

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

Muhammad Saminu Muhammad Awwal

Abstract

When discussing the topic-Education and Manpower Development, there is no how one will not consider the place of primary education in this development. Although, primary education may be taken to be the lower cadre of manpower development, it is highly relevant in this development. Like English Language, the mastery of spoken English begins from the knowledge of the alphabets ABCD to Z. Similarly, the attainment of the highest cadre in manpower development begins from primary education. Although, primary education may be looked down upon as being irrelevant or elementary, it is the foundation laying stage of any manpower development. In this wise, since, primary education is the foundation laying stage of manpower development, it is the major determinant of manpower development. Indeed it is very important to manpower development. The paper discussed the nature, goals and measures taken by the government to promote manpower development through primary education. These include: making primary education compulsory, the inclusion of Mathematics, Science, Agriculture/Home Economics, Religious Knowledge, Physical and Health Education and Citizenship Education etc, in the curriculum of primary education, the provision of school library, basic health scheme and education resource centres in primary schools.

Introduction

Manpower development in any nation is a function of the educational system. This is more so with skilled manpower. Manpower development is necessary for the production of the labour force or good workers of a nation. This labour force or the good workers are the nation builders.

Since manpower development is determined by education, primary education also has a major role to play in the development. Be it primary or elementary in nature it should not be seen or conceived to be in a relegatory position for manpower development.

Its place or degree of importance should be judged from the role it plays in the manpower development of any society. It is the foundation stage or the beginning of manpower development. As the foundation, it must be strong and firm. Like the construction of any building or sky scraper, the foundation of the building is the major determinant of the strength and worth of the building.

So is the nature of primary education. Since, it is the foundation stage of the educational system especially in Nigeria; it is the major determinant of not only the educational system but also of manpower development.

The National Policy on education (1998) has this to say on the above "the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system rests in primary education."

The study is presented as follows; the nature of primary education, the goals, some of the measures taken by the federal government to achieve the goals, manpower development, conclusion and recommendation.

The Nature of Primary Education

It should be clearly stated that the focus of this paper is the Nigerian society. The whole nature of primary education can be found in the National Policy on Education (1998) which describes primary education as:

The education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years.

The above view so far has given the true picture of what primary education is. In as much as it cannot be taken to be the totality of the educational system and hence the totality of the manpower position, it can be categorically stated that it is playing a major role and holds a very important or key position in linking education and manpower development. Being the base of oilier stages clearly shows dial, it is a major force in labour development and nation building.

In the 1960s and early 1970s in Nigeria, primary school leaving certificate holders used to be employed in (he low level manpower category as clerks, teachers and even as cotton tenders in textile industries. The wages and salaries they earned during those periods, although meager in nature, but surprisingly, is enough to meet the basic daily needs of (he workers. The general economic nature of. (he country at these periods was liberal enough for the workers lo enjoy their earnings. Hence, many Nigerian children then even prefer to slop their formal education at the primary school level and begin to earn a living. The primary school leaving certificate was then regarded as necessary for the low level manpower category. The situation has however drastically changed now. It is no longer so.

We now need to further our education to the secondary and tertiary levels in order to be at the middle and higher manpower levels to earn better salaries so as to improve our standard of living. The position of primary education in the manpower development

process is still not contestable. It still serves as the firm base for any level of manpower growth; and development.

Further, Adaviruko (2003) refers to Emeruwa, (1988) who also comments on the relevance of primary education by observing that:

The importance of primary education to Nigeria lies in the fact that there is absolute need for all Nigerian children to have a sound education. The author therefore tasks teachers to educate the Nigerian children adequately for adulthood and especially for the challenges of the country's urge for technology.

In view of its vital position in the general economic and social systems therefore, the Federal Government attaches great importance to its sustenance and development. In this regard, the Federal Government made categorical statement on its goals.

The goals as contained in the National Policy on Education (1998:10), are:

- (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.
- (d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- (e) Adaptation to changes in the environment.
- (f) Development of manipulative skills in the child.
- (g) Provide the child with basic tools for further education advancement.

It can be seen from the goals above that, they all have direct relevance to manpower development. This is especially so with the goals a, b, d, f, and g. These goals form clear foundations or bases for not only manpower development but educational progress.

The steps taken by the government in order to make the goals a reality are extensive. However, some of the measures include the following:

- (a) Primary education shall be tuition free, universal and compulsory.
- (b) The curriculum for primary education shall include language like language of the environment, English and French. Others are Mathematics, Science, Physical and Health Education, Religious Knowledge, Agriculture/Home Economics, Social Studies and Citizenship Education, Cultural and Creative Arts.
- (c) The following educational services shall be provided; school library, basic health scheme, counseling and educational resource centre.
- (d) Teaching shall be by practical, explanatory and experimental methods.

Under our present social and educational dispensation, the primary school certificate may not necessarily be reliable to earn (the child a good employment (if at all he/she obtains one) or make him/her a good worker for nation building. It however orients the child towards future prospects in manpower development and providing him/her with better condition of life if the education is pursued to higher heights.

In this respect, Adaralegbe (1972:214) observes:

Primary education should not be consciously geared towards a specific occupational goal. The end of the primary school course at eleven or twelve years of age is hardly the right age to take on a life occupation, labour codes notwithstanding. Nevertheless, primary education must have sufficiently oriented the child to make decisions (with some guidance) about future occupational vocational professional interests.

Manpower Development

Manpower necessarily refers to the able or good workers of a society or nation who consciously through hard work contribute to national development. These workers are the nation builders. Hornby's *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (1995) (special price edition), gives the meaning of manpower as "the number of people working or available for work".

There are three categories of manpower. We have low level manpower, intermediate level manpower and high level manpower. Manpower development refers to different levels of skilled manpower or (trained manpower). We have technical manpower, scientific manpower, managerial manpower and personnel manpower. Although, this is not a rigid classification.

It is the different levels of manpower development or skilled manpower that catapult a nation to both agricultural and industrial development. They constitute the labour class and through peace, stability, discipline, innovation, good organization and hard work move the nation to high productivity. They demonstrate the dignity of labour in nation building and according to Ukeje (1966) "skilled manpower is necessary in order to increase the productivity of labour".

Manpower development is only possible through the educational system. The schools inculcate the spirit of skilled labour and productivity into the child, and the genesis of meaningful formal education for manpower development is the primary school system. Hence, the primary education system is the root of any manpower development.

Conclusion

Either an individual or a society cannot grow and develop without one form of education or the other. The same thing applies to manpower. Its development is based on education,

Our concern here however is formal education. The growth and development of manpower is within the realm of education, and (the genesis of any meaningful form of formal education with relevance to manpower is primary education.

Hence, (there is no way manpower development can be detached or separated from primary education. They are two inseparable things. The root of manpower development in Nigeria is primary education. Since this is the case, primary education is a major determinant in manpower development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

It is pertinent at this stage to give the following recommendations.

1. Moral education should be vigorously pursued in primary schools, since primary education is the foundation of manpower development.
2. The Federal Government should take the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme very serious so as to see that every Nigerian child attains compulsory education for manpower needs of the nation.
3. The Federal government should provide primary education with well qualified and disciplined teachers.

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