

RE-STRUCTURING PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Socio-economic development in Nigeria is low because, self-reliance is not adequate in the nation. The present situation in Nigeria posed serious threats and challenges to both government and citizens. There is the need to restructure our educational system from the grass root. This paper therefore focuses on the need to re-structure primary school education for national development. One of the objectives of primary school education is to give the child opportunities to develop manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in society within the limits of his capacity. For this objective to be achieved, the educational system needs to be re-structured. This is to say that our educational system should be functional. The child after graduating from primary school education should be able to become self reliance as a result of the skills acquired during his last three years in the primary school known as upper class. Apart from becoming self reliance he can also become an employer of labour. Some recommendations were made that will enhance national development.

Keywords: Re-structuring, Primary School Education National Development.

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. It is an important aspect of man's existence on earth. It can be received either formally or informally depending on the individual. The education of the citizenry of any nation starts from the primary school. It is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. As a result of this, the government of Nigeria made primary education free and compulsory for all. For this policy to be effective, the government introduced free and compulsory Universal Primary Education in 1976. It was later replaced with the universal Basic Education (UBE) in September 30th 1999 which was launched in Sokoto.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013: 18) defined primary education as education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 12. It further gave its objectives as follows:

- a. Inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively.
- b. Laying of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- c. Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- d. Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes
- e. Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- f. Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

These objectives, if well implemented will no doubt help the country to develop her human and material resource. Primary school education helps to prepare and equip learners for all aspects of life.

The primary school education must receive the desired attention because education generally has the task to develop the nation's economy. Nigeria as a country can use primary school education to lay a solid foundation for a sound scientific thinking and good character development for the growth and development of the country. It will also help to build a strong spirit of patriotism and love for the country.

In spite of these laudable objectives, the primary school education is faced with a lot of challenges. These problems include administration, shortage of infrastructure, non-payment of teachers' salary which led to lack of commitment; poor/dilapidated building, inadequate funding and so on. These problems, if properly addressed, will help to improve the standard of primary school education.

The Concept of Primary School Education

Primary school education is the base of the formal education ladder. It has been described as “the embryo of the whole educational system”. The quality and standard of other levels depend on the quality of the primary school educational system. It is given to children from ages 6-11 plus. According to (NPE, 2013) the primary school level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Its duration is 6yrs. Since the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 now, 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, the primary school now shoulders the responsibility of developing permanent literacy and numeracy in pupils. Other purpose of primary school education as stipulated in the (NPE 2013) include the development of effective communication skills, sound character, adaptive ability in changing environment, desirable social norms and some manipulative skills.

According to Ibrahim (2009), primary education is the most dependable parameter for the measurement of the operational success of education at whatever level. If for any reason this level is weak, the whole education system will automatically be weak; primary education being the bedrock of other systems and the stepping stone of any nation’s development. Of the three tiers of educational system in Nigeria, Maduwesi (2005), stated that primary education is the gateway to whatever individuals can achieve through education. In the same vein Agocha (1998), asserted that sound fundamental knowledge provides a baseline orientation for the developmental edifier which means that the success or failure of subsequent educational endeavour in a child’s life, depends greatly on how effectively the primary education is handled.

The United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2007), sees primary education as a means of liberating the great majority of people who are encased within the rigid and inefficient traditional education.

In other to achieve the above purposes of the primary school education, emphasis should be made on how to improve the human and physical resources of the nation. In most Nigerian primary schools, infrastructural facilities, libraries and instructional facilities are inadequate. In support of this, Nwandiani (1998) stressed that schools in Nigeria are fast decaying. The ‘rot’ in the system ranges from shortage of all teaching and learning resources except students, the lack of effective leadership and proper motivation of teachers in primary schools are demoralized and disenchanting due to the uncondusive environment in the primary schools.

National Development

Ikwemelu (1992) stated that development involve the societies transformation through its institutions, organizations, social-rules, customary usages and attitudes to an extent that makes the society more and more positively respectively to desired modern changes. This transformation can be felt in economy, health, science and technology,

socio-political life of the people and by extension, the entire nation. National development implies advancement from a low level to a higher level. From the above statement it is clear to state that education is the key to national development and quality primary education remains one of the instrument through which this can be achieved.

Re-Structuring Primary School Education for National Development

There should be standard (quality) education that will encourage self-reliance in Nigeria. In order to make effective use of the natural resources in Nigeria, education should be considered as very paramount investment for national growth and development. Sound economic condition is realizable if manpower is trained and developed to explore and tap some natural endowments within a nation's environment. In other words, poverty is overcome when nations who have good accumulation of natural resources embark on standard education and develop their human potentials to harness those natural resources. Education is a crucial type of investment for the development of the state. An abundant and increasing supply of highly educated people has become the absolute prerequisite for social and economic development in the society.

Hornby (2001) defined re-structuring as organising a system or an organization. It involves changing a system in order to achieve success or an objective. This could be applied to the primary school education. In order to meet with the present demand of society, the system needs to be re-structured. Primary education plays vital roles in national development such as eradication of illiteracy by training the child on how to read and write, poverty eradication and character moulding Akintunde (2011) described primary school education as the foundation upon which all other levels of education are built, foundation we know is vital to a building that strength and durability depend on. Primary school education serves as the foundation in the formal process of ensuring changes in the behaviour of the growing members of society Mallison (1980) cited by Omotere (2011) described primary school education as the keystone of the whole educational structure. As a foundation, it in variably determines what the outlook of subsequent higher levels of formal education will be.

With the importance accrued to primary school education there is the need to improve the quality of basic education and re-structure it towards national development Education for national development must be will structured in order to reflect environmental, societal and economic conditions.

Apart from the government's participation in re-structuring the primary school education to meet with the present day societal demand, the teachers also have important role to play, through teachers' education. Teacher education institutions have

vital role to bring changes within the educational system that will shape the knowledge and skills of future generation. It is often said that, the standard of education cannot rise above its teachers. Teachers have the capability to re-structure the educational system through teachers' education institutions. These institutions serve as key change agents in re-structuring education and society towards national development. Efed (2010) opined that no matter how adequate the objectives and content of any educational curriculum may be, its implementation is very crucial to its success, hence the pedagogy quality, quantity, readiness and commitment of the teachers as well as their capability in utilizing the necessary teaching materials and skills are very vital. Teachers implement educational policies through instructional activities, scheme of work, breaking subject matter into units through lesson plans/notes and the uses of instructional materials and their effective utilization. Ughamadu (2013) noted that the method a teacher uses has the potential to promote or hinder and sharpen mental activities, encourage initiatives and curiosity and thus lead to self-reliance and survival.

With these laudable roles of teachers in policy implementation, they need to be trained specially on various methods of teaching, skills acquisition character development and morals. Olatunde (2013), stated that in training teachers for primary education, the emphasis should be on knowledge of the primary school curriculum, teaching methods and materials, how children learn, the importance of knowledge to learning and the methods of teaching mother tongue and English.

Re-structured primary school education needs to be well articulated by both the policy makers and the implementers at the classroom level. There are some children who are not able to go beyond primary school level to secondary school. Such children as they grow up, become problem to themselves and society at large.

A re-structured primary school education will sharpen the child to become self reliance and contribute positively to national development. If he /she has been well trained and groomed with the objectives of primary school education, he can engage in meaningful work as a source of livelihood. An unstructured educational system, gives room for vices like kidnapping, unemployment, prostitution, arm robbery and so on. In a nutshell, a restructured primary school education is a functional educational system. This borders on usefulness, practicability and operational potentiality of the education that will enhance the child's effectiveness and efficiency in all he does for himself and the society. This is the education that gives the child a very solid base to either continue with his academic career or earn his living outside if he so desires. A functional primary education should be that education which will enhance good character formation and development of sound attitude and morals in the child. It is that education that should enable the child have value for himself, other people, established culture and constituted authorities as well as having respect for the dignity of labour and corporate living.

Challenges of Primary School Education

A major problem facing the primary school education is in the area of funding. This has brought a lot of setback in achieving the objectives of primary school education. In fact, it is a major problem that affects all levels of education, Obayan (2009) opined that, the actual money spent on education is usually lower than the budget allocations and very little of the actual money spent on education goes to the school levels. Inadequate funding is also a hindrance to the effective performance of the teacher in primary school. In most cases, teachers embark on incessant strike action as a result of irregularity in payment of their salaries, promotion arrears, increments, emoluments and other entitlements. Of recent, teachers have decided to stay on their jobs by enduring instead of having job satisfaction, since industrial action has not yielded anything positive.

Poor/Dilapidated Building: Most primary school buildings are very old, dilapidated and unattractive. In most cases, when there is heavy down pour, the school buildings collapse and some roofs blow off resulting from the old age of the building and lack of maintenance culture. This can hinder children's interest in learning thereby bringing about poor performance in their learning activities.

Though lately, some state governments have embarked on renovation of primary schools but some are still begging for renovation and maintenance.

Olatunde (2013) also highlighted some of the challenges as follows:

1. Poor teacher deployment practices. There are more teachers in some schools than others. There are over supply of teachers in urban schools than the rural schools. The national teacher pupil ratio is put at 1.40, but in rural schools, because of under supply of teacher, the ratio is sometimes 1.70 or above. This brings about inefficiency and classroom ineffectiveness.
2. Poor quality of teaching and learning: Some teachers lack basic pedagogical skills and understanding to teach effectively in primary schools. There are inappropriate uses of textbooks and methods of teaching skills in developing literacy, mathematics and scientific concepts.
3. Primary school teachers' salaries come from the Federal allocation through the state government down to the local government councils. During this process, these salaries are tampered with by the personnels of the three tiers of government. At the end of it, salaries are not paid as at when due and this dampen their morals, and causes irregular attendance to school and thus lower productivity.
4. Wide disparities in learning outcomes and school participation. There is high disparities between rural and urban schools where we also have high enrolment and performance in the rural areas and enrolment and participation is also low.

Achieving Re-structured (functional) Primary Education in Nigeria

Achieving re-structured (functional) education lies mostly on the government of the nation. Sometimes ago, the various Academic Union of higher institutions like the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU and Polytechnic lecturers went on a prolonged strike. Even the Nigerian Union of Teachers are also planning to go on strike. All these strike actions hinder the smooth running of academic calendar resulting to poor performance of students. The recommendation by UNESCO that 26% of annual budget should be for education has not been implemented. Lack of proper funding also has a negative effect in the areas of infrastructure and provision of instructional materials.

Presently, the government through UBE scheme, provided text books on some subjects like English mathematics, computer science, science and technology and so on. These books cannot go round as a result of increase in population in children's enrolment. The infrastructural and instructional facilities are over stretched due to their overuse. All these conditions cannot guarantee restructured/functional primary education in Nigeria.

To achieve re-structured/functional primary school education in Nigeria, it requires educational facilities/input in a conducive school environment. This will facilitate learning process thereby enhances students' performance. Educational input refers to school infrastructure, teaching cadre, educational materials/equipment, finance, quality and motivation of teachers and so on.

In Nigeria primary school education, emphasis should be on re-structured/functional education that will bring about quality learners, quality learning environment, quality content, quality process and quality outcome. With all these, there will be standard in our primary education system if these desires are achieved. We will be able to produce children who can develop their potentials and add to national development.

Conclusion

Primary Education is the foundation upon which all other levels of education are built. In fact, it is the 'bedrock' of other levels of educational system. Considering its importance, all stake holders should be involved in salvaging primary school education from decay. This is necessary because, the progress of a nation largely depends on the quality and standard of education given to its citizenry. The teacher as a professional also has various roles to play in order to make quality input in achieving functional education for national development.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide enough funds for education at the primary school level
2. The existing structures such as classrooms and offices should be renovated to avoid collapse.
3. Teachers should be well paid as at when due. Promotions should be affected, arrears should be paid without delay, termly subvention should be paid on time to enable head teachers purchase teaching materials.
4. There should be constant monitoring and evaluation of primary school programmes. Teachers should also be supervised to improve and maintain high academic standard
5. Government should provide enabling environment and facilities in primary schools such as modern building, toilets, desk, tables and constant power supply.
6. Qualified teachers in pedagogical skills should be employed
7. Teachers should equally improve their knowledge through further education, conferences and seminars, symposiums, basic scientific interactive sessions.
8. Teachers should be provided with computer and laptops to enable them perform their roles as the 21st century teachers i.e. “The new teacher”.

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