

MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Primary Education is a fundamental level of education that needs to be funded, controlled and managed. Adequate provision of education to the citizens contributes greatly to the socio-economic development of the country. Therefore, good administration of primary level of education is required to foster national growth and development. This paper examined the management of primary education in Nigeria from the colonial administration to date. It is therefore observed that the management of this level of education has passed through different stages and different authorities exercised its control from time to time. It is being faced with many problems ranging from acute shortage of classroom space or overcrowded classrooms, shortage of teachers and equipment to under-funding.

Primary education is the major concern of all nations, since it is the foundation of the entire superstructure of education and is directly related to success of democracy. Its utilization has been taken as an international challenge; a national commitment and an important concern of states over the last fifty years. Primary education is the base for the development of human resource. During the period of primary education, the child is at least made competent to be able to exchange his ideas, understanding things and put in his ideas and feelings for the comprehension of others (Pathania and Pathania, 2006). The theory that education makes people more productive in the labour market and more able citizen of the society is now well established (Hanushek, 1986).

Primary education is the first level of education and it is a foundation upon which other levels of education are built. However, there is no doubt that primary

school system is facing serious problems. These problems culminate in acute shortage of infrastructures, late/non payment of teacher's salary and security problem. Some primary schools do not have enough classrooms and furniture to the extent that classes are held under shades of trees, some pupils carry-home their benches and desks and bring them to school every morning due to lack of security. The instructional materials needed to aid teaching and learning activities are not available. Teachers also are no longer committed to their jobs because they are not well paid. It is obvious that unless these teachers are provided with the drive that would energize them with the tools needed, their best cannot be tapped and the accomplishment of educational goals would be difficult.

The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria, the transfer of primary education from residual to the concurrent legislative list, the re-establishment of the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and State Primary Education Board (SPEB) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) are the moves of the Federal Government of Nigeria in accepting views and the commitment to provide educational opportunities at this level of education. It is stated in the Nigerian constitution under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, Nigeria constitution 1989 section 19 on further elaboration of educational objectives thus:

Government shall direct the policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate opportunities at all levels.

Government shall promote science and technology.

Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide free, compulsory and universal primary education.

Government shall promote the learning of indigenous languages.

It further expatiates of these objectives that:

There will be equal opportunities in primary schools.

There will be adequate education opportunities in primary schools; and others as stated in the constitution.

Some of these usually reflect in the planning and administration of primary education in Nigeria.

Fafunwa (1974) stated that the aims of primary education in all the states of the federation were to help the child to:

- (a) Master the three Rs – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, this is to develop permanent literacy.
- (b) Develop sound standards of individual conduct and behaviour.
- (c) Acquire some skills and appreciate the value of manual work.

So, the objectives of the primary education in Nigeria can be summed up as a broad based education with emphasis on the effective communication skills (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1986). That will enable pupils to contribute effectively to the social and economic development of the nation. This objective is purposely to produce a literate and numerate population and to lay the foundation for further education. For further education to attain these objectives, it has to be adequately managed. So far the effectiveness of higher education rests on solid foundation which is the product of primary education system; there should not be instability in the control and management of primary education.

Historical Background of Management of Primary Education in Nigeria

The management of primary education in Nigeria passed through different stages and different authorities exercised its control from time to time. Abinitio, the church missionaries who introduced western or formal education to Nigeria in 1882 handled the management of primary education system. After many criticisms from different quarters about the crude and lack of proper coordination of the system by these missionaries, the British government intervened through establishment of various education ordinances and codes. It is worth noting that the colonial government in Lagos made intermittent attempts to assist some of the missions in the management of schools between 1870 and 1876 while a bill was passed as an ordinance for the promotion and assistance of education and it covered the West African territories of Lagos, Gambia, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.

In 1887, there was the enactment of the first purely Nigerian education ordinance as a result of the separation of Lagos from Gold Coast in which it became the colony and protectorate of Lagos. However, the British government had no clearly defined policy on education for its African colonies during this time till 1925. It was the Phelps-stroke's report that forced the British colonial government to demonstrate its interest in African education. So, the principles in which the educational systems of the colonized countries should be based is the 1925 memorandum on education. As from 1946, Nigerians were deeply involved in the administration of their educational system as a result of Arthur Richard's constitution, which created Regional Governments - Northern, Western and Eastern regions. During this period, the colonial overlords were still supervising Nigeria's educational affair and partly funding it. The missionaries and voluntary urgencies were also in control of staff recruitment, supervision of staff, and the funding of their own schools only with grant-in-aid as subvention from the government.

Some years prior to Nigerian's independent, primary education started developing at different rates in different parts of Nigeria. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced in January 1955 by the then Western Region

followed by Eastern Region in 1956 and later by the Federal Government in September 1976.

This programme indicated government dynamic policy to favour the education of the masses on the basis that every Nigeria child has an inalienable right to a minimum of six years of education if he is to function effectively as a citizen of Nigerian that is free and democratic, just and egalitarian, united and self-reliant, with full opportunities (Fafunwa, 1974). After Nigeria has gotten independence in 1960, there was increased clamour for government take-over of schools from the missionaries and voluntary agencies, to be able to revert the old system and to tailor it to meet the needs of the new nation. Adesina (1977) reported that it was contended that absolute take-over of schools would improve their curriculum, teacher quality and centralized provision of instructional resources, minimize inequalities and provide a dynamic centre of leadership for education innovation. So, there was government take over of schools in 1970.

This trend of government take-over of primary and secondary schools was stated by the then East Central States in 1971 and by the end of that decade most states of the federation, especially the southern states had followed suit. The government was able to expand its activities in education sector during 1970s due to increased revenue from oil. With this, the government felt capable of embarking on the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976. This scheme radically expanded public involvement in education financing and administration. With the inception of the second republic in 1979, the Federal government withdrew its subsidy for primary education and transferred the responsibility to local governments. This effectively marked the end of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in most states of the Federation. During this period, most states quickly introduced fees and levies at all levels of education.

Again, in 1986, the Federal Government abolished tuition fees in primary schools nationwide. As a result of this, it started making direct grants to local government for primary education. In 1988, the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) was established with Decree 31 of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988 to manage the affair of primary education. It was later scrapped by the Federal Government under the provision of Decree 2 and 3 of 1991, which vested the full responsibility of the administration of primary education in the hand of local government. With the Decree No. 96 of 25th August 1993, the National Primary Education Commission was re-established with State Primary Education Board (SPEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and they were once again in charge of Primary Education in Nigeria. The State Primary Education Board was charged with the administration of Primary education at the state level, while the

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local government was responsible for the day-day administration of primary education at the local government level. The National Primary Education Commission (NPCC) was the overseer to the State Primary Education Board of all the states of the Federation and it was supervised by the Federal Government.

This was the condition of primary education administration till the democratic government came into power in 1999. In replacement of the National Primary Education Commission is the currently introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE), on 30 September 1999 in Sokoto. It is free and compulsorily accommodating children from primary school through junior secondary school. Various responsibilities are assigned to all levels of government (Federal, State and Local), which is not much different from what was in existence before now.

Universal Basic Education and Past Educational Policies

Before the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) by the Obasanjo's led government, several educational policies geared towards providing accessible and affordable education for all citizens of Nigeria of education age existed.

The origin of Nigerian's educational policies dates back to the 1955 comprehensive education laws of the western Nigeria, 1957 Universal Primary Education, (UPE) of the Eastern region and the 1976 UPE programme then, the baby programmed in 1999 which is being nurtured to maturity.

Each of the policy existed and was established by different government administration and was criticized when a new government rides into power as Utibe (2001) asserted. The UPE of 1956 was faulted in scope, planning, financing and a general lack of accurate data of children that would be affected by the scheme as absence of accurate census data in the country at that time prompted the failure. The UPE was primary designed to reduce the educational imbalance between the North and South backed by the oil boom. The government embarked on the full responsibility of training teachers for the scheme.

The incessant political changes in the past constituted the problems of ineffective implementation of the policy statement of Education For All (EFA). In decades past, military intervention occasioned by changes in government has always led to changes in educational policies most especially at the primary school level. Each government regime nationalized the policy on education on its own accord.

Utibe (2001), asserted that, the UPE programme in the then two regions of the country was improperly planned and hurriedly executed. Taiwo Commission of 1960 charged to investigate the crisis rocking the UPE scheme reported amongst other

things ‘a fall in standard’. The Dike Commission recommended its Abolition and subsequent modification.

The general outcry in the falling standard of basic education and a sharp depreciation in the morals of primary school children brought about the introduction of the UBE. The UBE challenged with the problems facing basic education in Nigeria before its introduction include: dearth of facilities, inadequate supervision, shortage of personnel, lack of funds, high prices of textbooks, incoherent implementation of the curriculum, drop out rates and so on (Denga 2000).

Education for All (EFA) and its Goals

Education for all (EFA) is a global concern which holds that education is a basic human rights. Its history could be said to date back to 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The issue of education as a basic human right which must be pursued vigorously re-echoed in a world conference in 1968 titled “The World Crisis in Education”. The conference defined basic education and recommended the promotion as the minimum for all citizens of the world. However, this was not of serious concern until March 1990, when a significant landmark in the struggle for basic education the world over culminated in the famous Jomtien world conference on Education for All (EFA) to be achieved by year 2000. At the April 2000 EFA forum in Dakar, the EFA target year was moved from 2000 to 2015, with the goals listed as follows:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015, all children particularly girl children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities’ house access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programme.
- Achieving a 50% improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education.
- Eliminating gender disparity in primary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015 and \with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy and essential life skills.

Critique of Primary School System in Nigeria

It is obvious that the Nigeria Government has good intention to fulfill primary education purpose, as the National Policy on Education stated in its objectives. But it has failed to achieve the intended objectives. As good as primary education is in providing the basic skills needed to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy as well as to gain admission into secondary schools, Nigerian primary schools are not fulfilling the central purpose of primary education. Before Nigeria's attainment of independence, primary schools were effectively managed by the missionaries and voluntary agencies with grant-in-aid from the colonial government. However, the management of primary education system by the Nigerians has experienced problems.

The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) nationwide in 1976 experienced problems of under-estimation of about 30 percent of the turn-up number of the children enrolment, acute shortage of classroom spaces or over-crowded classrooms, shortage of teachers and equipment. This inability of the government to effectively run primary schools has brought the emergence of many private primary schools presently experienced in Nigeria and the agitation for the return of schools to the missionaries and other voluntary agencies. Also, parents are with the opinion that the teachers in public primary schools are no longer committed in discharging their duties due to one reason or the other so, a large number of parents prefer private primary schools for their children and wards. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practice. It is estimated that about 70% of the primary schools are located in the rural areas. These schools are subsidized through additional funds contributed by communities to their local schools through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and community based organizations. The infrastructure and facilities remain inadequate for coping with a system that is growing at a rapid rate. The school environment is therefore generally not conducive to teaching and learning due to the physical conditions of most schools and lack of teaching and learning resources.

The National Policy on Education prescribes that the teacher-pupil ratio should be 1:40. The classroom are overcrowded and in some instances schools have operated with teacher-pupil ratio of 1:86 due to shortages of classroom space, classes are offered in the open air and are subjected to all problems associated with outdoor teaching such as weather fluctuations leading to class cancellations and lack of quality instruction. Significant changes and improvement have taken place since the reinstatement of the NPE in 1993. Teachers salaries have been paid out on time and their over-all conditions of service have been somewhat improved. These changes have raised the morale of teachers from its very low point. These improvements in the stability of teacher assignments have to some extent, contributed to improved enrollment figures and better retention rates of pupils. Another notable change has

been the effort to update the curriculum even though the teaching and learning materials were inadequate to support it.

Changes in management structures within the education system have helped to halt the negative trends relating to timely payment of teachers' salaries, provision of basic equipment, maintenance of school buildings and the supply of instructional materials. This has led to some restoration of public confidence in the public school system and to associated gains in school enrolment. However, much remains to be done in this area. The quality of education offered is affected by poor attendance resulting in low retention rates. The physical features are in poor condition and the teachers are not adequately prepared for their roles. The morale amongst teachers is low due to the basic conditions of service such as the work environment and irregular salaries.

Teacher qualifications also impact directly on quality. The grade II qualification is gradually being phased out as a minimum requirement for teaching. The number of teachers with NCE has increased and the country seems to be moving towards achieving a goal of having the NCE as a minimum qualification for teaching in the primary schools. There are few ongoing staff development programmes that seem to be effective. The inspectorate system has not included staff development as part of its activities. The teacher education programmes at pre-service level have been criticized for being too theoretical and for their lack of a sound practical base needed for good classroom practice.

Teachers are generally dissatisfied with their basic conditions of employment and working conditions. This has resulted in low morale and low esteem of the profession. The situation has improved slightly following the transfer of the management of primary schools to the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and the State Primary Education Board (SUPEB), now state Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). It is worth noting that there has been an improvement in the supply of qualified teachers to the primary schools.

The re-lunch of Universal Basic Education in 1999 is aimed at providing free universal basic education for all, to enable all citizens to acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative, manipulative and life skills. The intention is to provide nine years of compulsory education that would span primary and secondary levels. Access to basic education as a national priority includes literacy and adult education, science and vocational training. To implement the scheme, government established two committees-the coordinating committee and the technical committee. The plans include public information and community mobilization, provision of resources and the setting up of mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the programmes.

Another major role player is the National Primary Education Commission. The commission has been unable to meet the demands of implementing Universal Basic Education Scheme. Two major programmes have been identified and prioritized for implementation by the commissions special projects unit. The first is a short-term project-the “Catchment Area Based planning Management and Monitoring of Primary Schools Projects”. The objective is to build capacity and empower people at the community level to initiate projects that would contribute to the improvement of the quality of primary education and to ensure access of all school age children to the schools. The second project-“Development of skills Acquisition centres in the primary school”, is a long time project. The primary objective is to encourage the acquisition of craft production skills and a culture of entrepreneurship amongst the primary school children, in a schooling environment that is now interesting and functional. It is hoped that acquisition of such skill would address other social issues such as street begging, child street hawking, child prostitution, early marriage, child labour and child abuse. But these projects were not realized due to inadequate allocation to education.

In fact, a detailed survey commissioned by the Federal Government of Nigeria in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO in 1997 also confirmed that the quality of education offered at the primary school level was low (Falayajo, 1997). Three competencies were measured, namely literacy, numeracy and life skills. The level of numeracy competence was found to be generally low and performance in literacy was the worst amongst the three competences measured. The pupils performed better in life skills learnt through the curriculum as well as those that were acquired outside the school environment.

Conclusion

The management of primary education in Nigeria has been assigned to various tiers of governments and commissions. Infact, it has gone through different experimentations. It is very important for the Nigerian Government to find a permanent solution to the problem of instability in the control and management of primary school. Government intervention is needed to rescue public primary schools, which is the hope of the poor in giving education to their children, and saving them from total collapse. More so, the Federal Government should establish a minimum standard requirement for both the public and private primary school.

Recommendations

To enhance the management Primary Education in Nigeria, it is recommended that:

- Provision of adequate equipment to the school system.
- Building of more classrooms to accommodate the number of pupils enrolment.
- Training and retraining of teachers to improve on the quality of teaching.
- Improving the working conditions of teachers.
- The Federal Government should establish a minimum standard requirement for both the public and private primary schools.
- There should be a strong committee on the part of the Government to ensure that programme is implemented in line with plans.

Equally to successfully implement the Universal Basic Education Scheme, there is the need to develop sound implementation plans. This would have to be preceded by a survey of the existing resources and capacity of the national and local plan and monitor progress made in order to detect problem areas and address them at an early stage. Strategic planning and implementation are necessary for the success of the nine year programme and for capacity building in the system as well as for its implementation. Failures in the past cannot be blamed entirely on low levels of funding but also on lack of capacity for planning and implementation at both national and local levels National structures such as planning Division of the Federal Ministry of Education would need to be strengthened to ensure that there is a capacity in those structures to monitor the implementation plan as well as to provide assistance to the local structures.

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