

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The quantity and quality of the pace of development of every nation rest squarely on its educational system. Education is a tool for perfecting and effecting sustainable national development. Primary education in Nigeria is the base on which all future education of the child rests upon. This paper takes a look at the relevant issues in primary education in Nigeria which include: poor performance of pupils, old and dilapidated building, elementary technology, female dominated teachers, indiscipline and poor remuneration. It also reviews some critical problems of primary education like, funding, congested classroom, morale and motivation, pre-service, in-service/on the job training, seminars, and educational services. As a way forward, adequate funding, implementation of Teachers Salary Scale (TSS), exposure of primary school teachers to regular training and seminars, and the provision for educational services in all the primary schools in the federation are recommended.

Introduction

Primary education globally is ascribed as the prime or foundation of other levels of education; hence, it serves as the springboard on which subsequent education of every Nigerian child takes off. A sound primary education is a necessity and a pre-requisite not only for sound secondary, tertiary, and continuing education but for equipping the learners with appropriate and relevant skills and values for them to contribute their quota to national development. Primary education is the gateway to whatever individuals can achieve through education (Maduewesi, 2005).

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. In this respect, primary education can be likened to the foundation of a building and thus, it forms the solid base on which all future educational endeavour are hinged.

Primary education is the take off point in a formal school system where future leaders and technocrats like: bankers, teachers, managers, scientists, engineers, sailors, medical doctors, lawyers, military personnel, clergymen, etc. are trained. Because of the crucial nature of primary education to the Nigerian child, government at all levels and other stakeholders in education have been holding series of seminars, workshops, talk shops, symposia, for a, etc. in order to ensure that the earmarked goals of primary education as documented in the National Policy on Education are achieved.

The following are the goals of primary education in Nigeria as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004):

- (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 contribute to the life of the society;
- (d) moulding the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- (e) develop in the child 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) provides the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trade and crafts of the locality;

As laudable as the goals of primary education in Nigeria are, many of these goals have remained unachieved due to some issues and problems besetting the system.

The trust of this paper is to discuss the relevant. Issues and explore the nature of the problems militating against the actualization of the goals of primary education in Nigeria. Arising from these

discussions, the way forward will be recommended, so **that** primary education can play its prime role for effecting national growth and **development**.

Some Relevant Issues

(i) Issue of Poor Performance of Pupils

It is widely held view that the standard of our education has fallen. Jegede (2005) held similar view when he opined that in recent times, poor performance in schoolwork has always been attributed to poor foundation at the primary school level. Inadequate planning and ineffective instruction usually lead to poor academic performance of pupils. He attributed the predicament of irregular payment of teachers' salaries to have caused the teachers to reduce their level of dedication. This is the utmost reasons why many primary school teachers and head teachers prefer sending their children and wards to private schools.

(ii) Issue of Dilapidated Building

Most primary school buildings in the country are very old, dilapidated, unattractive and out of shape. They are thus not conducive for effective teaching-learning. The media is replete with cases of collapsed buildings or buildings blown off by wind and this has claimed lives of very many pupils and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. This can be attributed to the usage of dilapidated building for teaching-learning process and lack of maintenance culture (Chukwuma, 2005)

The government and other stakeholders need to act fast in the massive construction and renovation exercise aimed at making the school buildings conducive for effective teaching and learning.

(iii) Issue of Elementary Technology

The Nigerian primary school education is laden with good purpose and intention of implementing and inculcating mass literacy. However, the events of this century in technology have shown that these objectives have fallen short of introducing any form of technology to the pupils of primary schools in the country (Adekola, 2005). Technology is the pivot, hub or springboard for meaningful national development in the entire globe. The primary school level is a good point to kick start the inculcation of technical ideas in pupils and this will culminate in the acquisition of practical skills in technology. As it is now, Nigerian pupils will only have a feel of formal technology education after a successful completion of primary education and thus are deprived of simple elementary skill, abilities, competences and industrial arts that can equip them effectively to live successful lives in the future and to contribute their quota to national development. Not only this, it is reasoned that pupils are also far away from appreciating the importance of technology and thus become ignorant and unstimulated about what is being daily consumed by them (Adekola, 2000),

(iv) Issue of Female Dominated Teachers

Another relevant issue in primary schools in Nigeria is that it is characterised by female dominated teachers. Chukwuma, (2005), posited that "Most primary schools in Nigeria, particularly those located in the urban areas, are being dominated by women. The dominance by female teachers in primary school is one major reason why indiscipline among pupils is till very rife, because male teachers seen to be more effective in instilling discipline. Also many duties in primary schools are better handled by male teachers such as sporting activities; organising school garden, punctuality, local craft, etc. Moreover, female teachers go for maternity leave and thus the pupils may be denied of regular teaching and learning. For fairness and effectiveness, the ratio of female teachers to male teachers should be made equal.

(v) Issue of Indiscipline in Primary Schools

Indiscipline is another issue in the nation's primary school system. Adiotomre (2003), described indiscipline as an act that does not conform with the societal values and norms. Indiscipline involves abandoning of self restraint in pursuit of self interest and it is normally perpetuated by both the pupils and the teachers. In primary schools, pupils are involved in destruction of school properties, stealing, bullying, hooliganism, loitering, disobedience to school rules and regulations, lateness to classes, absenteeism, etc. While on the part of the teachers, indiscipline takes the form of

lateness or absence from school, selling snacks in the classroom or trading within and outside the school premises, breaking melon instead of teaching, gossiping with colleagues, entertaining visitors in the class, sexual harassment of female pupils by male teachers, etc. the implication of these is gross ineffectiveness in teaching and learning. .

(vi) **Issue of Remuneration**

In the past, primary school teachers were accorded respect and recognition in the society. They are seen as role models and the best persons that get good wives and good places of residence are the primary school teachers, moreover, the posting of a new teacher to a community is usually greeted with warm reception. The teaching profession in Nigeria of nowadays, with particular reference to the primary school teachers has been one of frustration; stress and conflict dating even as far back as the early part of the 19th century (Kayode, 1987). The poor remuneration of primary school teachers by the government has contributed immensely to near zero productivity; hence the mess in the primary school system. Primary school teachers console themselves by enduring the service instead of enjoying the service (Chukwuma, 2005). Primary school teachers most times are paid in areas in many states of the federation, leave, transport grants are rarely paid, they are not promoted as at when due and they are also not paid monetization benefits in many states. Abdulahi (1992), posited that "poorly motivated teachers in primary schools are most likely to turn out weak products for secondary schools and consequently half baked doctors, engineers, teachers, etc. at the end". Their condition should be improved through better remuneration so that primary school teachers can work hard and face the challenges of globalization. It must be said that the conditions of teachers generally need to be improved of course they are at the bottom. Before, teachers used to be the number one, most educated in the society, highly respected after the Obi, Bale, Elders however today, things have changed adversely. Teachers are at the lowest cadre in society (Fafunwa, 2007).

The aforementioned issues are by no means exhaustive but they reflect why the goals of primary education in Nigeria have remained unachieved even to the detriment of sustainable growth and national development. They account, in part for the problems we now discuss below.

Critical Problems

(i) **The Problem of Funding**

We must admit that funding of primary education in Nigeria is a problem. This view agrees with that of Okoh and Uko-Aviomoh (2005) who posited that "Funding Primary Education in Nigeria has been a headache for the Federal Government". It is however appalling that special effort is hardly made to recognise this truth. Many primary schools in the country today are in a very sorry state due to poor funding. They lack instructional materials to assist the teachers in their lessons, the working environment is also not conducive for effective teaching-learning, and in most schools, the pupils sit on the bare floor to learn.

(ii) **Problem of Congested Classrooms**

Another problem confronting primary education in Nigeria is congested or over-crowded classrooms especially those located in the urban areas of the country. The pupils sit in close proximity while the teacher shouts at the top of his/her voice in order to disseminate information, skills, values, etc. to the pupils. Most times, the teacher-pupil ratio is about 1:1.00. This prevailing condition is an outright negation of UNESCO and the NPE (2004), which prescribed one teacher to twenty-five pupils (1:25) and one teacher to thirty-five pupils (1:35) respectively.

(iii) **Problem of Morale and Motivation**

The morale of the primary school teacher has been drastically reduced to the lowest ebb because of poor motivation by his/her employer. This is in line with the view of Afe (2002), who opined that teachers in Nigeria are found to be poorly paid and inadequately motivated. These are translated to teachers' absenteeism, frustration, decline in professional standard, lukewarm classroom practises, militancy and early departure from the profession.

(iv) **Lack of Pre-Service, In-service on the Job, Training/Refresher Courses**

Primary education teachers nationwide are not exposed to pre-service, in-service on the job (training and refresher courses), conferences, seminars, workshops and conferences are sure avenues that accelerate the professional growth and development of teachers while on the job. Primary school teachers therefore, need to be up to date with the latest technological information and methods of teaching through in-service training and refresher courses (Okoli, et al. 2005).

(v) **Lack of Educational Services**

The National Policy on Education (2004) specified that for the goals of primary education to be achieved, the following educational services shall be provided:

- (i) school library
- (ii) basic health scheme
- (iii) counselling
- (iv) educational resource centre
- (v) specialist teachers of particular subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Language Arts (in relation to English, French, Sign language, Music, Fine-Art and Home-Economics).

A careful investigation will reveal that the foretasted educational services are mere paper work; none of the services is in existence. This goes to show that children in primary schools might not benefit from these services that ought to help them develop (Oniyama and Asamiago 2005).

The Way (forward)

Since the problems of primary education in Nigeria are these of poor funding, congested classrooms, problem of morale and motivation, lack of pre-service training on the job training and seminars, and lack of educational services in primary schools, the way forward must be to address the following problems.

(i) **The Problem of Funding**

Primary education in Nigeria is highly under-funded. The schools are beset with dearth of facilities. Money is required for the procurement of instructional materials, training and retraining of teachers and for recurrent expenditure (Okoh, 2000).

(ii) **Problem of Congested Classrooms**

The classrooms in most of the primary schools in the country are inadequate due to increase in pupils enrolment. More classrooms should be built and more competent or trained teachers should be employed to meet the prescribed ratio of 1 :25 by UNESCO and 1:35 by NPB (2004).

(iii) **Problem of Morale and Motivation**

The primary school teachers' morale need to be boosted for maximum productivity and job satisfaction. They should enjoy their rewards while on earth and not inside the grave. Therefore, to sustain the teachers' morale and consequently guarantee their job satisfaction, it is recommended that a separate Teacher Salary Scale (TSS) be put in place, as a teacher's salary is a crucial factor in the process of attracting and maintaining good and virile teaching work force (Afc, 2002).

(iv) **Lack of Pre-service, on the Job Training and Seminars**

Primary school teachers in the country are not growing professionally because they lack pre-service on the job/training and seminars. Primary school teachers need to up-date their knowledge regularly in order for them to remain pupils ever knowledgeable and relevant in the profession through training, workshops and seminars. It is against this background that Okoh. et ;d (2005), suggested that primary school teachers must be constantly subjected to in-service training and refresher courses by the Federal and State Governments in order to up-date their knowledge and method of teaching.

(v) **Lack of Educational Services**

The dearth of educational services in primary schools in Nigeria is posing a serious constraint to the attainment of laudable goals. Moreover, the survival of the UBC depends greatly on the

availability or state of the art educational services. The federal government therefore should effect her policy statement as it affects the provision of educational services as enshrined in the NPE (2004).

Conclusion

The primary education in Nigeria is the 'key' to unlock all the subsequent education of the child, The goals centred generally on the betterment of the child; therefore it is a right for all children. However, some of the goals of primary education appear to be a ruse, the reason is. that many of the goals have not been achieved, majority as a result of poor funding by the three tiers of government, NGOs, PTAs, multinational companies, philanthropic organisations, concerned private individuals etc. Therefore funding of primary education should be improved so that the system could be brought to its expected standard in terms of curriculum and methodology (Okoh, et al. 2005).

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