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# RE-ENGINEERING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGER STATE

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By

**Lydia Nnadzwa Baba**  
*Niger State College of Education,  
Minna.*

## **Abstract**

*Education is generally regarded in Niger State as her major industry hence the need for its constant re-examination. The paper examined the present condition of education in the state and noted that its dwindling quality as depicted by poor pupil achievements in basic skills and public examinations is inimical to her progress and development. It attributed the situation to several factors such as over-centralization, poor investment by stakeholders. More especially the lack of appropriate management policies by Government that could engender and inspire to healthy competition for better performance among schools etc there is therefore a need, it was suggested, for quality education in the state to bring about stronger motivation among school leadership and teachers. The state government should adopt strategic planning with statements of vision and mission backed by policies on acceptable standard in reading and conceptual skills standardize tests among others.*

Educational reforms are not strange, as no educational system is perfect. All over the world, education continues to be subjected to questions like: what should be taught? Why? Where? How? By whom? To whom? Education is meant to serve the world. The world itself is not static. How can education be static if it is to remain relevant?

The decade 1990 to 2000 has been correctly referred to as the “Decade of world summit”, because the world witnessed a plethora (about 22) of international conferences mainly devoted to “Quality of Education” for human development. Among such conferences are “World Conference on Education for All” held in 1990 at Jomtien and another in Dakar, 2000. Several important messages came out of these conferences, among which are “an affirmation that education is a fundamental human right” and “an acknowledgement that Africa is at the bottom of the world’s educational league table, and the fact that this should justify urgent, concerted, innovative responses” (Obanya, 2002:3). It was also noted that “political will is the key to success in all educational endeavours” (Obanya, 2002:3).

Although it has been asserted on some occasions that education is an industry, and indeed a major one in the state, in thus writers view, the problem of this state’s

## Academic Excellence

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education system is so deep and fundamental that it will take a total and radical re-engineering of the system to cure it of its ailment. The problems did not start today. Since the introduction of western education into Nigeria, the education system has been facing myriads of problems but in the last three decades, they have become increasingly complex. In the hurry to develop, the various Governments have made sense of omissions and commissions which have continued to cripple the education system, and reforms have been patchy, inconsistent, mismanaged and therefore mostly ineffective. The system failed largely at the level of management. There is no gainsaying the fact that no educational system can rise above the quality of its management. The implementation of the National Policy on Education is a typical example: laudable programme but poorly executed.

The ultimate aim of educational management is to procure and marshal resources (Man, money, materials and time) to ensure the achievement of educational goals and objectives. All management functions such as planning, organizing, leading, supervising, controlling and motivating are directed toward achieving such objectives. The ultimate aim of education is to bring out the best in each individual for his benefit and that of the society. Education is an investment against poverty. Yet, Nigeria short changes education to their own peril. It is not just the Government that is under-investing in education; parents, teachers, head teachers, and pupils'/students are equally guilty in various ways. The resources such as energy, time, money and materials committed to education by these groups continue to dwindle. People describe education as a social service (Ollele, 1995) but it is much more than that.

Nwagwu (1976:12) succinctly described the importance of education to human development as follows:

*Today, education is universally accepted as a form of investment in human beings, which yields economic benefits or returns and contribute to nation's future wealth and development by increasing the productive capacity of citizens.*

However, this can only happen where there is good quality education. The present state of education in Nigeria and in Niger State in particular hardly merits that description. Public outcry and indignation about what their children learn in schools, the way they are being taught and their quality after graduation have been on the increase in recent times even from those who should carry out the reform. Education without quality is not education. It is a destroyer and a betrayer of trust. The problems facing education in Niger State today are numerous. This paper will highlight some of them and then show how Government, by making appropriate policies, can improve the quality of education in the state.

To carry out any educational reform, an accurate assessment of the present situation must be done. This paper will examine the present state, where we ought to be as far as the educational development is concerned and make appropriate recommendations.

### **‘Where We Are’**

Niger State created in 1976, can be regarded as a replica of Nigeria with several ethnic groups occupying both rural and urban settlements. Like Nigeria, it has the burden of educationally disadvantaged groups among which are some local government areas, girl-child and possibly boy-child groups too. There are over 100 public primary schools over 200 secondary schools, one polytechnic, one college of education, one college of Arabic and legal studies, one university to manage. Among her problems are:

**Poor Quality Education:-** One of the major problems facing the state today is poor quality education. The indicators are quite visible. Woeful performance in National Common Entrance Examination, Poor Performance especially in subjects like English and Mathematics. Many who passed could have been aided through examination malpractice in one form or the other. Cheating to pass is already assuming a dangerous dimension in the state as it is in the country. Many pupil students now migrate to rural schools for opportunity to cheat. Some principals, head teachers/headmasters and teachers, illegally assist pupils to cheat. Many primary school products cannot read or write correctly in English or local language. The primary level as a foundation is very weak and creates problems for the upper levels. Ineffective teaching is the major factor responsible for this and can also be traced to other factors. Quality in education is considered multidimensional, involving, the community, parents, teachers, students, school administrators, government, curriculum funds and infrastructure (Obanya, 2002). Each of these elements has in one way or another eroded the quality of education in the state.

**Planning:-** This involves the collection of data and systematic analysis for the purpose of appropriate decision making. Educational planning in Nigeria/state has not been helpful in promoting quality education. First, accurate data are hardly possible in Nigerian schools because of the politicization of figures of financial gains by Government continues to tie figures to budgetary allocation, there by no correct school enrolment data in the state/country. The National Policy on Education (2004) (NPE) is supposed to guide the operators of the system but it is short sighted. It talks about the philosophy and objectives of Nigerian education at various levels but fails to proffer strategies for the implementation by the classroom teachers and how the students/pupils would know when they have reached acceptable level of performance. Also the implementation of the NPE has been haphazard because of lack of strategies for implementing it. For instance, the intention of the 6-3-3-4 system is that pupils/students will start the primary school and complete after six years and branch after Junior Secondary to Secondary. But no sooner did the implementation begin than the state divert by closing some schools.

**Quality and Quantity of Teachers:-** The most serious factor eroding quality in the educational system are the quality and quantity of the teachers. The educational system suffers from both. This has been a perennial problem. Teachers are considered as the most important factor in students/pupils learning, a bridge between students and quality.

Their deficiencies either in knowledge, pedagogical skills or motivation spells doom for the system. There are “among the sore points of basic education in Nigeria” (Tahir, 2001). At the inception of UPE and UBE, the federal government has to resort to crash teacher training to make up for the huge shortfall in teachers for the take-off of both programmes. These groups of teachers have compounded the problem of quality in the system because the training is weak and no concrete program was put in place at school level to improve them. Some schools have no teachers at all in some subjects or just rely on one or two, especially in English, Mathematics and Sciences. Many schools make do with part-time teachers paid by Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). The trend has not changed till today.

**Parents:-** They occupy important position in the quality process. Many parents are shirking their responsibilities in this regard. They send children to school without text books and writing materials. Lack of textbooks has reached an epidemic level. Many parents do not pay school fees or levies regularly. Many do not bother to find out what their children do in school or how they behave until it is too late. This is why wastage is very high. Even though the state has declared free education textbooks are not readily available and there is over population of pupils in the classes especially at the primary school level.

**School Administration:-** Educational administration involves the operational aspect of education management, it concerns itself with the implementational policies and programmes formulated by management, through its day-to-day activities. It ensures the achievement of educational goals and objectives through “careful utilization of the available limited resources” (Peretomade, 1995, P.1) some of its activities span, planning, organizing, coordinating, staffing, budgeting, controlling, reporting, motivating, evaluating and supervising. Most administrators of these primary schools have to grapple with the problem of inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, poorly motivated teachers and pupils’ uncooperative parents and the likes. There is also the problem of politics in the appointment of school heads and deputies, problem of promotion of teachers which are all walking against quality education of primary schools in the state.

**Supervision and Inspection:-** Supervision is an age long device for improving teacher’s knowledge and skills. It focuses on the teaching/learning process for the purpose of achieving quality education. Whereas supervision tends to be selective or specific in approach to problem solving in schools. School inspection takes holistic view of the school’s evaluation and improvement. although there are many well experienced teachers who are on special grades and teaching in the classrooms, their wealth of experience is not being used to improve the performance of students or train the younger less experienced teacher. It is like these valuable teachers are wasting away. School inspection is also far from being regular and so, ineffective due mainly to poor funding, staffing and poor implementation of inspectors recommendations.

**Government:-** It will not be an exaggeration to say that in Niger State/Nigeria today, there are more people who are dissatisfied with the educational system than there are those who are satisfied with it. Government hardly hold itself accountable for pupils/students' failure but blame teachers, they neglect the variables that can improve teacher quality such as praises, recognition, rewards, honour promotion, and adequate supervision. However, research findings have shown that simply increasing "the number of teachers or their salaries will not automatically improve productivity unless there is appropriate supervision (Hanushek, 2001.) No amount of money can change a poorly-trained teacher's skills. Many Government policies even lower rather than enhance teacher's quality.

Government approach to problems has always been, "we will increase spending, build additional classrooms, employ more teachers, etc. what should be emphasized here is that while all these are important, no amount of teachers, or money, or classrooms injected to the system can dramatically turn around the poor quality of performances of teachers and pupils, unless radical policies are introduced into the system.

### **'Where We Ought to Be'**

Niger State must have a dream and work toward realizing it, that is, what it ultimately wants out of education. Education, must take the people out of poverty, produce job creators and not job seekers, have vision and mission to guide stakeholders in education.

Four important, issues influence education policy in USA (Reeves, 2001) and some developed countries which Nigerians/Nigerlites have closed their eyes to in the search for quality education. They are academic standard, standardized test, accountability and choices.

Academic standard refers to what pupils/students should be able to know and "provide explicit expectations for students at each level, along with an explicit description of the content knowledge and academic skills that are required" (Reeves, 2001). For example, every primary three pupils should be able to read fluently. He/she should be tested, failure of which he/she must be assisted to reach acceptable standard. Same should apply to writing, computation skills and other subjects.

Tests are not strange to pupils in Niger State, but of what purpose have they served. Effective use of tests can help to identify pupils/students who need to be assisted in their studies. "Tests are diagnostic instruments that give students timely and meaningful help and avoid more serious problems later in life" (Reeves, 2001). Tests experts can be used to prepare standardized tests for the primary schools.

Accountability is some how strange in Nigeria/Niger state. Students/pupils are usually the ones called to account by parents and teachers sometimes by flogging and

## *Academic Excellence*

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verbal abuse. Those who should also account are teachers, school heads, parents and government in various ways. For example, teachers can account by loosing some of their free time to providing remedial assistance to needy pupils. Parents should spare more time to come to school for information on their children and spend more money to buy addition books. Government should stop automatic promotion and be ready to spend more money on repeaters. If there is policy on academic standards and tests, wastage will be reduced.

**Choices:-** Parents and pupils have very little choice. The public deserves to know effective schools and ineffective schools to increase their choices and to ginger non-performing schools. One way of making this possible is by publishing school results. Rewards should be used to encourage innovative and reforming schools and sanctions (e.g change of headmaster/head teacher) for those who fail to respond positively to reforms.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the problems facing education (primary) in Niger state. It re-emphasized the importance of education for national development. It was noted, that most of the problems of education in the state bother on deficiencies in management policies, especially the failure of government to provide necessary policies as guidelines to regulate teacher's and pupils/students' behaviour. However, no amount of money or teachers injected into the system can improve quality in the school unless government introduces new approaches to solving educational problems.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are being made for government to consider for a radical re-engineering of educational management in the state.

- Government should adopt a systematic approach to educational management through strategic planning. An initial four-to-five-year plan is a good starting point.
- Education policy on academic standard in all subjects particularly reading writing and conceptual skills is desirable.
- There should be policy are use of standardized tests in all subjects from primary to secondary.
- Automatic promotion in schools should be discouraged.
- Inspectorate division should be strengthened with well trained staff, re-focused and better funded to avoid corruption and ensure effectiveness.

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