

# RE-ENGINEERING PRIMARY EDUCATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF LITERATURE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

This paper takes a look at primary education in Nigeria and calls for the re-engineering of its curriculum. The primary level of education is where the foundation is laid and therefore holds the key to the success of the whole educational programme. The paper advocates for the overhauling of the primary school curriculum to accommodate the acquisition of literary skills through effective teaching of literature at the formative stage of the children's development, which will in turn guarantee employment and self productivity among the children in later life.

Gainful employment for Nigeria's teeming population particularly among the youth is becoming so elusive considering the number of unemployed youth roaming the streets in search of employment.

The bulk of the unemployed youth are mainly graduates and school certificate holders. This development clearly shows that the kind of education received by our teeming youth population is inadequate particularly in preparing them for employment and self productivity in later life.

In order to address the problem of unemployment in Nigeria, there is the need to re-engineer the educational sector to ensure that it provides adequate and relevant knowledge and skills needed by our youth for employment and productivity in later life.

Therefore, in reengineering the educational sector, the primary level of education should be given priority because of its position as the foundation of the whole system. Consequently, if the foundation is solid, the a reliable and dependable structure is guaranteed.

This paper will therefore focus on the need to reengineer primary education in our quest for an effective educational sector that will guarantee employment and self productivity.

## **The Primary School Curriculum**

The word "Curriculum" is derived from a Latin word "currere" which means "to run" and gradually it comes to mean the "course of study". But for most lay persons, curriculum today is equated with course guides, syllabi or textbooks that establish the course (Ben Yunusa, 2000). Similarly Saylor, J. G. Alexander, W. M. & Lewis, A. J. (1981) sees curriculum as one of the educational fields that takes as problematic, what should be planned, taught and learned in schools. Furthermore, it is a central and centralizing study organized around the choice facing the practitioner. Curriculum is considered to include both what is to be taught and by what means it is to be taught.

Furthermore, the objectives of a curriculum are derived from the needs and values of individuals and the society at large.

In Nigeria, the curriculum of educational instructions is often tailored towards achieving the national education goals which are derived from the country's philosophy of education. According to the National Policy on Education (2004, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition) the national educational goals are:-

- (a) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- (b) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
- (c) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
- (d) The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

In line with the above objectives, primary education aims at:-

- ❖ Inculcating permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- ❖ Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- ❖ Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in an contribution to the life of the society.
- ❖ Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- ❖ Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- ❖ Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- ❖ Provide the child with basic tool for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Looking at the above goals of primary education in Nigeria, one will no doubt agree that they were tailored towards making a child employable and self productive and in pursuance of this the National Policy on Education (2004) recommends that the curriculum for primary education shall include:

- (I) Languages
  - a. Language of the environment
  - b. English
  - c. French
  - d. Arabic
- (II) Mathematics
- (III) Science
- (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

Looking at the subjects in the primary school curriculum, one will now ask if they are adequate in meeting the challenges of employment and self productivity and whether these subjects are efficiently taught in the primary schools to ensure that the products are employable. It is in this respect that the need for effective teaching of literature becomes handy.

### **Literature in the Primary School Curriculum**

Literature according to Hudson (2011) is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language. Such expression is fashioned into the various forms of literary art. Furthermore McGregor (1971) sees literature as language used skillfully about subjects which are important to human beings. From the above definitions we can infer that literature concerns human activities/experiences through the instrumentality of language.

Literature has a lot of cognitive and effective training for the learner. Learning of literature is also primarily and experience and this should be the focus for the teacher and the learner in the study of literature.

Equipped with the experience the learner should then be able to describe, explain or account for the experience. (Azikwe, 1998).

Further, Widdowson (1975) stated that:

*The essential discipline of an English school is the literary-critical; it is a true discipline, ... and it is irreplaceable. It trains, in a way no other discipline can; intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence-intelligence that integrates as well as analyzes and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy.*

It is obvious from what has been said above by scholars that literature is a very important school subject that deserve special attention in the primary school curriculum.

However, looking at the subjects in the primary school curriculum as quoted from the National Policy on Education (2004) in this paper, one will discover that literature is not explicitly included among the subjects to be taught in the primary school despite the importance of the subject. It is subsumed into the English language component.

With what we have observed above it is clear that language and literature are complementary and as such none should be given more emphasis than the other. Unfortunately the situation in our primary schools is quite alarming because literature is treated as additional language-learning exercise. Literature is practically relegated to the background, which should not be so. There are good literary materials for the young minds which if properly harnessed could help the pupils to develop and imbibe literary skills in their formative years.

### **Teaching of Literature in the Primary School**

Since this paper focuses on the need to teach literature effectively in our primary schools, there is the need to suggest some strategies which teachers can adopt in teaching literature effectively in the primary schools.

Before going into details the suggested approaches, the teacher should bear in mind age of the learners, their interest, the relevance of the text to their experience/background and the physical attractiveness of the text to be used by primary school pupils.

After putting the above factors into consideration the teacher can make use of any of the following strategies or approaches;

- ❖ Arouse and sustain the interest of students by relating the ideas and issues of the text to their own lives.
- ❖ Guide the pupils to identify the themes and characters of the text.
- ❖ Make use of instructional aids, visual, aural and audio-visual to enrich the lesson.
- ❖ After going through a text make use of questioning technique by asking questions such as:
  - i. Who made... statement?
  - ii. Why did he make such a statement?
  - iii. Where did the event occur?
  - iv. What is the motive behind the action by a character?
  - iv. What lessons is this poem/story/play trying to teach us?

As a follow-up activity the teacher could emphasize important parts of a poem/story read by engaging the pupils in dramatization or role playing.

Literature teachers should be innovative and vary their approach to literature teaching from time to time. Literature lessons should not be turned into reading comprehension lessons, rather the teacher should involve the students in detailed discussions about the authors, characters actions, events and social background of the texts. This should then be followed by written and oral exercises (Azikiwe 1998).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the need for reengineering the primary school curriculum cannot be overemphasized if primary education is to produce the desired result of employment and self productivity in Nigeria.

Subject such as literature that train a child to be imaginative and creative should be given priority in the curriculum and taught efficiently so that our youth can be employable and self productive as a result of the experience acquired at the formative years of their educational endeavour.

### **Recommendations**

In order to ensure that primary school pupils derive maximum values from effective teaching of literature that can guarantee employment and self productivity, the following recommendations are offered:

- ❖ Literature should be given adequate attention in the primary school curriculum in order to ensure that it is not relegated to the background.
- ❖ Appropriate strategies/approaches should be employed by the teachers of literature in primary school to replace the traditional practice of turning literature lessons into reading comprehension lessons.
- ❖ Teachers of literature should pay attention to the three genres of literature i.e. prose, poetry and drama as this will ensure that the pupils are introduced to the world of creativity. This will in turn pave way for maturity in their future as professional artists.
- ❖ Lastly, enough and qualified teachers of literature should be Employed in our primary schools to ensure that a solid foundation is laid.

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