

QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION: A VIABLE ROUTE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

National development, in all its ramifications, is based on a sound qualitative primary education. The foundation of the entire educational system is the primary education. Therefore any nation wishing to develop in all spheres of human endeavour should pay serious attention to primary education. This paper takes a critical look at primary education in Nigeria. It discusses the implications of poor quality primary education in national development. It also highlights the various strategies for achieving national development through quality primary education. Finally, recommendations are made as to the expected qualities of primary education that promote national development.

Introduction

Primary education is usually the foundation upon which the entire education structure is built. This is so because a good beginning is normally a prerequisite to a good ending. Therefore the primary school level is a very crucial period because subsequent educational attainments by a child depend largely on the achievements made at this level. It is in this realisation that the National Policy on Education, (1998), acknowledges that the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system.

Primary education is one, which any child who wants to receive formal education must pass through in order to benefit from the system. To the Nigerian Government, primary education is of utmost concern and every effort is being made regardless of financial constraints, to improve, the quality of education given to children at the primary school level (Omoraka, Ajuar and Atiptoko, 1997). It is thus clear from all indications that primary education is an indispensable tool to national development.

Concept of National Development

The term "National Development" means growth or advancement in all areas of our national life. This includes our social, economic and political life.

For a developing nation, development should be considered to be what Enahoro (1974) refers to as, 'the transformation of the community into a fully participatory and modern society, whose citizens enjoy as much economic and social well-being as we generate'. An urgent call for an organized education that is designed to reflect the needs and interest of the entire population is necessary. The achievement of national development will be an illusion if the primary education sector, which is the key to the success or failure of the whole system, is not fully considered.

Primary Education has to be seriously improved for effective national development. It is therefore the position of this paper to establish the need for primary education as an important avenue through which national development could be achieved in the country.

Concept of Education

Education is the indisputable answer to the fast changing world. It is the key to the development of both human and natural resources of any nation. For it to be meaningful, it must be

qualitative. And quality education is that which is relevant and adapted to the changing needs of the community.

Ejiogu (1991) describes education as "an instrument par excellence for effective national development and a dynamic instrument for change". The relentless quest for education by many countries especially in the modern times signifies, no doubt, the strategic position occupied by educational institution in the society. Specifically, education transmits, selects and 'modifies aspects of accepted societal culture in her effort to establish the position of man in society. Education introduces some elements of change in

society for man to cope with the ever-changing societal conditions. It therefore becomes important to note that since man is not static, education is a continuous process. It aims at establishing and stabilizing man to be useful to both himself and his society at any given time. Kosemani (1982: 9) notes that:

Education has been adopted by the Federal Government as one of the social institutions to foster the much needed unity, correct imbalances in inter-state and intra-state development in terms, of the quick development of the nation's economic, political, sociological and human resources.

Williams (1973) also stated that education has been pursued for personal enjoyment, for social integration or for political understanding. The colonial government noted that, among other things, education contributed included the raising of the general level of living of the whole people and the provision of adequate facilities for the development, physical, economic, intellectual and spiritual (Omolewa, 1974). These observations suggest that education is an important agent of social, cultural, economic and political development of any given society in both developed and developing societies.

Objectives of Primary Education

Primary education, according to the National Policy on Education (1998) is education given in an institution for children aged normally 6 to 11⁺ and the general objectives for the primary education are:

- (a) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;
- (b) The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (c) Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- (d) Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- (e) Development in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- (f) Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity;
- (g) Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Looking at the above objectives of primary education, one way by which the objectives can be achieved involves quality primary education teaching. The implication of this is that if primary education objectives are well implemented, it will help to lay in the child, a solid foundation for the development of good habits. It is therefore imperative that if these good qualities and values were imbibed early in the life of the child, his later years would be blessed. Qualities such as better human relationship, individual efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, and national unity if

inculcated into the child early in life, especially at the primary level, will go a long way towards achieving national development.

Despite the laudable objectives of primary education, there are lots of anomalies in the sector that affect national development.

The Implications of Poor Quality Primary Education in National Development

Primary education in Nigeria is still facing a number of problems, which militate against the expected upliftment of the country. Why the issue of quality is of concern, is that, quantitative growth has been paid more attention at the expense of qualitative development in primary schools. The problems emanating from this are immense: Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient learning aids, poor infrastructural facilities, unsystematic planning and implementation of primary education practices and activities, poor management of school resources, inadequate and haphazard schools supervision by ministry inspectors, etc. These shortcomings have serious implications for primary education quality both in terms of process and product (Omoraka et al, 1997J).

The long-term effect of poor quality teacher education for the primary level has perpetual effects on the learners as well as the nation's development. This is so because an educational system that could not equip the students with the needed knowledge and skills will produce a large army of unskilled youths. Such a

situation would invariably lead to all sorts of anti-social behaviour of some citizens such as thuggery, armed robbery and other violent crimes. According to Yakub (1997), the curriculum, though tailored to advance country's social, economic and political system, has not been properly translated to benefit the people. He also stressed that, the products of the present educational system have little to offer to the indigenous occupations of the citizens.

The nation's poor vision and orientation, which adversely affect education, can be seen as follows:

- (a) Once a child is in school, he is deemed to be a member of the "elite", having little to do with those not in school. This attitude leads to a false sense of achievement and creates an undesirable gap in the nation's socio-economic system.
- (b) Parents send their children to school to prepare for future careers as lawyers, engineers, doctors, etc. Unfortunately, parents today no longer think of making their children better farmers, craftsmen, fishermen and so on. This trend is equally harmful to the nation's economy and development (Yakub, 1997). All these anomalies have adversely affected both socio-economic and national development. Furthermore, poor quality primary education produces ill-prepared learners. And ill-prepared learners will lose confidence in themselves in the face of challenges of modern world of science and technology. Consequently, mediocrity would set in and mar the education system that would only produce a vicious circle of mediocrity. Poor quality primary education will generate clear manifestations of mediocrity in almost all aspects of life. For instance, a vibrant economy would not be sustained, social services would not be efficiently maintained, collapse of buildings and bridges would occur at regular intervals, innocent citizens would be thrown into jail and our hospital theatres would be turned into slaughter houses.

Similarly, the same system of education has produced unpatriotic civil servants who have no interest or feeling of the nation at heart. Many important areas of national development are suffering due to the attitude of corrupt civil servants. It is most unfortunate that the system of education has failed to produce promising educated persons who should put the country above self and extol respect, dignity, sincerity and accountability which are necessary if the nation is to make progress.

Strategies for Achieving National Development through Quality Primary Education

The following strategies would go a long way to help in achieving national development through quality primary education. The government needs to provide better teacher incentives and avenues for staff development and periodic refresher courses to make primary school teaching very attractive. School inspection and teachers' supervision exercise, which degenerated to mere routine with no meaningful feedback to the system for control purposes need to be revived.

Inspectorate officials in the ministry need to be trained in the use of modern inspection and supervision technique in line with the aim and emphasis of education under the 6-3-3-4 dispensation. The conditions of learning in our primary schools need improvement generally, so as to foster national development. The government and voluntary agencies and organizations should build more standard structures for the schools for a more efficient and effective education of pupils at the primary school level. Also, a more reliable scheme for the allocation and disbursement of funds for primary education in the country should be put in place so that subventions to schools are not unnecessarily delayed.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as means of improving education for national development.

1. The National Policy on the 6-3-3-4 system should be reviewed. Since primary education is inadequate in terms of availability of teachers, finance and equipment, the government should provide a solution.
2. That the primary system of education should reflect the needs and aspirations of our society. It should also be geared towards improving our occupational and cultural heritage.
3. The products of the primary education should be taught to understand the meaning of self-reliance, so as to contribute towards national development.
4. The primary education system should reflect the need to appreciate our indigenous

occupations and find means of improving them.

5. That there should be probity and accountability at the primary level so as to eradicate the problems of corruption from the grass root or foundation of education. Unless this is done, the nation will never develop.

The concern of any patriotic Nigerian should be to improve education for genuine national development.

Conclusion

Government recognizes the importance of primary education. Hence, it has made it compulsory, universal and free. Also government made provisions to ensure that all the objectives of primary education are met to ensure an effective, efficient and quality primary education in the country. For this reason, the issue of quality in its curriculum, methods and practices is vital for effective performance and attainment of both individual and national objectives. The analysis of the objectives of primary education has shown clearly the indispensable role which primary education plays in national development. This implies that quality primary education, which is a viable route to national development, must be encouraged and enhanced. In this regard, it is very important to encourage, train and provide better teacher incentives and avenues for staff development. This will make primary school teaching very attractive and to contribute towards national development.

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