

# RESTORING QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH ADEQUATE FUNDING

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## **Abstract**

Primary education and indeed other levels of the education system in Nigeria have continued to suffer the negative impact of our dwindling economy which reared its ugly head in the early eighties. The quality of our primary education crumbled and collapsed due to inadequate funding. The rot permeated the various facets of the education sector especially at the primary education level giving rise to common derogatory phrasal expressions such as<sup>1</sup> "Tailing standard in education", decay and decline in education', collapse of education<sup>1</sup>, disrepair in education brain drain etc. This paper reveals the various areas (hat are bruised and calls for substantial contribution from the government the private sector and the voluntary agencies and non-government organizations towards adequate funding of education if quality is to be restored to that level of education. Restoring quality to primary education would restore confidence in our entire education system the paper enthused,

## **Introduction**

As an opening statement in the national Policy on Education (NPE), the federal Government of Nigeria (2004: 4), reminds all stakeholders in education that education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development." The federal government pointed out that education has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies communities and individuals as well as government intervention.

These participatory interventions have not been adequate to effectively sustain this vital sector of the national economy, primary education being the worst hit. The increase in primary school enrolment consequent on the Universal primary education (UPE) of 1976 and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has greatly impacted on our education system, especially in terms of funding to cope with the varied demands of education. More teachers would be needed to cope with the high-enrolment. More infrastructural facilities would be required. Instructional materials and equipment would be sourced. Administration, supervision, inspection and monitoring would be revisited. All these and more need to be adequately funded if the country expects to reap the much desired dividends from education.

Inadequate funding has caused immeasurable havoc in our education system giving rise to common phrasal expressions: falling standard in education," "decay and decline in education, "collapse of education, disrepair in education', "brain drain", etc. as the standard of education in Nigeria declines, a shadow is cast on the future progress and development of the country Taiwo (1980:131), observed that Education is an instrument for creating an education and forward-looking democratic society and for providing the trained manpower needed to implement the development plans of the nation,

The National Policy on education (2004:7), noted that education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society. Primary education is the foundation of any education system. For Nigeria to guarantee future progress and development of the country, primary education must be rescued from total decay and further decline. Mato (2002:12), concored that the state of (primary) education in the country today is pathetic and portend great dangers for the immediate and distant future. Primary education in Nigeria needs an overhaul if we desire to restore quality, if we need to move forward, if Nigeria is to join the human race,

## **Definition of Primary Education**

Primary education is one of the tripods of Nigeria education system, the others, are the secondary and the tertiary levels of the three, the primary level is the most critical being the base of the whole system and the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The National Policy on

education (2004:14) describes primary education as "'the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus" stipulating 6 years to be the duration.

### **Coals of Primary Education**

The Federal Government of Nigeria in the NPE (2004:14), identified seven goals which form the basis of the six year primary education in all the states of the federation, The goals as identified are lo:

- a) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively;
- b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- d) Mould the character and develop sound and morals in the child;
- e) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;
- g) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

In pursuance of the identified goals, primary education shall be tuition free, universal and compulsory. These are lofty propositions that would be cost-intensive in terms of infrastructure, instructional equipment/materials, teaching staff in quality and quantity, sustained payment of salaries and allowances, provision of educational services, sustained routine supervision/inspection etc. the main focus of this discussion would be on public schools or government schools established and managed by the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria. Reference would however be made to schools established and managed by voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals and all other such schools that meet the minimum standards laid down by the federal government.

### **Area of Concern in Primary Education in Nigeria**

If we intend and desire to restore quality in our primary education, adequate attention needs to be focused on infrastructure, teachers recruitment and retention provision of instructional material, sustained payment of salaries and allowances, provision of educational services, routine supervision and inspection of schools etc.

### **Infrastructure**

Our primary schools are in very bad shape. The condition of building in primary schools especially those in the rural areas, epitomize the state of rot. The facilities are decayed and deplorable and in most cases, hazardous and injurious to both the children and the teachers. The mud buildings of many years are still in use with the walls cracked and collapsing, the roofs yawning for repairs. Adcycmo (1972:14), advocated that classrooms should be protected from rain, they should be clean and free from the germs for the sake of the child because without the child, nobody will use the school buildings." Under proper organization and management, (he school should be well built to accommodate the pupils and to make things convenient for them because children like to learn under attractive building. Learning is most effective under a conducive environment.

### **Equipment**

Our primary schools need equipments like benches, desks, chairs, blackboards, books, pictures and apparatus of different kinds for illustration so that the child may understand and remember what is taught. In terms of equipment, the condition in most primary schools in Nigeria today is a far cry from the standard. The prevailing scenario is totally unacceptable, in most schools, furniture are never provided. Children more often than not, sit on bare floors to receive lessons. When they are lucky, mats are provided. Sometimes in remote villages, children are made to provide chalk, the most rudimentary school material.

The National policy on education (2004:15), recommended the provision of the following educational services: school library, basic health scheme, counseling, educational resource center, and specialist teachers of particular subject. As of today, the listed educational services can be found in a few private and elite primary schools in the urban centers.

### **Teachers Recruitment and Retention**

The NPE (2004:39), recommends that "minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria certificate in education (NCE)", and that "for effective teaching and learning the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:35 (NPE, 2004:16). Today, many N.CE teachers are holding sway in primary schools in line with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education, but still, there are yawning vacancies here and there especially in the branded educationally disadvantaged states. Some of the NCE teachers teaching in our primary schools are not even qualified in the real sense of it since they have not fully satisfied all the requirements for certification. In most primary schools, especially those domiciled in the

rural areas, teachers with lower qualifications are still numerous. With adequate funding, university graduates can be recruited to teach in primary schools in the remotest of villages.

Primary school teachers need to be recruited massively in terms of quality and in quantity to cater for the increased primary school enrolment consequent on the Universal primary Education (UPE) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes.

Large class size in primary schools is never good-for effective teaching and learning. Deliberate efforts should be geared towards closing the gap to meet the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35 as recommended by the NPE (2004:16). That way, quality which has been eroded may be restored in the long run. Most importantly, uncertificated teachers at whatever level need to be expunged from the system. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria should make hay while the sun shines. Quality teachers need to be motivated and retained by enhancing their working conditions; prompt payment of salaries and allowances, loans of various kinds, medical care etc. when quality teachers are adequately motivate, they can impart the right knowledge to the children because no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004:39). To ensure that quality teachers are available for recruitment in the desired number, teacher education should be given an impetus to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers especially for the primary education level. However, such teachers must be given professional respect recognition and adequate remuneration.

### **Routine Supervision /Inspection**

Since the government take over of schools in the early 70s, routine supervision/inspection in primary schools is no longer taken seriously. When such routine exercise takes place, it is often designed to haunt and victimize political opponents. Well intentioned school supervision and inspection will restore commitment in the teacher and quality in their teaching. School supervision guarantees regular tidiness of school premises. Fabunmi (1999), advocated that.

Children should be comfortable at their work and above all, there must exist in a class good ventilation. The clean and tidy school, the neat and tidy compound decorated with flowers, with roads and walks properly made will have far-reaching and good influence on the pupils.

Supervision and inspection ensure standards in all spheres of primary education. The neglect of school supervision and inspection have contributed to the sorry and sordid state of primary education in Nigeria. The sordid stated does not augur well for quality which more often than not is compromised.

### **Impact of Under-Funding of Education**

Enough damage has been done already on our education system. Greater damage can still be prevented especially through an improved an adequate funding of the sector. Everyone knows that despite the large number of primary schools in the country, education, especially at that level is not in a pretty shape. Decline is the right word. Agbese (1994:13), captured the frightening scenario, thus:

The cold, numbing but hardly shocking fact is that education in our country has crumbed. Even in this age of informed innocence, it is not possible to pretend that all is well with our education any more..... The rot in our education has gone too far. We fail to arrest it at the peril of the future of our country. Nigeria cannot afford to regress into the age of darkness in the age of enlightenment.

The continued decline in primary education must he arrested. Thai can host be done through an improved funding. Funding is the central and crucial issue and perhaps, the fulcrum sustaining all aspects of education. Funds are needed for infrastructural development and maintenance, provision of materials and equipment, recruitment of quality staff in the desired quantity, staff development, routine supervision and inspection etc. for Nigeria (o join the human race, the budgetary allocation to education must be reviewed upwards to meet the United Nations, Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the Gross national product (GNP). The inability of the government to adequately fund the education sector has always resulted in an uneasy calm in schools, often from the teacher, other workers and even the pupils, and their parents. The obvious result of these strike actions has been destruction of in fractural facilities disappearance of the most rudimentary of instructional materials and equipment, a lowering and degradation of standards and the quality of the knowledge and leaning imparted. Onyekpe (1996), fingered poor funding as the root cause, stating that "of course these arc the results of under funding, which is the direct result of wrong and irrational ordering of priority.

## Conclusion

Education is an expensive social service and requires all hands on deck to adequately finance the sector. Odozi (1996), affirmed that, government alone could not continue to fund education given the present realities of the economy. The government at all levels, the private sector and (he voluntary agencies must work in concert to restore quality in our education especially at the primary school level. Relevant sectoral bodies such as the Kducation Tax Fund (ETF), the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the National Science and Technology Fund (NSTF) have been established by the government to respond to the funding needs of education. Wealthy individuals and notable philanthropists and various mission and governmental organizations should step up their contributions to ease (he burden of financing education. When education is adequately funded, all the areas of concern would be addressed and then, quality would be restored at (he primary education level which is acknowledged to be the foundation of the education system in Nigeria, Akinkugbe (1994:357), encapsulated it all thus, if one were to proffer a panacea for the present state of malaise and disrepair in all aspects of our educational enterprise in Nigeria today, adequate funding would be unquestionably central to all our consideration.

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