

PRIMARY EDUCATION AS INSTRUMENT FOR ACHIEVING THE SEVEN (7) POINT AGENDA IN NIGERIA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Education is the instrument needed for social, economic, political and religious advancement. This paper examines primary education as instrument for achieving the seven (7) – point Agenda in Nigeria for national development. The goals of primary education as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) as well as the curricula were discussed. Educational services and people involved in implementing the curricula geared toward national development were highlighted. Problems of primary education were identified to include inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of teaching aids and instructional methods. Recommendations were made on how primary education can be used to achieve the seven-point Agenda and conclusions were drawn.

Introduction

Obviously, the birth of any administration is usually associated with policy trust and programmes with which the direction of the administration's activities are directed. The present administration led by Alhaji Umuaru Musa Yar'Adua was inaugurated on 29th May, 2007 had seven (7) – point Agenda namely: power and energy, Food security, Wealth Creation, Transportation, Land reforms; Security and Education.

These are laudable national development policies capable of placing Nigeria among committee of developed Nations if well implemented. The primary education which is the basis for higher education is very vital to the implementation of the seven (7) – point Agenda because it prepares the learners for higher training in areas of agriculture, engineering, employment etc.

The seven point agenda are for the moment the most socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria that if proper attention and resources are channeled toward solving the problems, national development becomes eminent. The world at large has recognized education as the only means to development. According to Omolewa (2001:1)

Education is a great importance to every nation. It therefore, attracts consideration attention. At the family, community, state and federal government levels, education is discussed planned and processed. It is believed that education makes both the person and the nation; it also influences values and attitudes. The professions are similarly built through the training and preparing people for different careers in life.

This implies that all sectors of the economy such as electricity, agriculture, health, transportation, communication, housing, defence, employment, education etc. can be developed through education. Also every education that makes both the person, the nation starts at the primary level. If the child's attitude and value systems are positively influenced at the early stage of learning (primary), it will go a long way in making him/her cultivate the right attitudinal frame work of nation building.

Olubadewo (2006) believed that “the faith of the people of developing countries including Nigeria, in education is as strong as their faith in their religion”. This is obvious as seen in towns and villages where parents/guardians train their young ones especially at the primary level which form the bedrock upon which other level rest. This believe has assumed a new dimension in the sense that education is seen as the cure for all societal ailments; hunger starvation, inflation, uncertainty, oppression, high levies/taxes, victimization, corruption, robbery, murder, fear, arson, suffering,

educational depression, tribalism, retrenchment and unemployment. These ills are rampaging enemies to national development (Ewemie; 2000).

There has been a firm belief that without education, development cannot occur. The seven (7) point Agenda in Nigeria aimed at national development can be achieved with the primary education if given the right attention.

This paper therefore examines the role of primary education as instrument for achieving the seven (7) – point Agenda in Nigeria for national development, the goals of primary education as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) as well as the curriculum. Education services and people involved in implementing primary education were also discussed. The problem of primary education and possible solutions were looked into. Recommendations and conclusions were drawn.

Concept of National Development

National development and growth are words that differ in meaning and scope. Akingbade (1992) emphasized national growth as implying wealth creation and is measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), whereas national development is growth rate i.e Gross Domestic Product per capita and its utilization to solve human and other economic infrastructural problems. In the same vein, Folayan (1997) sees national growth as capital accumulation, whereas national development encompasses growth, structural and institutional changes and the essential elements that make for better quality of life such as improved education, health, nutrition and better environment”. Development is also seen as social engineering propelling the participants to seek avenues of reaching higher levels of development.

National Development could be seen as “a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structure, attitude and institution as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty (Folayan, 1997). This implies that national development involves positive changes in terms of materials, organizational and human resources aimed at promoting growth and advancement in all sectors of the economy for better improved living.

The Role of Primary Education as Instrument for Achieving the Seven(7)- Point Agenda in Nigeria for National Development

FRN (2004:14) defines Primary Education as “the education given in institution for children aged 6 – 11 plus”

Primary Education as the bedrocks of child’s education need to be properly managed to ensure effective instruction and solid educational foundation. Effective instruction requires that the teacher possesses some basic qualities like adequate knowledge of subject matter and competence in lesson preparation, presentation and evaluation. National development is a phenomenon which every sector (family, institutions, government) should try to imbibe at the early stage of learning i.e primary level if Nigeria is not to be left behind by other nations at a time when life and living have become very competitive. There is no doubt that some policies have been put in place such as the seven (7) – point Agenda for national development but this can only be achieved if our primary education is given appropriate attention.

The level of educational provisions in a situation of underdevelopment has been the challenges of any developing nation including Nigeria. This is because even with the subscription to the relevant United Nations instruments with regard to education, many developing countries still pay lip service to education especially at the primary level. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it (primary education), the primary level play a vital role to the success or failure of implementing the seven (7) point agenda in Nigeria for national development.

Primary Education As Instrument For Achieving The Seven (7) Point Agenda In Nigeria For National Development

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) enumerated the goals of primary education. They are to:

- (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 attitude and morals in the child;
- (e) develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- (f) giving 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.

If the above goals are purposefully pursued all things being equal, achieving the seven (7) point agenda in Nigeria for national development becomes eminent.

Curriculum of Primary Education

Curriculum consists of the subjects that are including in a course study or taught in a school.

According to FRN (2004:15), the curriculum for primary education shall include:

- (i) Languages
 - (a) Language of the environment
 - (b) English
 - (c) French
 - (d) Arabic
- ii. Mathematics
- iii. Sciences
- iv. Physical and Health Education
- v. Religious Knowledge
- vi. Agriculture/Home Economics
- vii. Social Studies and Citizenship Education
- viii. Cultural and Creative Arts (Drawing, Handicraft, Music and Cultural Activities)
- ix. Computer Education

The curricula for primary education are simple and well stated. However, the problem lies with its implementation. For instance citizenship and computer education are not taught in most primary schools in Nigeria. These subjects are capable of promoting positive attitude among the pupils and technological advancement which will in turn promote national development. Citizenship education can help mould the character of the child, develop sound attitudes and good morals. It can also help the child participate and contribute meaningfully to the life of the society. Computer education on its part enables the child development manipulative skills. All these put in place at the primary education level will go a long way in achieving the seven (7) – point agenda in Nigeria.

Educational Services at the Primary Level

According to FRN (2004:15), the following educational services shall be provided.

- (i) School library;
- (ii) basic health scheme;
- (iii) counseling;
- (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 and Nigerian Languages), Librarian, Music, Fine Art and Home Economics.

It also stated that teaching at the primary level of education shall be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods. The question is how many of the above stated educational services are provided as stated? Most primary schools in Nigeria lack school library, basic health scheme,

counseling units, educational resource centre and specialist teachers. Where they are provided, they are handled by non-professionals. Some that are available are in dysfunctional state.

People Involved in Implementation Primary Education Curriculum

To achieve the goals of primary education in-line with the seven point agenda in Nigeria aimed at national development, many people are involved. As observed by Mkpa (1991), “the task of curriculum implementation involves the efforts of all concerned: the government teachers, school administrators and others to translate into reality the prescriptions of the curriculum document”. Supporting Mkpa, Ivowi (2004) opined that, “in implementing a curriculum one deals with many people of diverse experiences and backgrounds e.g. students, teachers, school inspectors, school administrators, community leaders, examining bodies, publishers and so on”. Ivowi was of the view that curriculum implementation cut across all stakeholders in the system and as such, it should be treated with all sincerity of purpose. Onyeachu (2007) described the personnel involved in curriculum implementation as partners working towards the same goal. If the seven-point agenda in Nigeria for national development is to be attained, the personnel involved in the management and administration of primary education should be alive to their responsibilities. Government and other stakeholders should stop paying lip services to education especially at the primary level.

Problems of Primary Education in Nigeria

Despite the subscription to the relevant United Nations instruments with regard to education, many developing countries continue to pay lip service to the concept of the centrality of academic pursuits to national development (Jiboku, 2001). The academic pursuits of any nation directed towards national development starts with primary education.

The problems of primary education vis-à-vis achieving the seven point agenda for national development in Nigeria include:

- 1. Poor Attitude to Work:-** Some teachers are lazy, hence they find extensive planning for instruction and teaching materials too cumbersome to cope with. Such teachers would always prefer teaching without sufficient teaching aids forgetting that teaching at the primary level should be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods.
- 2. Lack of Specialization:** According to the economists, division of labour encourages specialization which in turn brings about efficiency. In the primary school, the teachers are generalists rather than specialists. A teacher is made to teach over one different subjects in the primary school. This system does not encourage efficiency and effectiveness.
- 3. Inadequate Teachers:** There is the problem of inadequate number of teachers in primary schools. Government do not employ adequate number of teachers.
- 4. Over Stretching of Teachers:** The present practice whereby a teacher manages a class that is over-populated and he/she is expected to prepare for and teach about eight lessons a day does not allow for effectiveness. This militates against achieving the seven-point agenda in Nigeria for national development.
- 5. Lack of Supervision:** It has been observed that student-teachers on teaching practice always prepare for their lessons due to their awareness that supervisors would come at any time. In our primary schools, there is no regular supervision of schools to determine the extent to which teachers and other stakeholders are implementing the curriculum. This makes them to relax in most cases thereby hindering the attainment.
- 6. Inadequate Instructional Materials:** Teacher’s non-use of varied instructional materials, methods and strategies for teaching primary school pupils is another problem militating against primary education in Nigeria on one hand and also against achieving the policies.

Primary Education As Instrument For Achieving The Seven (7) Point Agenda In Nigeria For National Development

7. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** The lack of adequate infrastructural facilities such as electricity, health care delivery, communication network, roads, etc hinders the success of primary education in Nigeria. This in turn hinders achieving national development.

8. **Inadequate Finance:** This is a potential factor militating against primary education in Nigeria which invariably is affecting the achievement. Some teachers are active, dedicated, resourceful and innovative, but their efforts are often truncated by lack of funds. Lessons are supposed to be complemented by instructional materials, exploratory visits (excursions) and practical. These are often not available in our primary schools due to lack of funds.

Possible Solutions/Recommendations

Sequel to the prime position of primary education as instrument for achieving the seven-point agenda in Nigeria for national development, the following remedies/recommendations should be adopted.

Improved Conditions of Services: Teachers should not be denied promotions, salaries and allowance as at when due. Their lots should be improved to motivate them.

Adequate Training: Efforts should be intensified by those in-charge of training of primary school teachers to emphasize the need for specialization.

Employment of More Qualified Personnel: Government should endeavour to employ more qualified teachers and other personnel to man the system.

Regular Supervision: Supervisors of primary education should always visit primary schools regularly and carry out proper supervision. They should not be seen as threat to the teachers rather they should complement the efforts of the teachers and other stakeholders.

Provisions of Instructional Materials: Adequate instructional materials should be provided for schools and regular maintenance carried out. Obsolete ones should be replaced.

Provision of Fund: Primary education should be properly funded. Accountability and prudence should be the watch-ward of all concerned about primary education in Nigeria. Moreso, government should stop using education (free education) as vote catching technique and be realistic in pursuing primary education goals.

All stake holders in primary education should be alive to their responsibilities in order to lay solid foundation for the pupils and prepare them for further studies. This will go a long way in achieving the seven-point agenda in Nigeria for national development.

Personnel involved in primary education should be well motivated to contribute their quota. There should be prompt release of budgetary allocation to primary education and spending properly supervised.

Conclusion

Considering the relevance of primary education in pursuance of the seven-point agenda in Nigeria for national development, all machineries towards attaining the goals of primary education should be put in place. Government should stop paying lip service to education.

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