

ISSUES IN EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF NIGERIAN PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

James Korave Uno; Sunday Abel Okwori and Amenger Henry Serumum

Abstract

The management of primary education has come under threat with frequent changes that have neither produced the desired result nor addressed the entrenched challenges. The education quality and standard have not witnessed any remarkable improvement even though several attempts at rediscovering the faults in the system have been made. Facilities, materials, equipments and funding are inadequate as well as trained manpower. The consequence has been the falling standard of primary education that is observed from the products as it is usually discussed in education parlance. In this article emphasis was placed on effective management of the system and the personnel involved in the process as the yardstick for improvement. The other areas considered for improvement of standard and quality in primary education include provision of infrastructure, instructional materials, trained manpower and adequate funding. Equally, the planning process for primary education is given attention to avoid under estimation that has been a great challenge to educational planners. The paper recommended optimum infrastructure and materials management for primary school system as well as training and retraining of personnel in the system.

It is obvious that the management of primary education system need to be strengthened and revamped to align with the global standard for quality education. Many countries of the world have given much attention to the management of education system and have improved the standard of their educational system both in quality and quantity. It must be realized that educational management at the primary school level has suffered greatly and this has led to its fall in standards.

In Nigeria, primary education made a debut with the arrival and establishment of a school in Badagry in 1843 by Mr and Mrs de Graft of the Methodist Mission, (Fafunwa, 2004). It is the first level of education an individual receives in his life time in a formal school setting. In other words, it is referred to as elementary education and it is meant for children of 6 – 12 years of ages, (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). The levels objectives, Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2013) states that, it is to inculcate permanent literacy; numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking; promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity etc.

This level of education is the constitutional responsibility of the local government but has been usurped by the state governments of the federation. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011) declares that the functions of a local government council shall include participation of such council in the government of a state as respect the following matters: The provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education. By the constitutional provisions, local governments are responsible for managing education at this level in terms of providing infrastructure, instructional materials, recruitment and promotion as well as payment of salaries of other bills.

Management connotes working with people and other resources to support the upliftment of the system. Sherlekar (1984) cited in Peretomode (2003) says that management as the guidance, leadership and control of efforts of a group of people towards some common objectives. In the Nigerian educational system people that work for the growth and development of the system are neglected. This has led to fall in standard in both quantity and quality. Even though the claim that there are qualified and competent management staff, many factors have contributed to the slow growth of quality of primary school system.

Questions have continuously been raised as to why the education system has not become vibrant to produce people that will add value to the system and to the society. It is a fact that the system is facing daunting challenges because of poor management. This article takes a critical examination of the concept of management as it relates to the primary education system. It examines the challenges of managing the system and attempts to proffer strategies for effective primary education management.

Management

Management is an integral part of human endeavour for social and economic development. It deals with people who are in the system, be it organization or institution for the purpose of organizational goal achievement. Hartzell, (2006) defines management as a process of organizing, using, and controlling human activities and other resources towards specific ends by the group of persons responsible for running an organization or directing human activity toward specific ends. Kalu (2012) says that management is a systematic process used to accomplish organization goals through planning, organizing, directing and controlling people and other organization resources. In other words, it is the process of manipulating people and resources to achieve organizational goals and objectives.

Edem (2004) opines that the increasing faith in education as an agent of change in many developing countries has led to a heavy investment in it, and thus the delegation of manpower development to the schools. Effective management, therefore is a catalyst for manpower production and resource utilization to achieve optimal socio-economic development in the society. Therefore, educational institutions are responsible for the manipulation of people and resources to cause the desired change that positively affect the society.

Primary Education Management

Primary education is the foundation of all levels of education that are attained by an individual. Tor-Anyiin (2008) regards it as the schools for the generality of the public to enable citizens learn to live effectively in the society. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) refers to it as the education for children age 6-12. Primary education caters for the education of the young who hold the future of the society and are innocent of the damage the society has inflicted on it in which they are suffering for. Nigeria has made great strides in higher education development but primary education that is the most important level has been neglected.

In Nigeria Federal and States Ministries of Education make policies for primary education as regards its management structure. The period between 1960-1987, primary education management was the responsibility of Regional and State Ministries of Education as acting co-coordinating agencies for the study promotion, evaluation, planning and improvement of education while the local

education boards or authorities were responsible for provision of infrastructure, instructional materials, personnel and training at primary education levels (Ozigi, 1982).

The management of primary education changed when the Decree No.31 of August, 1988 was enacted establishing the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC), the State Primary Education Boards, Local Government Education Authorities, District School Boards (Tor Anyiin, 2008). The decree created an avenue for greater participation of stakeholders in primary school matters. Funds for school development from the National Primary Education Commission were given to the boards at the state level which in turn remitted to the Local Education Authorities for salaries, projects and payment of other bills.

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) 2004 Act made primary education the responsibility of the state. The State Universal Basic Education Boards are established at state level while there exist local government education authorities at the government level. For instance, Benue State Government (2005) states that the implementation of Universal Basic Education shall be financed from State Government grant of 55% of the total requirements for the UBE scheme to take care of overhead cost, personnel emolument, training, special needs, a grant of 45% from local government council to take care of the provision of instructional materials, examination fees, books etc.

Primary education management has not been stable to achieve greater impact but has created lapses that have impeded its development as a beacon of hope for the younger generation. Such challenges can be observed in inadequate infrastructure, instructional materials, funding and motivation of teachers in pecuniary issues. Urevbu (2005) cited in Lawani (2006) identified deficiencies in school curriculum, lack of motivation on the part of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, overemphasis on examination, inadequacies in financing inadequate school infrastructure, poor management and planning, monitoring and evaluation in education sector.

It is argued that Universal Primary Education (UPE) failed because of poor training and inauguration. This is in line with Fafunwa (2004) assertion that the shortness of time for planning resulted in inadequate buildings, equipments and poor management, unsuitable buildings rented and temporary buildings and shelters were used to accommodate the bulging population. The tendency of education managers to underestimate the pupil population is another case in point. For instance, Fafunwa (2004) stated that the Universal Primary Education (UPE) triggered off a phenomenal rise in pupil population. Enrolment figures jumped from 6 million in the year proceeding Universal Primary Education (UPE) (1975/1976) to 8.7million in 1976/77, the UPE year and to 12.5million in 1979/80. By 1982 the pupil population rose to 15million. On inadequate financing, Athanasius (2017) admitted that there have been cases of poor management of primary schools in Nigeria as a result of embezzlement of funds by some public officials in whose offices education funds were allocated.

Primary Education Management Challenges

During pre-colonial and colonial periods in Nigeria and even after independence primary education witnessed several changes in management policies both at the regional and Federal levels. The regional government introduced educational policies that lack uniformity. The Western and Eastern regions introduced Universal Primary Education in 1955 and 1957 respectively while the Northern region could not. The population of pupils in the Western and Eastern regions rose dramatically that created a lacuna culminating into educational disparity between the North and South.

The war period between 1967 -1970 witnessed the creation of 12 states that became an avenue to address the regional educational disparity. Tor-Anyiin (2008) avers that decree No14 of 1967 mandated each state to take over the control of primary education within its domain and this required the government to introduce the unified teaching service, manpower development, provision of infrastructure and instructional materials and funding.

The take-over of primary schools by government meant national control and greater financial involvement which at this time posed no challenge because of increase oil revenue. The prospects of the take-over resulted into the introduction of Universal Free Primary Education launched by the Head of State General Yakubu Gowon at Sokoto in 1976. Olaniyan & Obadara (2008) says this scheme radically expanded public involvement in education finance and administration. The scheme brought primary education to the door step of Nigerians. Fafunwa, (2004) states that between 1975/1976 and 1982, primary school enrolment in Nigeria had risen from 6 Million to 15 Million pupils. The increment in the enrolment was a great effort to raise the literacy level but many other challenges emerged. To-Anyiin (2008) admits that the increase gave birth to problem of accommodation, infrastructure, funding and control of primary education in Nigeria as well as teacher education and teacher condition of service.

The UPE though commendable, created greater problems of management that seems unsolvable which has led to frequent changes and challenges. The challenges of UPE led to the promulgation of Decree No31 of August 1988 establishing the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC). It was short lived and replaced by Decree No. 3 of 1991 and again Decree No. 96 of 1994 that re-introduced the National Primary Education Commission with a tripartite funding arrangement. Uno, (2014) states that the re-introduction of the Decree brought relief to the aggrieved teachers that went on strike to press home their demand.

At the wake of the return to Civil Rule in 1999, Universal Basic Education was launched in Sokoto by President Olusegun Obasanjo on the 30th September, 1999 (FGN 2006). The UBE Act 2004 enacted by the National Assembly terminated NPEC that greatly enhanced the welfare of teachers and provision of infrastructure and instructional materials and funding (Tor-Anynii 2008). Apart from the frequent changes, the management of primary education is challenged by shortage of infrastructure, instructional materials, man power and funding as well as population explosion and wastage. Olaniyan & Obadara (2008) agree that the introduction of UPE nationwide in 1976 experienced the problem of under-estimation of about 30 percent of the turn-up number of children enrolment, acute shortage of classroom spaces or over-crowded classrooms, shortage of teachers and equipment. Uno (2014) opines that it is not puzzling to see thatch roofed huts as classrooms, roofs blown off by wind without repairs and no form of accommodation for teachers. Lawani (2006) agrees that in many schools teaching is conducted under trees, in dilapidated structures, roofless buildings with broken windows and un-plastered floors.

Stressing the relevance of instructional materials to teaching, Iortsuun and Anjira (2006) aver that teaching/learning is more effective through recognition that people learn through interaction with materials. The problem of instructional materials management is no different. They are not adequately provided for teachers and pupils use for effective teaching and learning. Lawani (2006) emphasizes that there is urgent need to address the present deficiencies in the physical and instructional materials. Uno (2014) agrees that the problem of inadequate instructional materials in the schools today has greatly affected children cognitive development.

Finance management is another grave concern in the primary education system. Allocation for salaries, infrastructure and materials are embezzled by corrupt government officials. Poopola, Bello and Atanda (2009) say that even where the allocated fund is not enough, the little that is available is usually embezzled by corrupt Nigeria officials working in State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) offices across the country. Corruption remains the greater threat to education system most especially at primary school level.

Manpower development to enhance teacher quality and quantity is another concern to primary education management. Teachers are poorly trained and are inadequate. According to Lawani (2006) this is more disastrous for the realization of the aims and objectives of education than inadequacy of instructional materials for adequate books in the hands of inefficient and ill-informed teachers would result in colossal failure. The system is more or less producing illiterates that constitute a great danger to the society.

The over bloated pupil population in primary schools without adequate teachers and accommodation for them pose another threat to primary education. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) recommends teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35. In many schools, the ratio is surpassed because of inadequate teachers and classrooms making school heads to admit more pupils in a class than recommended not minding its attendant problems of classroom administration. Olaniyan & Obadara (2008) emphasize that classrooms are overcrowded and in some instances, schools have operated with teacher pupil's ratio of 1:76. Classrooms under this arrangement, become difficult to manage in the areas of affecting teaching and discipline.

The challenge of wastage in educational management has become a national phenomena. In many states, teachers embark on strike to fight for their welfare and better condition of service thereby wasting man hours that would have been utilized for the benefit of the pupils. Onojerena (2013) states that wastage of resources have become a culture in educational organizations in developing countries. Loss of learning months because of strikes has increased, examination failure rate, repetition and school drop outs.

Strategies for Effective Primary Education Management

Indeed primary education needs steady management structure to achieve the goals and objectives of the National policy on education. To achieve this, it is neither to fund education alone nor provide infrastructure etc but to take a holistic approach by critically analyzing the problems and proffering workable solutions. A management structure like the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC), Primary Education Board, and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) which were applauded for improving the quality of primary education needs to be reestablished to be responsible for managing primary education. Primary education demands that all services that affect it be properly handled.

These can be achieved by adopting these strategies: improving the condition of service of teachers and prompt payment of salaries. Teachers over the years have felt dissatisfied with their condition of services and have agitated for teacher's salary structure and payment of salaries as at when due. Many educators refuse to acknowledge money issues as problems of teachers but have harped on lack of materials and facilities leaving out the core issue. Uno (2014) says that money is a motivator especially when paid as at when due. Many have advocated for proper funding which can be achieved without remittance to teachers due to inherent corruption and embezzlement in the system, (Poopola, Bello and Afanda 2009).

Improving learning environment: An environment conducive for learning would have necessary facilities that can inspire teachers and learners. The physical environment of the school and classroom should be pleasant and conducive such that learning will be aided. Primary schools need to be provided with well ventilated classrooms with toilets, libraries, sports facilities, good source of water and adequate furniture for pupils and teachers. Kalu (2012) says that classroom where student gather and spend most of their time in the course of their educational pursuit is more likely to have a social friendly climate.

Supply of adequate instructional materials: The materials are very critical and crucial for effective lesson, delivery and assimilation by pupils. Iortsuun & Anjira (2006) agrees that the teaching learning process, viewed as involvement of the teacher and learners in purposeful activities presupposes that resources must be used for effectiveness of instructional procedure. These instructional materials include among others audio and audiovisual aids, textbooks, writing materials, charts, maps, chalk and chalkboards and computers. Parents should be enlightened and encouraged to provide some of the materials for their wards.

Training, recruitment and supply of teachers: Teachers are professionals that must receive adequate training for the benefit of the children. FRN (2013) section 2 (20)(c) says teaching should be practical, exploratory and experimental. This demands for the best among the trained teachers to be recruited to fulfill the requirements. Lawani (2006) opines that the major problem of primary education is inadequacy of teachers in terms of quality and quantity. Most teachers are not qualified to teach some school subjects largely due to improper training or even lack of training in the art of teaching. Teacher training need not be a crash programme but painstakingly done to make them truly professionals for educational excellence.

Funding of primary education: Primary education funding has suffered a great setback and has endangered national growth and development. This is contrary to government policy that education should be well funded. FRN (2013) section 10 (153) states that education is an expensive social service and requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of government for successful implementation of education programmes. If the statement is anything to go by, government should improve the funding of primary education bearing in mind it is laying a solid foundation for the entire education system. To cater for the adequate funding needs of primary education, reference should be made to the National Primary Education Commission of Decrees 1988 and 1991, when the primary education board was funded directly by the commission. Fafunwa (2004) says that the national fund consisted of the Federal Government 65% contribution to the calculated cost of primary school teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, provided that the calculation is based on demographic criterion of 40 pupils per teacher in a class. The disbursed funds were strictly monitored to avoid misapplication. The commission's disbursement created little room for misappropriation and primary education was well funded. Salaries of teachers were paid on time and infrastructure and instructional materials were provided adequately in the primary schools.

The 21st century is a crucial period in Nigeria's history in which democracy has been entrenched. The current government emphasis on change in the way of doing things should reflect in the provision of facilities and materials, funding and payment of salaries and allowances as well as provision of necessary equipments. There is no way the educational system for national educational

growth and development can be achieved if primary education is not taken adequate care of. The strategies stated in managing primary education need to be adopted for sustainable primary education.

Conclusion

Primary education is the bedrock of the education system that needs to be effectively provided for and managed to achieve the objectives explicitly stated in the National policy on Education. It needs to be well planned for and funded to avoid past mistakes for the interest of the pupils who are future leaders of the society. Specifically, the environment of learners and learning materials should be adequately provided to make learning and teaching attractive. Teachers need to be properly trained, mobilized and empowered in pecuniary and non-pecuniary needs to achieve the objective of primary education.

Suggestions

It is important to implement these suggestions to improve the standard of primary education for the achievement of educational goals and objective:

- Professional management specialist be appointed and trained to manage education boards and offices over seeing primary education to achieve objectives.
- Teachers welfare especially salary payment must be made to receive priority attention to enhance commitment of teachers to their professional duties.
- Teacher training and retraining content must be up graded with principles and practices of teaching to make teachers truly professionals for effective service delivery.
- Learning environment must be made very conducive to inspire teachers and pupils for higher academic attainment.
- Instructional materials that ensure practical lesson approach should be provided and where they are not available teachers should be trained and encourage to improvise where necessary.
- Education planning processes should be made more robust to discourage underestimation that has always led to failure of policy and scheme as has been the situation in Nigeria education system.
- Government at all levels should ensure adequate funding of primary education and also enlighten and encourage philanthropists, business and social organizations, religious groups, and Parent, Teacher Associations to assist in funding primary education.
- State government should handover the management of primary education to the local government in line with the constitutional provision of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- A management model like the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) be adopted to stabilize primary education.

References

- Athanasius, J. (2018). Problems and Prospects of Primary Education in Nigeria. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid....** Retrieval Date 6th October, 2019.
- Benue State Government (2005). A law to provide for compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education and Purposes connected therewith. Government Publication.
- Edem, D.A. (2004). Introduction to Educational Administration in Nigeria. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

- Fafunwa, A.B. (2004). History of Education in Nigeria. Ibadan: NPs Educational Publishers Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011). Constitution of Nigeria: Amended. Government Publication.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education* Lagos: Nigerian Education and Research Development Council (NERDC).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2006). 40 Frequently Asked questions (EAQS) on Universal Basic Education Programme.
- Hartzell, D. (2006). Dictionary of Management, EPP Books Service Nigeria Ltd.
- Kalu, R.U. (2012). Effective Classroom Management and Teaching. Makurdi: Roska Publishers.
- Lawani, M.T. (2006). Making Public Primary schools effective. Jos: *Journal of Educational Improvement*.
- lortsuun, P.T. & Anjira, TD. 1. (2006). Fundamentals of Teaching. Makurdi; Onaivi Printing and Publishing co.
- Olaniyan, D.A. & Obadara, O.E. (2008). A Critical Review of Management of Primary Education in Nigeria *International Journal of African & African American Studies* Vol.v//, No.1
- Onojerena, J.E. (2013). Challenges of Secondary School Management in the 21st Century. ICAB Journal of Art and Education.
- Ozigi, A.O. (1982). A Handbook of School Administration and Management. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.
- Peretomode, V. F. (2003). Educational Administration: Applied concepts and practicals. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and publishers Ltd.
- Poopola, S.O., Bello, A.A. & Atanda, F.A. (2009). Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol.6/5. Retrieved from <http://www.medwelljournals.com/abstract/?doi 13-3-2015>.
- Tor-Anyiin, S.A. (2008). Origin, Growth and Development of Pre-primary and Primary Education in Nigeria. Makurdi: Selfer's Academic Press Ltd.
- Uno, J.K. (2014). The Teacher and Service: Making Teaching a Profession of Choice in Nigeria. Katsina-Ala: Gold Ink Company.