

THE PROBLEM OF FINANCING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Primary education is a foundation level of education that needs to be well funded, controlled and managed. In every nation of the world, primary education is considered as the first level towards formal education because it is upon it that every other level of the educational system is built. This paper addressed primary education, the importance of education, objective of primary education, its financing problems and suggestions are provided on how primary education should be funded.

Education is the basis upon which any nation places its national development plans without which it cannot have any meaningful development or growth. The world at large passes through a continuous process of development and change with innovations and both scientific and technological advancements that come with the learning process that is an integral part of life of human beings. For every nation on earth, advanced or undeveloped, education is a vital instrument of the continuous process of development and growth.

Primary education in Nigeria refers to the education which children receive from the age of 6years to 11years plus. It is the foundation level of the educational system which runs for six years and it is aimed are developing

basic literacy, numeracy communication skills and transmission of the culture of the people to younger generations. Information gathered through the education data bank shows that as at 1998, there were 41,814 primary schools with an enrolment of 16,348, 324 pupils. 13.75% of these were females. There are 468,770 teachers and (26.45%) of these were non-qualified teachers. The teacher: pupil ratio at that level was 1:38 while the completion rate was 64.1 percent.

The Importance of Education

In realization of the important role which education plays as an agent of national development and globalization, there has been agitation for more functional and qualitative education all over the world. In its broadest meaning, education is any

process by which an individual gain knowledge or insight or develops attitudes and skills. In its strict sense, it is a process to attain acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to the right reason and to achieve his perfect self-fulfillment. It is concerned with the cultivation of the whole person including intellectual, affective, characters and psychomotor development. It is the human resources, which ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development. According to Anyanwu (1997)

“Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organization, and carry forward national development. Clearly, a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else”.

It is the formal educational system that is the major institutional mechanism for developing such human skills and knowledge.

Improving and widening access to education, especially basic education

has been an objective of education policy in developing countries over the past two decades. This reflects the broad recognition that education contributes to development. Basic education is often considered a right which nations have a responsibility to guarantee to each generation and the benefits to education are by now well established. The evidence is overwhelming that education raises the quality of life. It improves health and productivity in market and non-market work, increase individual's success in paid employments and often facilitates social and political participation (Anyamwa, 1987).

The Importance of Primary Education

All over the world, primary education has been regarded as the most important as well as the most patronized by people. This, perhaps, may be due to the fact that it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit which is expected to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens. The importance of primary education can therefore be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by necessity, have to pass through this level (Oni, 2008).

What this means is that primary education which is defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus constitutes the bedrock upon which the entire education system is built. Indeed, the success and failure of the entire

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education system are determined by it and it is at the heart of the concept of basic education which entails the universalization of access of education (Oni, 2008).

Recognizing the importance of primary education, all governments in Nigeria (past and present) have placed premium on it by making primary education the center piece of their educational policies. During the colonial period and after independence in Nigeria there have been one form of educational reform or the other. This indicates that there is a link between the past and present in the educational development of Nigeria. Starting with the colonial period, Nigeria, having been colonized by Britain, adopted the British form of education, which consists of primary, secondary, sixth form as well as higher education (Fabunmi, 2005). However, the Islamic education had been in Northern protectorate before the amalgamation in 1914 and the Christian missionaries that came into the country through the western region were restricted from spreading both Christianity and western education to the northern region.

The Objectives of Primary Education

The federal government of Nigeria has seven general objectives of primary education, which it says, should form the basis of primary education in all state of the federation. The objectives, contained in paragraph 14 of

the national policy on education (FRN, 2004) are:

- a. The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- b. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- c. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- d. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- e. Develop in the child the ability to this changing environment;
- f. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulating skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- g. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Having seen the objectives of primary education programme in Nigeria, teachers and infrastructural materials should be provided. Teachers should be well trained and infrastructure materials needed for education should be properly financed in order to meet the needs and aspiration of the primary education in Nigeria.

Financing Primary Education in Nigeria

The period between 1976 and 1980 witnessed unprecedented growth at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. The federal military government had in October 1976 launched the Universal Primary Education Scheme throughout the country. This led to a phenomenal growth in the enrolment of pupils into primary school from six (6) million in the preceding year (1975/76) to 8.7million in 1976/77 to 12.5 million in 1979/80 (Fafunwa, 1985).

By launching the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976, Nigeria took a giant step toward the financing of education in Nigeria from the structures of service to the few privileged to absolute freedom of educational opportunities for the many more underprivileged. A project like the UPE needless to say comes with heavy financial burden.

In 1976 and 1978, the federal military government gave building grant N3.500 per classroom to state government and in addition, it gave N40 per pupil to states based on their declared enrolment figure towards payment of teacher salaries. The various state governments regarded the UPE programme as the initiative of federal government and therefore, left the funding almost exclusively to the government at the federal level (Fafunwa, 1995).

The total federal government expenditure on Universal Primary Education in the 1976/77 year was N386,311,433 on recurrent and N223,212,630 for capital expenditure (Fafunwa, 1995). In 1978, the price of oil dropped in the world market forcing the federal government to cut down the UPE building grants from N3,500 to N2,500 per classroom (Fafunwa, 1995) and local state governments and parents were asked to participate in the financing of UPE. This action marked the beginning of the crisis of funding primary education in Nigeria.

The enormous responsibility of financing the UPE programme was becoming too heavy a responsibility for the federal government to single-handedly handle. In 1980, a review of revenue allocation was carried out and the federal government share was reduced from 71 percent to 55percent while the shares of states and local governments were correspondingly increased. The then civilian federal government accordingly, decided to stop the funding of primary education and passed over the burden to both state and local governments. It was from that moment that the two arms of government began to default in the payment of primary school teachers and the acquisition of enough facilities for learning. When the 25th meeting of the National Council on Education (the highest national consultative body in education) met in Owerri-Imo State in July 1981, the various state

commissioners of education solicited for substantial financial assistance from the federal government in order to help prevent the UPE programme from collapse but the appeal fell on deaf ears (Fafunwa, 1995).

It is these persistent problems of sharing responsibility and the inability of reaching a stable compromise between the federal and state government that created and become the genesis of the problem of financing primary school education in Nigeria.

Problems of Financing Primary Education in Nigeria

In studying problem of financing primary education in Nigeria, it was imperative to look at the Nigeria Policy on Education (NPE) and its resulting problems of financing primary education in general.

With reference to some government policies, it has become evident that although both past and recent governments have come up with laudable primary school education programmes, the problems encountered have been as a result of poor evaluation of the problem, poor execution and implementation coupled with the official bureaucratic delays in implementing and carrying out government decisions.

Another problem that is evident is the attitude of neglecting reports and recommendations on problems forwarded to government that would have alleviated some of the problems facing the funding of primary education.

On the whole, the problem of funding has not been with the planning but largely with the manner of executing and implementing adopted policies.

It is clear that over the years, government has made efforts at improving and developing primary education through the introduction of programmes such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and now the Universal basic Education (UBE) the establishment of the primary education interim development fund etc. Despite the introduction of these programmes it is glaring that the problems of financing primary education are far from being over.

It is showing that the problems of:

1. poor execution of government policies on funding primary education
2. lack of proper and thorough evaluation of the problem
3. bureaucratic delays in release of funds
4. quasi-dependence of state develop policies on funding of primary education on revenue from the federal government.

Another major contributing factors is the problem of corruption and embezzlement by those charged with the responsibility of overseeing the financing of primary school education.

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This leads to examine why does the problem embezzlement arise.

The relationship between organizational characteristics and performance has attracted the attention of system theorists for the past few decades. Social system theorists points out that most units within an organization emanating from the society which is the cradle of any organization, interact with each other and therefore dependent on one another. Organizational process refer to both formal and informal interpersonal characteristics and actions that result when individual interact within an organization. Gelzel and Guba (1957) asserted that organization is a social system that includes an organizational dimension and individual dimension. The dynamic process of interaction between these two dimensions influence the working behavior of members within the organization. In Nigeria, the society in general has been deeply penetrated by corruption. Government officials and public service administration in Nigeria have embraced corruption and embezzlement as a means of survival. It is this trend that has led to the diversion of funds meant for the funding of primary education. The grave errors of the federal government at the initial implementation stages of the UPE programme, the decline in oil revenue to the federal government, the increasing demands of other sectors of the society coupled with the behavioural and organizational behaviours of those

charged with the responsibility of funding primary education have this problem of financing.

In the 55years of independence of the Nigerian federation, all the 5times that the military had intervened on the basis of corruption they themselves had severally been accused of embezzlement and corruption, diversion of public funds. It is no hidden fact therefore that corruption coupled with the individual and organizational behaviors responsible for the disbursement of public funds affected the funding of primary education.

One general fact, is that these problems of funding do exist and increasing by the day. Schools do not get prompt responses to requests, and yet, there is strong opposition to the idea of giving these schools, the full right to source funds on their own. It is therefore, inevitable that the responsibility of funding primary education will continue to lie with governments and that these schools will continue to be at the mercies of government. The management and financing of primary education is hereby dependent on government both at the local, state and federal levels. This heavy dependence on government for funds has only served to cripple rather than enhance the development and growth of primary education. This is because the financing of primary schools in particular and secondary and tertiary schools is very expensive venture that

requires substantial investments on the part of government which at the same time, has other enormous responsibilities in other sectors of the economy. There is the problem of poor planning and execution on the part of government of policies and programmes affecting the overall development of primary education in Nigeria. Examples of these are the problems encountered by government in 1976 when the Universal Primary Education programme was launched. Government encountered massive financial problems resulting from poor planning and execution of the programme.

At present, it has been established by the United Nations Information and Child Education Fund (UNICEF) that Nigeria ranks 7th amongst African nations that allocate the least of their resources to the funding of education especially at primary level with an estimated funding rate of ten percent. Another problem is the attitude of neglecting reports and recommendations of problem forwarded to government that would have alleviated if not erased some of the problems facing the funding of primary education. Generally, the problem of financing primary school education has been implementation of adopted policies. During the presidential budgetary speech of 1991, Decree No 3 of 1991 was announced. The president raised the local governments shares of the federation account from 10% to 15% and transferred the management and

funding of primary education to the local government education authorities. It was clear that the federal government did not want to continue to shoulder the burden of financing primary education. The government postulated however, that 5% increase to the local government share of the federation account would surpass N800milliins which had already been given in recent years then to the states by the federal government in aid of primary education.

Decree No. 3 of 1991 was promulgated in February 1991 and backdated to January 1. It established a local government education authority in every local government council in the whole of the country, including the federal capital territory of Abuja: - and Decree No. 3 of 1991 came to replace decree No. 31 of 1988. Irregular and non-payment of teachers' salaries resulted in closure of schools in several states sometimes for upwards of six months, as teachers embarked on industrial action. This situation prevailed, even as the local government council share of the federation account was increased from 15% to 20% with effect from January 1, 1992.

Conclusion

The primary education in Nigeria is not adequately funded. The leaders and those in authority can put head together and jointly fight the battle of solving the problems of primary education in Nigeria. This is not to say that government has not in the past made

credible attempts towards solving these problems but may be, a different and better approach can be conceived and applied in helping to solve the problem. Primary education is the key to the success or failure of the whole nations building since the rest of the education system is built upon it. According to Adepoju (1998) primary education is the type of education which is exposed to children in primary institution, where the child acquires fundamental knowledge, skills, thought, feelings and actions, which are considered necessary for all citizens, regardless of social status, vocation or sex. It should be noted that primary education has direct impact on earning, farm productivity and hence on development as a result of the cognitive skills of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills etc, that it impact on the pupils (World Bank, 1990;100). However, primary school has to be properly funded in Nigeria for development to take place.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to improve primary education and its funding:

1. Federal government should constitute a state education relief account that would keep money that would cover the payment of teachers' salaries etc that should be taken from the federal government account to supplement already existing revenue for the said purposes.
2. Government should put in place measures that would ensure honest acquisitions and distribution of instructional and teaching materials for primary education.
3. A strict code of conduct should be promulgated that would govern the behavior and attitude to duty of those directly responsible for the finance and management of primary schools in the country and strict adherence to the provision of this code of conduct should be ensured. This should serve to address the problem of incompetence.
4. There should be long term plans, including strategies, programmes and detailed plans of action and the application of methods and measures to ensure that the plan is implemented.
5. The Nigerian educational system should be geared towards self realization, better human relationships, self reliant, economic efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, unity, social and political progress etc. But all these objectives can be realized with adequate funding and sound managerial attitudes from those that are responsible for the funding of these schools.

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