

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

*Mr. Odogbor, Palmer Isite*

## **Abstract**

This paper reviews some of the contemporary issues in primary education in Nigeria, which demand the attention of relevant policy makers. Some of these issues include: congested class rooms, examination malpractice among primary school pupils, indiscipline among primary school pupils, the issue of one teacher teaching all the subjects in primary school, alienation of the primary school teacher and the neglect of primary schools. The paper therefore, recommends some solutions to these contemporary issues such as: building of more classrooms, proper implementation of examination laws, enforcing discipline in primary school; primary school teachers should be made to teach only subjects where they specialize; primary school teachers should be well remunerated by the government and all the primary schools should be renovated for effective learning to take place.

## **Introduction**

There had been several calls, debates and discussions by stakeholders in the Nigerian educational system on ways and means of making the Nigerian Educational system to move forward in order to meet the needs, goals and aspirations of the populace. Against this backdrop, a lot of conferences, seminars and workshops have been held and a number of conclusion and recommendations had been made on the matter, but a careful observation has revealed that policy makers in Nigeria are more concerned about issues that confront secondary and higher education in Nigeria, without taking cognisance of the fact that primary education is the spring board for subsequent education. The wrong impression of many is that issues that emanate from primary education are minor and thus, will have no much negative effect on the educational system.

Education in its broadest perspective is the lifelong learning, both formal and informal, which aims at equipping the individual effectively with acceptable skills, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, facts and competences that will enable him to cope favourably with the problems of the society. Kellerman (1980), said education is: The process of teaching, training a child. The imparting or acquisition of skills for a particular trade or profession in which applicable methods are used. While Fafunwa (1983), defines education as: Comprising all efforts, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect, made by a given society to accomplish certain objectives that are considered desirable in terms of the individual's needs as well as the needs of society where the programme is based, Musaaazi (1982), also described it as "being concerned with the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation". Any form of education equips the individuals with skills and capabilities that will enable them cope with the problems of living in the society, especially meeting his basic needs of life, such as food, clothing, shelter and health care. The all important role of education is that it serves as a veritable instrument to counter the constraints posed by the dynamic society where man lives.

Primary education in Nigeria is the bedrock of the nation's educational system since it determines the quantity and quality of subsequent education. Primary education according to the revised edition of the National policy on Education (2004) is the education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 11+. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Primary education kick starts the educational

journey of the school child, and thus, the solid foundation for a sound functional education is best laid at this level.

Primary education dictates the pace of the educational growth and progress of a nation, therefore, all issues concerning them should be treated with all necessary attention. This paper thus, takes a look at some of the contemporary issues in primary education in Nigeria, which demand the urgent attention of the government as a major stakeholder in the education industry.

## **Some Contemporary Issues in Primary Education**

For the purpose of this paper, a contemporary issue refers to the moment in the primary level of education in Nigeria. Some of these contemporary issues are: congested classrooms, examination malpractice among primary school pupils, indiscipline in primary schools, issue of one teacher teaching all the subjects in primary schools, alienation of the primary school teachers and the neglect of primary schools.

### **Congested Classrooms**

Many of the classrooms in the primary schools in Nigeria are congested with pupils. A great majority of the classes are filled to capacity especially schools in the urban areas of the country. The; pupils sit in close proximity, while the teacher finds it extremely difficult to move about while teaching. The teacher pupils ratio is about 1:100, this is too large for effective teaching and learning to take place. The negative effect of this situation is noisy classrooms, poor class control, ineffective teaching and learning, etc. This situation is an outright negation of the (NPE, 2004), which stipulates that the teacher pupils ratio should be 1:35. If we are to achieve any meaningful result and if the quality of our primary school system is to be improved upon, concerted efforts have to be made to recruit more teachers and to build more classrooms.

### **Examination Malpractice Among Primary School Pupils**

Another major contemporary issue threatening primary education in Nigeria today is examination malpractice. It is like a canker worm that has eaten deep into the very fabrics of our dynamic society. Presently, examination malpractice has become an "academic phenomenon" in the primary school system of education. Examination malpractice is a form of academic fraud, academic dishonesty, academic corruption, academic crime or academic indiscipline that has continued to spread sporadically like an epidemic in the nation's primary education system. Teachers who are expected to discipline erring students at examination have been most often, found to aid and abet this corrupt practice in various ways including indiscriminate award of marks, giving out examination questions or marking scheme prior to examination, telling the students answers in the examination halls, etc (Anarado, 2003). In order to maintain good standard in our primary school system, and for examination to remain as a true test of knowledge, the school heads, the teachers, the pupils and the parents must work together to eradicate examination malpractice from the primary school system and other levels of education.

### **Indiscipline in Primary Schools**

Indiscipline is another contemporary issue in the nation's primary school system. Adiotomre (2003), described indiscipline as an act that does not conform with the societal values and norms. Indiscipline involves abandoning of self-restraint in pursuit of self-interest and it is normally perpetuated by both the pupils and the teachers. In primary schools, pupils are involved in destruction of school properties, stealing, bullying, hooliganism, loitering, disobedience to school rules and

regulations, lateness to classes, absenteeism etc. While on the part of the teachers, indiscipline takes the form of lateness or absence from school, selling snacks in the classroom, breaking melon with the students when classes are supposed to be in progress, etc. The implication of this on the educational system is that it will lead to gross ineffectiveness in teaching and learning and the products from the schools will end up being non-conformist both to the school system and the larger society. For there to be discipline in primary school, the school heads should try as much as possible to enforce discipline, so that the primary schools will serve as good training ground for future leaders.

### **The Issue of one Teacher Teaching all the Subjects in Primary Schools**

One other issue in the nation's primary school system is the culture of only one teacher teaching all the subjects in the class timetable. This is not good enough for effective learning since no one has monopoly of knowledge. The minimum qualification to teach in primary school as contained in (NPE, 2004), is the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), and the number of subjects the teachers can specialize in while in training is at most in two subjects areas, and thus, teaching all the subjects as jack of all trade which will lead to master of none is a disservice to the pupils and the entire primary school system. Afe (1995), disclose that, in some states, the teachers of primary school still teach a class for the whole day in all subjects. The issue was even made worse with the introduction of computer science in primary schools. With this development, many of the

primary school teachers without any fore knowledge of computer science rush to the bookshops to buy books which goes by the name: "computer for beginners" it is from this book they form lesson notes which is then used in teaching pupils. The resultant effect of this trend in the primary school system is that it will lead to the production of half-baked pupils who will later graduate to other subsequent levels of education. This situation should be properly addressed by disallowing one teacher to teach all the subjects in primary school, this measure will enhance academic performance of the pupils.

### **Alienation of the Primary School Teachers**

Way back into history, primary school teachers are accorded respect and recognition in the society. Primary school teachers then are seen as role models and the best person that gets good wives then are primary school teachers, also, the posting of a new teacher to a community is usually greeted with warm reception. The teaching profession in Nigeria, with particular reference to primary school teachers has been one of frustration, stress and conflict dating even as far back as the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kayode, 1987). The primary school teacher, has been poorly treated in all facets of the society. The non-recognition of the primary school teacher by the government cum members of the society has immensely contributed to their whisper level morale and near zero productivity, hence the mess in primary school system. In any social gathering, the primary school teacher lacks recognition. To him, becoming a special guest of honour, being member of the high table, to get national honour is mission impossible. In the school, the teacher is given all sort of nick names by his pupils as a "reward" for teaching them, most times his life is threatened, as a result of all these, he has a negative attitude to his job. Aside from the afore-mentioned treatments, the government on their parts are not helping matters. The teachers of primary schools are most times paid in arrears in many states of the federation, while annual leave transport grants are rarely paid, resulting to frequent strikes. If teachers are truly the people that train the people that build the nation, then their welfare should be paramount in order to improve their productivity and consequently a better performance will be enhanced. A situation where primary school teachers are poorly paid and the pupils which they taught few years back who are working in oil companies are well paid is detrimental to the education growth and development of primary school education. Abdullahi (1992), posited that, "poorly motivated teachers

in primary school are most likely to turn out weak products for secondary schools and consequently half baked Doctors, Engineers, Teachers etc at the end. This condition should be reversed so that the primary school teachers can work hard and face the challenges of globalization.

### **Neglect of Primary Schools**

Many primary schools especially those in the rural areas have suffered total neglect. The issues range from dearth of infrastructures, dilapidated buildings, to quantity and quality of staff among others. Many of the primary schools in Nigeria lacked infrastructures, the class roof have been blown off by wind, many of the buildings are old and thus, need reconstruction, the classes have no furniture not to talk of library, guidance and counseling clinic and laboratory, these are urgent areas that need the attention of the government, NGOs, private individuals and corporate bodies.

### **Recommendations**

From the afore-mentioned contemporary issues in primary education in Nigeria, some recommendations are therefore, made in order for primary school to achieve its earmarked objectives." (i) The government should build more classrooms nationwide, in order to accommodate the

- increasing number of pupils enrolment,
- (ii) Examination Laws should be implemented to the later,
- (iii) Discipline should be enforced in primary schools,
- (iv) Teachers who specialized in a particular subject area should be made to teach only that subject in primary schools.
- (v) Primary school teachers should be well remunerated by the government,
- (vi) Primary schools should be renovated in order to make them conducive for effective learning.

### **Conclusion**

Primary Education is the initial school of the child, which all Nigerians aged between 6-11 plus are

expected to attend. One of its major objectives is to act as basic tool for further educational advancement, including preparation for trade and crafts of the locality. This paper has identified some contemporary issues in primary education in Nigeria that requires the urgent attention of the government or policy makers in order for primary school to attain the objectives for which it is meant to serve. Some recommendations were also made on how these contemporary issues could be solved.

## **References**

- Abdulahi, A. (1992). Teacher Education for Nigeria Primary School. In Adaralegbe A. (Ed.), *Education in Nigeria Teacher Education for the 6 3.3.4. System*. The Management of Human and Material Resources for Education; Proceedings of the 1989 and 1990 conference of the Nigeria Academy of Education.
- Adiotomre, J.E. (2003). *Introduction to Educational Administration and Management*. Warri: COEWA Publishers.
- Afe, J.O. (1996). *Teacher Education in Nigeria, Trends, issues and Challenges*, Benin City: NERA.
- Anarado, R.N. (2003). Examination Malpractice as an impediment to Effective Administration of Higher Education in Nigeria, in the Registrar: *Journal of the conference of Registrars of colleges of Education in Nigeria* 1(1), page 51.
- Fafunwa, B.A. (1983). Education in Nigeria: Development of Education in Nigeria. In *Trends and Issues in Nigerian Education*. Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National policy on education* (Revised Ed). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Kayode, A. (1987). Some crucial Issues in the Nigerian Primary School System. In A.M. Ejiogu and D. Ajeyalemi (Eds.), *Emergent Issues in Nigerian Education*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited.
- Kellerman, D.F. (19980). *The Lexicon Webster Dictionary*. U.S.A.: Delair Publishing Company Inc.
- Musaazi, J.C.S. (1982). *The Theory and Practice of Educational Administration*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. Nigeria.
- Tribune (2000). *The Nigeria Tribune* of Friday October 27, 2000 page 4 primary School Teacher Resume Work.