

TOWARDS A FUNCTIONAL PRIMARY EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Primary education constitutes a very significant sector of Nigeria's educational tripod. The increasing roles of primary education in national development are unmistakably clear since it is the frame from which other educational stages found footing. However, this paper has examined functional primary education and national development. It also discussed the meaning of primary education and national development. Finally, the paper examined the challenges of primary education in Nigeria and the way forward.

Introduction

The developmental agenda of most countries emphasize effective and functional primary education programme as a ladder through which science and technology could be attained. Nigeria is no exception. Laudable programmes have been identified and systematically pursued through different levels of formal education programme as the most effective ways for attaining science and technological development (FMST, 1998). The primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system.

The word "primary" in education is not used everywhere in the same way. Some countries call it "elementary", which implies, probably, what is essential and simple. Other use the words "basic", "fundamental" although these terms have of recent acquired special definitions. In a strict sense of the word, "primary" connotes first, the first stage of education (Pokalas and Nuhu, 2006). But like Nwagwu (1981) observes, "primary education in its usual accepted sense is not the first stage in the education of children. All children start receiving their first education in the home from the moment they are born".

Based on this fact, "primary" education is not really primary, and it is not always easy to see where it begins and ends, or even where it should begin and end. It is not an unchangeable God-given stage which has exactly the same meaning for everybody everywhere. However, the truth remains that primary school is a truly universal institution no matter its appellations (Pokalas and Nuhu, 2006). These institutions are in all part of the world catering for children of approximately the same age groups.

The National Policy on Education (2004) settled these controversies and defines primary education as "the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus". It further states the goals of primary education as follows:

- i. Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;

- ii. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- iii. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- iv. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- v. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- vi. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society with the limits of the child's capacity.

From the above background, it can be deduced that primary education goals have direct link with national development because a country, which aspires for national development must be literate, scientifically able and knowledgeable in all ramifications.

National Development

Development is not guaranteed by nature rather, man is responsible for it. Development according to Adewole (2000) means nothing but change through the transformation of ideas, technologies, and those cultural factors, structures and relationship that may resist development. So, change and transformation are prerequisites for development. Development takes place where there are visible changes in the society as a whole. Also, it takes place only where there are positive interactions and coordination among all the sectors.

National development, on the other hand, is the creation of a form of society in which the following conditions prevail for members:

- Safety, in that the society is generally non-violent and that individuals are protected from victimisation by the state or the police or each other;
- Sufficiency in that they have enough food, clothing and other material things so that they are not prevented from making the full use of their potential;
- Satisfaction, in that their lives are generally pleasant and that sufficiency is not achieved at the cost of psychological and cultural disruption and disturbance;
- Stimulus, in that the people are kept aware of their intellectual, emotional, social or spiritual potentiality and encourage to fulfil it (Pokalas and Nuhu, 2006).

Furthermore, national development can be assessed through:

- i. Increase in the real income of the average citizen;
- ii. An even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups;
- iii. High level of productivity and low level of employment and unemployment;

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- iv. Basic shelter – housing for normal living, recreation, offices, institutions and others;
- v. Effective management and use of agriculture, forestry and fisheries for providing food to the people in quality and quantity;
- vi. Attitudes and behaviours – patriotism, beliefs, attitude to work and public property, honesty, dedication and commitment to positive edifying values;
- vii. Right to self-respect and freedom and provision of infrastructural facilities (Ikwemelu, 1992).

Functional Primary Education for Nigeria

According to Adewole, (2000) functional primary education means an active and vibrant primary education rather than passive one. Functional suggests a system where attention is paid to activity or rather practical application of the subject of focus. Functional primary education is opposed to theoretical in the sense that it abhors speculation and deals rather with facts as presented by experience.

Functional primary education is not education concerned merely with knowledge but rather the practical application of knowledge based on the experience of the learner (Alaezi, 2000). It is being opposed to the education based on theoretical knowledge; that functional primary education is that education which in view of its practicality equips its products with skills.

The acquisition of skills by children at the primary education level, makes them functional and gainfully employed. So, the need to equip children with some basic occupational competence early enough becomes more obvious when we consider the transition rate from primary to secondary level in Nigeria. True, the skills that involve manipulation ability are more easily grasped when the learner is still young. It should be noted according to Pokalas and Nuhu, (2006) that when we make a case for a functional primary education it is not to say that at the end of the experience the child must have reached the point of independently starting up a trade or artisanship. Therefore, because functionalism here is that which calls for practical application of school knowledge, attitude and skills. Functionalism in primary education calls for the integration of useful community skills into school work.

There are five main learning situations, which correspond to the main objectives of functionalism of the primary education curricular structure. These according to Alaezi, (2000) include:

- a. Making primary school pupils learn through doing.
- b. Making community experts come to work alongside the pupils.
- c. Seminars, academic and practical group work with a teacher.
- d. Encouraging pupils to work together in small groups.
- e. Teaching pupils to work individually by themselves.

More so, functional primary education involves children's sound knowledge of their community, making the children to learn to value positively the norms and institutions, which are considered central to the community and helping the children to learn to identify and exploit opportunities offered by the community and its environment.

Primary Education and National Development

No nation of the world had attained a level of national development without first being pivoted on primary education. Most period of a nation's march to development are usually correlated with the primary sector. Functional primary education provides food for the individual and the community, in the long run contributes to GDP, provides basic level employment opportunities and raw material for the second stage of our educational tripod (Adewole, 2000).

The concept of functional primary education is skill, knowledge and personality factor combined to foster national development, which is seen as a positive change from developing and underdeveloped nation. Primary education affects national development by facilitating and setting the space for all forms of development. Primary education, perhaps more than the other levels of the education system. The Nigerian school system must prepare young people for the realities and needs of their country and society so as to contribute to national wealth for national development. This effort demands a radical change in our primary education system.

The Challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria

In spite of the contribution roles of primary education to national development, its development in Nigeria remains somehow sluggish, defective and neglected. Among the prominent defects are the quantity and quality of the teaching force, the education and training system, infrastructural materials, etc. Once primary education is neglected the road-map to national development begins to open ranks, the greatest obstacle towards the realisation of national development in Nigeria is the lack of giving primary education its rightful place as the foundation on which all other sectoral developments revolve.

Inadequate preparation of primary school teachers create insurmountable problems for pupil's learning (Oyetunde and Umoru, 2000). The general academic standards of students in Colleges of Education and other institutions of education is very low. Teachers with poor foundations inevitably produce pupils with poor foundations no matter the efforts of governments and others as well as supervisory agencies.

One particular interest is the assumption that a primary school learners will have been armed with requisite literary skills for further development in education. This is practically not so. At this age of primary education the child is not equipped or armed with the requisite literacy skills. True, no one will dispute the fact that the inculcation of literary skills in children should be the foremost

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emphasis of primary education. Unfortunately, evidence abound that primary education, as it is offered in government schools, is falling in this task of equipping children with the needed literary skills.

Conclusion

It is clear that functional primary education is a unique instrument for excellence for the development of the individual and the nation. So, growth in all facets of national life depends upon a primary and literate populace. This is so because the primary is where basic foundation to knowledge, skill acquisition and national development is laid.

The quality of the children's education depends on the quality of the primary school's teachers. In the same vein, the future of any nation depends on the quality of primary education and their children. The primary school's teachers are the builders of the future and the nation.

The Way Forward

The Nigerian school system should prepare young people for the realities and needs of their country and society so as to contribute to national wealth for national development. This can only be achieved if primary education is rightfully placed as the foundation on which all other educational developments revolve.

Primary education for national development must take into cognisance the various potentials primary education stands to offer. The present low morale of teachers resulting from poor condition of service especially at the primary school level and irregular payments of salaries in some states as well as the uncertain nature of their promotions are some of the reasons for a high rate of attrition among teachers in Nigeria. improved condition will go a long way to motivating them to stay on the job and attracting recruits into the noble profession.

Qualified teachers should be employed to teach at all the primary schools level. There should be adequate provision of funds by the government. Primary school teachers should also be well trained through seminars, workshop, conferences, etc. to be able to equip children with needed literary skills. Teaching materials should be provided to them adequately.

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