

THE PLACE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NATION BUILDING

Agbunno, A. dmes; Och uema, G.A. and muojekwu, Ijeom a

Abstract

Education in Nigeria right from its inception has always been used as an instrument for the attainment of the objectives of whoever controlled it. Education has as its main aim, the ability to help each individual in the society to function effectively and productively too. Primary Education is one of the first stages of the formal school system in most countries of the world. It is the foundation laying process that provides the child with the necessary environment and stimulus for learning. How to acquire the knowledge that he needs to cope with life and contributes meaningfully to nation building. The quality of primary education offered to the child will determine the extent to which he can contribute to nation building. This type of education should be functional. Making it functional means that all the necessary machineries must be put in place, such as adequate funds, proper planning and devoid of unnecessary politicking.

Introduction

Education is derived from the Latin word, *Bduco* (*educare*) meaning to rear, to lead, to draw out. It is the development of character and mental powers. This leading or leading out, which is the hall mark education presupposes that:

- (a) The person to be led out is in an undesirable place and condition from which he cannot emancipate himself all alone.
- (b) That the person to lead out has himself been led out; knows the way and possesses the means.

Education is the "art of developing and cultivating the various physical, intellectual, aesthetic and moral faculties" according to New Webster Encyclopedia Dictionary (p. 276). This definition states that education is a form of ignorance to knowledge and its consequent effect upon character. It serves as a catalyst both for the individual self actualization, national development and international relations.

Education in whatever form according to Dosummu, (1996), it is transmitted, is the sole source of enlightenment and the only pillar that lifts human beings on a higher pedestal than the other creatures of the planet.

Ikejiani (1964) opines that "education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave. At home a friend, abroad-an introduction, in solitude, a solace, in society-an ornament. It chastens vice, it guides virtue and it gives at once grace and government to genius. Without it, what is man?. A splendid slave, a reasoning savage". From this perspective, one can see education as the only catalyst for national development and building, a parameter for measuring the country's growth and nation building. It removes the obstacle to people's progressive march toward true humanization, liberation, civilization and attainment of integral development, good governance and viable democracy.

Concept And Aims Of Education

The concept of education in general has to do with the development of human beings. The development of human personality is a complex one as it involves different aspects of the individual such as, the physical, intellectual, social, moral, aesthetic and spiritual.

Going through history, we discover that every society has its own aim of education. For example, the Spartans, the primary aim of education was service of the state by preparing the citizenry for war. For the Athenians, it was not limited to physical training alone, but included intellectual, aesthetic as well as cultural elements.

According to O'connor, the aim of education in the contemporary society, can be summarised into five main points namely:

- (a) To provide men and women with the minimum of skills necessary for them to take their place in society and to see further knowledge.
- (b) To provide men and women with vocational training that will enable them to be self supporting.
- (e) To awaken an interest in them and a taste for knowledge,

- (d) To make people critical.
- (c) To put people in touch with and train them to appreciate to the cultural and moral achievement of mankind (Schofield, 1972).

The summary of the whole five points outlined above means that the aim of education is development and nation building as it increases the standard and quality of life of the society at large. Although, there seems to be some misconception about the more important aspect of development in our Nigerian society. 'the development of the mind is very fundamental, as it is the development of the whole man himself. All other kinds of development like social, political etc are dependent on that of the mind, which education alone can offer.

Primary Education In Nigeria Today

Every society in the world designs its educational system for the achievement of some specific goals, Each level of education is geared towards the achievement of such goals , and such goals must always be in conformity with the national objectives.

According to the National Policy on Education (1981), Nigeria, like most other countries of the world use education as one of the effective and aspiration. These national aspirations and objectives include the building: (i) A free and democratic society; (ii) a just and egalitarian society; (iii) a united, strong and self-reliant nation; (iv) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Nigerian education is geared towards the integration of Nigerians into sound and effective citizens and to provide equal educational opportunity for all citizens at all levels of the school system. The National Policy on Education (1981) spelt out the objectives of primary education in Nigeria, which include among others:

- (i) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- (ii) The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (iii) Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- (iv) Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes; (v) Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society with the limits of his capacity; (vi) Providing basic skills for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

From the objectives of primary education in Nigeria, the government intends to make it functional, so that at the end of primary education, the beneficiaries would be able to contribute to nation building. There is need however, for a functional primary education in which the beneficiaries who could not proceed to the secondary school can live their lives effectively in the community and contribute to nation building. A complete and terminal primary education in which pupils are prepared more for useful living and contribute to national development instead of more preparation for post-primary level is the main focus of this paper.

Primary education is the beginning of formal schooling for most Nigerian children. All over the world, primary education is regarded as the most important foundation and the bedrock of any other system of education. Obviously, a weak foundation at this primary school level may make the smooth working of other levels of education difficult. This is why the type of education the child gets at this level to a large extent determines the child's performance in his educational pursuit in life later.

From the stated objectives of primary education in Nigeria, the writers are very much convinced with quality and functional education at the primary school level. To further ensure effective implementation of these objectives, government established national Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and the State Primary Education Board (SPCB). This is a major breakthrough in the history of primary education in Nigeria, and it is hoped firmly believed that this will go a long way to ensure functionality in our primary school. Already this move has shown positive results especially in the area of payment of teachers' salaries and allowances. Frequent strikes by primary school teachers are becoming a

thing of the past.

Primary education if properly managed should be able to develop children in various skills, understanding, enlightenment and decision. They should be encouraged to contribute towards the sustenance of national enterprise.

Realising the importance of primary education and to ensure that the objectives are achieved, Nigerian government lined up responsibilities such as:

- (1) provision of junior libraries.
- (2) Provision of man power and materials for the leaching of sciences.
- (3) Ensure that teaching methods de-emphasise memorization and encourage practical exploratory methods and that the development of manual skills is stressed.

Furthermore, government prescribed some curricula! activities which include:

- (1) inculcation of literacy and numeracy
- (2) the study of science
- (3) the study of social norms and values of the local community and of the country as a whole through civics and social studies.
- (4) The giving of health and physical education, moral and religious education.
- (5) The encouragement of aesthetic, creative and musical activities.
- (6) The teaching of local craft and domestic science and agriculture.

There is no doubt that Nigeria would have provided her citizens with high quality primary education that will form the base for functionality if these guidelines are implemented to (he letter especially for those children whose parents are not handy enough to send them to secondary school.

Ensuring The Use Of Primary Education As A Starting Point For Nation Building

Many Nigerians still see primary education as a process of smooth transition to secondary school. To some it is a means for acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy, instead of an enterprise that can convey any socio-economic advantage to the receiver talk less of nation building. Okwuenu (1994) views education as the process of equipping one with the:

Relevant skills that will make him survive as an individual and contribute to the survival of his own society.

One of the cardinal objectives of primary education is "the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking." This objective is very new and significant to form a sound base for functionality. For this to be achieved, the primary school holder can effectively contribute to nation building. Primary education should not lock up pupils' minds rather release their minds to invent, discover, building and produce. This will help the nation produce people who will do work needed for the welfare of all.

Our primary school should not prepare children for secondary school alone but should aim at fitting the children for life. This means that teaching should relate to life. There should be de-emphasis in examination and teacher centered approach to instruction as this will constitute a gateway to scientific and reflective thinking.

A great philosopher of the old Alfred North Whitehead (1948) once remarked that:
Education is not just (lie acquisition of knowledge but the acquisition of THE art of" utilization of knowledge and thai the only use **of the** knowledge of the past is to equip us for the **future** and that education with inert ideas is not only useless but it is, beyond all emphasis harmful.

Education is tied to the national goals and objectives. If primary education fails to achieve the desired goals among the beneficiaries, it is not functional. A functional education is that which can achieve predetermined needs and of the objectives of the nation.

Many good Nigerians are not happy with the status of our primary schools today. Egonu (1989) observes that primary education in Nigeria is in a state of utter neglect. This situation makes some Nigerians wonder whether modern education as represented by primary education now has seriously replaced the pre- colonial education it eroded.

To make primary education a base for nation building, teachers should desist from the

traditional chalk-talk method of teaching alone and use other methods such as inquiry or discovery method, practice and drill, laboratory etc. It will help primary school to produce pupils who could make good, relevant and discriminating judgement and act intelligently.

Functional primary education will help develop human personality, potentialities, talents, skills and attitude in the individuals as well as the culture of the people. Functional primary education also will promote a people's heritage, what they cherish and value while at the same time makes open to change and to hunger for modernization and the demands of our technological age. It will produce a balanced individual who receives it cope with life individual, his/her preparation to internalize the right values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and society as well as the acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies need to equip him to live and contribute meaningfully to nation building.

The most important factor to consider if primary education is to adequately contribute to nation building is the teachers. His/her training must involve such skills and competencies that facilitate and encourage learning. As Obi (2000) puts it, under the teachers' guidance, learners should acquire the competencies in:

- (i) identifying problems with local interests and impact;
- (ii) acquiring process skills which they can use in their own problems resolution.
- (iii) Going through a series of processes and skills and becoming more conversant with the concepts and principles of the related field;
- (iv) Ability to make devices for the solution of problems that leads to development of both the individual and the society.

It must be noted that these competencies can only be achieved if government should try to provide those inputs for operating primary education promised in the National Policy on Education. The inputs include good quality infrastructures, cheap and affordable textbooks, libraries, laboratories, musical, craft and sporting equipment, teaching aids, sufficient pupils' desks, teachers' tables and chairs and sanitation facilities. But we should equally know that the provision of these facilities spell put above requires a lot of money, which government cannot provide alone. It needs a combined effort of the federal, state, and local governments, parents, industries and corporations, national and international agencies and organizations, non governmental organizations (NGOs), foreign institutions, societies and wealthy Nigerians.

It must equally be noted that not all primary school pupils can proceed to post primary level due to their parental socio-economic status. That is why it is very necessary that our primary school should be well equipped so that children who cannot go beyond primary level can use the little they learnt to contribute to nation building. For this reason, primary education should not be politicized as it is the case now. All politicians should rather encourage those who can assist to do so.

The present arrangement in which the primary school teachers salaries are deducted at source and paid to SPHB is a very welcome development as it has reduced the incidence of teachers' frequent strike action to the barest minimum. Government should continue with this policy no matter what pressures local government chairmen are mounting.

In addition, a special fund, should be established for education, a well funded primary education **would** restore teachers' and pupils' confidence and which would in turn yield better productivity.

There is the need to increase teachers' awareness and effectiveness through improved working conditions, intensified preservice training and continuous in-service training. The teacher of the 21st century should be highly exposed to technological and scientific and computer awareness. He should be made to realise that the terminal level of the children he/she is teaching is the primary education, therefore, all the things (that the children ought to know in order to contribute to nation building must be inculcated into him/her.

Finally, adequate and effective monitoring of instructions must be carried out periodically by the federal, state and local government agencies. This is with the view to seeing that children are properly taught and that facilities supplied to schools are properly and effectively utilized for the purpose of achieving the desired objectives.

Primary education has been recognised in Nigeria as the most important instrument of change and the most important resource for development. Ajayi and Akinwumiju (1996) observe that:

in plural societies, primary education may be more relevant to the (ask of national integration, since education is a potential force for bringing together the diverse groups in a plural state to form one nation.

The primary level of education is the only correct level of education at which children should be made to be acquainted with democratic principles in order to develop the democratically minded individuals to help build up the nation. Primary education, therefore can foster national unity by ensuring that it is accessible to all Nigerian children and by de-emphasizing the divisive elements of culture on school curricula. A well-managed primary education programme can, therefore eradicate social pluralism and promote national unity, if only the cultural and political contest of primary education management is suitable and supportive.

References

Ameh, E. A. (2001) Education and Democracy, in Nigeria." Conference Paper Presented at College of Education Katsina Ala September 12¹¹'- 14¹⁴".

Dosummu, 13. (1996) For Intellectual Renaissance. *Guardian* Newspaper September 127.

Ikejiani, O. (1964) *Nigerian Education*. Lagos: Longmans.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: Government Printer.

O' Connell (1965) *Education and Nation Building in Africa*. London: Pall Mali press.

Oboro, C. A & Onosade , F. A. (2000) Primary Conference Paper Presented at NAFK June 26th - 30th.

Okwuenu, J.O. (1994) Functional Education As A Factor In The Transformation Of The Nigerian Rural Communities. *Journal Of Quality Education* Vol. 156-165.

Schofield, H. (1972) *Theory of Education: An Introduction*. London: Macmillan.

Trapael, U & Ityau, C. M. (1999) Women Education for Democracy and National Reconciliation. Conference Paper Presented at College of Education Katsina-Ala Feb. 2nd - 5