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# RE-ENGINEERING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined the failure of the primary education system to lay a solid foundation for a great and dynamic economy in Nigeria. The failure resulted from underfunding, declining teacher quality, deficient structure, curriculum, organization and administration. Using the concept of re-engineering, which involved taking drastic measures to ensure a turn-around, not only to eliminate identified problems but actually ensure that there should be desirable educational outcomes. The re-engineering involved initiating measures to ensure that all government officials' children attend public schools. This will ensure the globalization of schools. Secondly, instead of primary education, it should now be National Basic Education and it should be 14 years of compulsory and continuous schooling. There should be a National Basic Education Board to certificate not only the products from the National Basic Education system but to also certificate those interested in teaching so that it was from this pool that teachers would be recruited. Faculties of Education of universities should be involved in the organization and administration of National Basic Education for at least 28 years.*

Nations that are known to be developed are so due to the contributions which have been made and are still being made by men and women, who in-turn, have been developed by their systems of education. Amongst such developed nations are the United States of America (USA), Britain, Germany and France just to mention a few. The realization of the immense and positive impact of quality education has made these countries to emphasize basic education for all school-age children. Basic education in these countries range from 12-14 years of compulsory schooling and it usually encompasses elementary through secondary education. Basic education is therefore regarded as the foundation or cornerstone for sustainable life-long learning as well as

the least education an individual could have and would be enough for him to live effectively and functionally in the society in which he lives.

It is the wish of Nigeria to be a developed nation too, hence emphasis is sometimes placed on the development of education. Hence goal 3(d) of the philosophy of education in Nigeria stipulates that through education, Nigeria should have “a great and dynamic economy (NPE, 2004). In achieving this, emphasis would be placed on giving a sound primary education because as stated in Section 4 no 7, “the rest of the education system is built upon it” and that “it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system”. Sadly, all sectors of the Nigerian economy are faced with crises and failure. This in essence translates to the fact that, primary education has failed to perform its role of acting as a strong cornerstone. Since this is so, there is need then to re-engineer primary education so that it can actually perform the function(s) expected of it. However, before re-engineering can take place the first step is to identify deficiencies in the system of education. Hence this paper discusses the need for re-engineering in our primary education system. The paper also discusses the concept of re-engineering and re-engineering primary education for productivity and self-reliance in Nigeria.

### **The Need for Re-Engineering Primary Education in Nigeria**

As noted by Okeke (1995), “...there is a general outcry that standards are falling.” This was re-echoed by Udebhulu and Okinowo (2008) when they opined that “...stakeholders over the years have decried the fallen standard of education in the country.” With such observations, there is something definitely wrong with the system of education in Nigeria particularly at the foundation level – primary education. Underlying the deficiencies of primary education in Nigeria are underfunding, declining teacher quality, faulty structure, duration and curriculum, out-dated examination practices and examination-led school system as well as absence of a strong philosophical and social cultural foundation.

### **Under-funding and Its Results**

The greatest problem facing primary education is under-funding. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended that if developing countries of which Nigeria is one are to ensure minimum qualitative education for their citizens, then 26 percent of their national budgets should be allocated to the educational sector. Funding education in Nigeria involves the three tiers of government. Unfortunately, none of these levels of government has been able to use this recommended percentage as a guide. Federal government’s allocation to education oscillates between 7-13 percent. In all the states, apart from Kano and Yobe, it is between 5-9 percent of the total annual budgetary allocation (Chuta, 2000, Abamba, 2008, Okoza, 2011). In fact, allocating the funds to the three levels of education takes the form of an inverted triangle – primary education receives the least (Hamza 2000). This has been so for as long as primary education has been in Nigeria. The outcome of this long period of under-funding of primary education is pupils’ unfriendly school environment characterized by old and dilapidating

structures as well as absence of learning materials. The truth of the matter at present is that many of the public primary schools are not better than sheds for pigs and goats. Incidentally, there are more pupils in these public schools than those in the private-owned ones (this is not to say that all private-owned primary schools are better equipped). Due to the unattractive school environment, many children are not motivated to learn (Ojogbane, 2011) resulting in a high drop-out rate. Even those that manage to complete their primary education are academically weak with many of them extremely poor at reading, writing, calculating and manipulative skills (UNESCO, 2001, Adeoye, 2008). In essence, when pupils learn in a squalid environment, there will be high drop-out rate and even those that graduate will not possess any skill with which to be self-employed.

### **Declining Teacher Quality in the Primary School System and Its Results**

As a result of so many negative factors which have interacted to and cause monumented decay in education, there is also the problem of low quality teachers in the system. As reported by Akaeze (2011), employment into the teaching profession particularly at the elementary level is now by 'sale and political connection', particularly, since the present democratic dispensation began in 1999. The former method of screening so as to determine competence before being engaged has been abandoned. This has led to the school system having incompetent hands. Teacher quality throughout the country is unequal also. Many of the teachers in the elementary school system are yet to attain the minimum NCE qualification which is recommended in the National Policy on Education (Konyeme, 2011). As noted by Sensuwa and Sensuwa (2011), 23 percent of the teachers across the country are not even having the TC II certificate. Since the teaching profession is the most impoverished of all sectors of the labour force in Nigeria it has also become a dumping ground for academic dregs. This is particularly true for the teachers produced for this level of education. It is only in the teaching profession that one finds Distance Learning (DL) centres. Getting admitted into a College of Education is as easy as being admitted into elementary school especially as many of these institutions are more interested in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to augument the low funding from government. Again since the pupil cannot be above his teacher, the graduates reflect the poor quality of their teachers.

### **Deficient Structure and Curriculum and Its Results**

As noted by Okeke (1985), formerly, pupils start elementary education at either the age of seven or eight and spent about eight to nine years for elementary education. If with that number of years, primary school graduates could not engage in productive ventures, one wonders how they can function in a global economy with only six years of substandard elementary education.

The structure is particularly not suitable for the Nigerian society because of the bi-lingual and multi-lingual nature of the society. Even though the English Language is the official language, it is the second language of most of the pupils in the primary

school system. As such they face the problem of understanding ideas and concepts in many of the subjects being taught. This has resulted in what is referred to as “Cumulative Deficit Syndrome” (Bakare, 1979).

In the face of these problems, no primary school graduate in Nigeria can be self-employed neither are they employable. However, Nigeria wishes to have a great and dynamic economy. The only way to realize this is to re-engineer the elementary school system in the country. It is pertinent at this point to examine the concept of re-engineering.

### **The Concept of Re-engineering**

Re-engineering as a concept was used by Chikofsky and Cross in relation to software in 1990. According to them, it is “the examination and alteration of a system to reconstitute it in a new form” (Wikipedia, accessed 2012). According to the same source, it implies “changes of various types and depth to a system, from a slight renovation to a total overhaul”.

If this concept is to be used in the education sector, it means drastically altering the education system because it has failed to meet the objectives for which it was originally intended. In other words, it has become a dysfunctional education. In this case, the country’s primary education level has failed woefully to meet the objectives for which it was designed for. This includes failure to lay a good foundation for other levels of learning and institutions as well as producing far below standard primary school graduates for the next level of education, as well as not equipping them with skills needed to live a functional life in a rapidly changing and growing society.

Therefore, if the primary education level is to eliminate these complete failures as well as equip the graduates to live economically productive lives, it is the suggestion of this paper, that, the elementary school system should be reengineered in the identified dysfunctional aspects, namely, (1)Funding (2)Structure, Duration and Curriculum (3) Teacher Quality and (4)Organization and Management. Although, the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report (2011), noted that barriers to education in Nigeria are especially difficult to overcome”, It is the hope of this write-up, that if the identified faulty areas are re-engineered as suggested below, primary education will play a very positive role in the economic, political and social development of Nigeria as a nation.

To re-engineer implies that engineering had already occurred but as a result of the undesirable outcomes of that engineering, there is need to alter what has been initially engineered so that there will be positive outcome.

### **Global Antecedents of Re-engineering in Education**

Many countries all over the world have re-engineered their systems of education so as to eliminate the identified failures in the system as well as redirect or reposition their systems so as to achieve the desired goals. Britain’s (from which

Nigeria's system sprang) and Ghana's (Nigeria's West African neighbor) re-engineering will be examined.

Between 1979 and 1997, Britain allowed the Neoliberal / New Right Policies to influence and redirect her system of education. The main highlight of the educational policies according to Haralambos & Holborn (2008) was:

1. Education should promote economic growth by improving the skills of the workforce.
2. There should be competition in the education market
3. Parents to have choice between schools, and;
4. Parents should have a means of assessing the quality of school.

So as to realize these, there was the Education Reform Act of 1988 which gave birth to (i) Grant maintained schools (ii) City Technology Colleges, open enrolment, formula funding, a national curriculum as well as national testing and assessment under the auspices of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which was set up in 1993.

In Ghana, due to the weaknesses identified in the three-year senior secondary system, the government extended the duration to four years in 2007. Thus, there were no graduates from the secondary school system in 2010 (Abamba, 2011).

In addition, certain policies were put in place to remove obstacles that may hinder ALL from benefiting from the education provided by the state as well as ensuring that EVERYONE has the capability to contribute towards the rapid economic growth of the society; some of these are (i) the establishment of 110 science Resources Centres across the country the introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) education and provision of telephone services so that schools can have access to the internet (Abamba, 2011).

### **Re-engineering Primary Education - (Providing Learning Stimulating Environment)**

The only way this can be done is through increased funding but with the type of government in Nigeria, this will not be easy. However, this can be done through legislation. The legislation should be that all government officials as well as all public officers should enroll their children in public elementary schools. Again, this will not be easy to come about but then it takes one or two persons to bring about changes. For example, in America, the various legislations at ensuring that all children with disabilities had equal educational opportunities as their counterparts without disabilities, started with the formation of family associations that advocated for the rights of children with disabilities in the 1950s and 1960s. These associations initiated several court cases. The outcome of these cases was in favor of providing education for children with disabilities (Wikipedia, accessed 2012). Many of us may not have children in the public school system, but the many academic associations can initiate court cases that may lead to such legislations that will help improve the school system. If this is done, primary schools will be properly funded so as to provide qualitative education for all children of school- age in Nigeria. With this, dropout rate will be reduced because of the academic stimulating school environment.

### **Re-engineering the Educational Structure**

Primary education should be referred to as National Basic Education and should have a duration of continuous learning of 14 years. It should be compulsory for all children of school-age. This will be broken down into four levels of

1. National Basic Education – Headstart Level:- this should be a two-year introduction into school education for children of 4-6 years.
2. National Basic Education Level 1:- children should transit from Headstart to level 1. Level 1 should be a 4 year programme and should be known as “Junior National Basic”. The curriculum should emphasize proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, arithmetic, physical training, aesthetic education, introductory science and social living.
3. National Basic Education Level II:- This should be known as “Middle National Basic”. It should be a four- year programme. All Middle Basic Schools should have ICT centres. In addition to the subjects in the Junior Basic level, vocational subjects, which reflect the labour and production needs of the immediate environment, should be introduced. At this stage, pupils should be encouraged to discover their potentials and acquire skills in at least one vocational subject.
4. The fourth and final level should be known as “Senior National Basic” and should also be for duration of four years. It should be comprehensive in nature and students are to specialize during this period. As part of their training, by the 10<sup>th</sup> year or the second year of Senior National Basic, at least two weeks in each term students should be assigned to relevant organizations so as to acquire practical and work experience. This should also continue during the 11<sup>th</sup> year and their work experience which will be graded by the firm in conjunction with the school, should form 50 percent of the certificate exam which will be done in the 14<sup>th</sup> year. The 14<sup>th</sup> year should be intensive academic work based on Senior Basic subjects. This level should end with an external examination which should be conducted by an external body specifically charged with the conduct of examinations and awarding of certificates. For this purpose, it is recommended that there should be a National Basic Education Examination Board. The certificate qualifies the graduates more for self-employment and employment into the labour force. Those who wish to continue their education could do so in any of the different kinds of tertiary institutions.

### **Re-engineering the Teaching Force**

So as to solve the problem of the many incompetent teachers in the school system, the National Basic Examination Board should be charged with the final certification of teachers. All graduates from the Colleges of Education and Universities and those who wish to teach in the National Basic Education System must be test and certificated by the National Basic Examination Board. It is from this pool that teachers must be recruited from.

### **Re-engineering the Organization and Administration of National Basic Education**

So as to ensure the National Basic Education that will meet the objective of ensuring that the graduates have skills that will make them employable or be self-employed, then the administration as it presently exists, should be kept aside. So as to take off the implementation as suggested in this paper, faculties of education first and second generation or older federal and state universities should be charged with the organization and administration of the national basic education. This is suggested, because as at now, the only system that is still relatively free from intellectual and administrative ineptitude as well as selfless commitment towards national growth is a university system. It is on record that when the Decree no 41 of 1989 that gave birth to the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) was made so as to ensure its effective implementation, the University of Jos, University of Maiduguri and Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto were involved. Following this step, the faculties of education should be involved in the planning and implementation of this new education as suggested in this paper. They should be fully involved in producing the first batch of graduates (i.e. for 14 years) while gradually work with and train workers for the National Basic Education Commission and the National Basic Examination Board for the next 14 years. Therefore, they are to act in advisory capacity. This step will ensure that only capable and committed individuals will be in this level of education.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the failure of the elementary school system in failing to lay a solid foundation for the other levels of education as well failure to produce graduates with employable skills that will ensure Nigeria's dynamic economic growth. It is the hope of this paper, that the re-engineering of the primary school system so that it becomes National Basic Education (NBE) of 14 years of continuous learning, the system will be able to produce graduates for the employment and self productivity. This will fulfill the sayings of Omatseye (2008:209-210), when he reiterated;

*The building of a great and dynamic economy is possible only when people have a sense of pride in their work, such would necessarily increase productivity. The educational process can certainly contribute to a virile economy when in addition to knowledge, skills and civility, people develop a healthy attitude to work. To the extent that an educational policy enables the nation to produce people who can be self-employed, productive and generate jobs within the economy, it can be said that such a policy has been successful. When the number of such people grows in the society, it will depend less on imported products and thus bring about self-reliant*

It is the hope of this paper that the re-engineering of primary education as suggested will bring about such realization.

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