ought to have been seen as the exclusive ventures of their proprietors. We cannot challenge the fact that there can never be a healthy understanding, obligation and commitment to school progress on the part of parents, without involving them meaningfully in the decision making process.

This is the dilemma of the present day primary education management. Imana (2006) affirmed that “The Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) which used to be the platform for cross fertilization of ideas concerning the school and the children are, fast diminishing” in the school system. He added that 80% of head teachers who responded on the issue in his study complained that parent responses to PTA meetings were generally poor.

Conclusion

Shortage in facilities, poor teacher recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced ones and other concomitant variables have been identified as impediments to the successful implementation of policy guidelines in primary schools.

Against this backdrop it becomes very obvious that the attainment of the goals of

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primary Education as espoused in the National policy on Education NPE (2004) seems a dream which is far from reality.

Recommendation

It is hereby recommended that as antidote to these observed lapses in the implementation of policy guidelines, the following measures are suggested.

1. Quality and experienced teachers should be employed and retained and one of the ways to achieve this is by enhancing the condition of their services.
2. Facilities should be supplied in proportion to class size and maintenance culture stressed.
3. Most of the private primary schools that operate in dilapidated and uncompleted buildings should be closed down by withdrawing the earlier approval granted them. A situation where pupils are made to sit on bare floor and receive their lesson is not only wicked but an abuse to humanity which is demeaning to the worth of man and therefore should be discouraged.
4. Public primary schools should be made attractive to regain the confidence of parents. It is only by so doing that a vote of no confidence should be passed on to some of these private primary schools that operate on make shift environment, a scenario considered very dangerous to teaching and learning.
5. Schools that elongate the school hours by way of teaching private lesson after the normal school hours should take into consideration the maturational level of the pupils under their tutelage as well as their attention span. This is very

important so that their efforts in this regard will not be counter productive.

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