

## REPOSITIONING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR JOB CREATION

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### **Abstract**

Primary Education is the cornerstone of all levels of education and this explains why nations all over the world has continued to emphasis on this aspect of education. The national policy of education is very explicit on the fundamental goals of primary education. But in recent times it appears that the product of this school find it extremely difficult to be functional in Nigerian scheme of things especially in matters relating to job creation. It is in his context that the paper examines the need to reposition primary education in the context of present realities and to achieve this, some constraints on the way to meaningful and functional primary education were x-rayed while far reaching recommendations on repositioning primary education for functionality were espoused

### **Introduction**

Primary Education is the foundation on which all other levels of education are supposed to rest. The National Policy of Education in line with the above (NPE)(2004) admits as much and described primary Education as the key to the success or failure of the whole system. In pursuance of the goal of providing a sound primary education, the policy provides among others that: (i) it shall be free, universal and compulsory.

- (ii) Duration shall be six years
- (iii) It shall be for children aged 6-11 plus
- (iv) Educational services (Library, health scheme, counseling, resource center and specialist teachers) to be supplied.

- (v) Teachers pupils ratio shall be 1:35 and
- (vi) Primary school leaving certificate shall be locally issued by the schools' head-teacher.

In the light f the foregoing, there is a strong need to strengthen and revitalized the primary level of education, so that even if the graduates do not eventually proceed to higher levels, they can still be self-reliant and function as useful members of the society. For this dream to be realized, it is absolutely important to identify some areas of constraints and confront such challenges to qualitative primary education in Nigeria.

This may equally involve repositioning the present school curricular

by identifying areas of need and ascertaining how to make it functional in the present dispensation.

### **The Place of Primary Education in Nigeria**

The realization of the right to education requires that young people should be given the opportunities necessary for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude and values which will enable them lead happy, satisfying and productive lives as individuals and discharge their social and civic duties for the betterment of life in their society. Realizing the importance of education, Article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights made the following assertions about education:-

- Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least, in elementary stages.
- Elementary Education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- Parents have prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

In Nigeria, chapter II, section 18 sub sections 1-3 under fundamental objectives and principles of state policy states as follows:-

- 1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

- 2) Government shall promote science and technology

- 3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide:

- (1) Free, compulsory and universal primary education
- (2) Free secondary education (FRN, 2004).

As usual, resource supplies and handling have remained the critical factors influencing policy implementation at this level of education. In the first part of the paper teaching personal and facilities as interrelated critical factors are explored. The second part of the paper is on repositioning of primary education in the face of contemporary realities.

### **Quality of Teachers Recruited and their Retention**

In Nigeria, education is perceived as an instrument “per excellence” for effecting national development. (NPE, 2004:4). While the belief and confidence in education as the process of unlocking the doors to development subsist, it can also be hypothesized that the teacher holds the key to that door. It is also agreed that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004:39). Also, Adewumi (2004) asserted that, “the teacher is the key person in the nations education enterprise whose quality of training could mar or improve the education results”.

Starting from the point of their admission as they enter the teacher education training programmes, the

Nigerian teachers including those for the primary schools suffer from low morale. In the days past, training institutions according to Okeke (2004) had the opportunity of being involved in the process of selecting their prospective entrants for certain desirable qualities.

So far, those recruited into the teacher education programmes are generally of poor quality. Trainees with low academic qualifications go into teachers education perhaps because they lack alternative professional choices. Other factors contributing towards low quality of teachers are lack of build-in-incentives and enabling environment. In this regard, Njoku (2005) posited that even when they retire from service, some of them are not paid their retirement entitlement till they die. He added that this phenomenon does not only affect job performance but also his psyche, hence retaining teachers on the job is difficult. The situation is that teachers stay on the job while waiting for better alternative. This tendency has continued to rob the teaching profession of the quality and experienced teachers and therefore places the education of our children in the hands of inexperienced and half baked teachers which does not guarantee quality instruction delivery.

#### **Dearth of Instructional aids in Schools**

Facilities are the part of the major production variables in primary education. Facilities required at this level other than those included in educational services are furnished classroom, science/vocational laboratories, sports equipment, and

playground. Over the years, these kind of facilities have dwindled in schools. Where they once existed, they are not made available (Adewola 1999). Whereas the NPE (2004) stated that science, agriculture, Home economics and computer education be taught at the primary level, in many schools, particularly those located in the rural areas facilities for instructions in these subject areas were never supplied adequately (Adewola 1999).

Facilities supply have been very epileptic, while its management has been very inappropriate in the primary schools.

#### **Issues and Discussion**

Nowadays, there are a number of factors which pose threats and challenges to implementation of primary education policy in Enugu State. These factors are growing phenomenon in the ecology of the primary education system. They present challenges in areas of re-planning, and administration. Specifically, educational planners and administrators desire to address the issues of multiplicity of private schools, politicization of the system, admission of under-aged, examination frauds, elongated school hours, and non application of collaboration by school administrators. This is with a view to minimizing and if possible eliminating them as current and emerging sources of crises in the implementation process.

#### **2. Multiplicity of Private Schools**

In the last few years, there is an upsurge of privately owned primary schools across the country. In Enugu

State, records indicate that the number of such schools is 849 while those owned by government is 1158 (ESBEB, 2007). If the number of unapproved schools in this category is taken, the private primary schools will no doubt, out number that of the government.

Although the increasing number of privately owned schools could be seen as a vote against the public schools, the operation of these schools deserve attention. Private schools, most of which are not government approved, operate in uncompleted buildings, where pupils are stalked in little spaces, ordinarily built as bedrooms and garages.

Observation revealed that teachers in most private schools do not have the qualifications stipulated by the policy. The growing number of private schools and its attendant inadequacies in their management outfits are enough to attract attention.

### **3. Politicization of the System**

The politicization of primary education in Nigeria in recent times is one of the factors giving rise to crises in the implementation process. In terms of control, the external bodies in charge of management of primary education are the State Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Board and Local Education Authority (Obi, 2004).

In addition, there are other interventional bodies established to ameliorate the problems of the public primary school system. They include the Local Government Education Authorities, the local government councils, and the

Universal Basic Education Board. As usual, appointments into the governing boards and councils of these bodies are often politicized. Serious considerations may be given to professionalism and competency at the federal level. At the state and local government levels, appointments into these bodies are mainly based on political consideration. This is because the governing boards of these bodies are seen as very lucrative. As a result, appointees into the boards are cronies of the state chief executives and party loyalists. The over bearing influence of government extends beyond the composition of these boards. It is visible in the recruitment and promotion of teachers.

It should be noted that politics and intrigues can only breed incompetence and crises in the system management particularly, at the school level. In effect, policy implementation is in jeopardy.

### **4. Admission and Graduation of Under-Aged**

The required age of those entering the primary school is six years. The duration is also six years (N.P.E, 2004:14). The same policy document recognizes Early childhood or pre-primary education. Early Childhood Education (ECE) was initially conceived to help working mothers in the care of their children. In other words, it started as a mother-centred concept in order to release the women to join the world of work. (Maduwesi 2005:39)

These days as noted by Asogwa (2004) the emphases on early child

education now generate children between the ages of 4 and 5 years as potential entrants into the primary school. In the same manner, the six years duration for primary education has been reduced to five years by most private primary school operators. In effect, children now graduate from the primary schools between at the ages of nine and ten years. This phenomenon is a distortion of the policy and has serious implication for the management of the system. In the circumstance, teachers and school heads are being compelled to dish instructions to under-aged children.

#### **5. Examination Frauds**

It has been asserted that our school leavers are not exhibiting the kinds of behavioural pattern that the schools are expected to transmit for the social control of the nation (Tahir, 2007). This raises the question of efficacy of the entire production process particularly the final examinations which mark the end point in the quality control efforts in the system.

Certification at this level is expected to be based only on continuous assessment and to be done locally by the class room teachers and head teachers of the school. Unfortunately however, the prevailing practices is that certification is done on the basis of examination administered for the purpose by the state's ministry of education. Most times, the conduct of these examination are usually shrouded with malpractices, a phenomenon which has rendered most Nigerian certificates inferior in the outside world.

It is highly contended that no problem is as threatening to the primary education system as that of examination malpractices.

Examination malpractice is a product of corruption and social decay of the Nigerian society. This situation has become a pull down factor in the policy implementation efforts in the schools. As things are now, there may be no solution to this phenomenon. This is because, teachers and even parents are collaborators in the shameful game. The situation is likely to be worsened when head teachers starts to issue certificates locally. At that time, certification especially obtainable grades are likely to be on "cash and carry" basis.

#### **6. Elongated School Hours**

Earlier, it was stated that private sector participation in the provision of primary education is on the increase. As a private business, it is profit-driven and proprietor controlled. This situation coupled with the need to keep children busy beyond 12 -1 pm as their mothers remain at work, has forced many private school owners to introduce after school 'lessons'. These lessons last up to 4pm and even beyond in some schools. Since after school lessons have become a veritable source of additional financial resources to the school and the teachers, many public schools in the urban setting have joined in the practice.

Although, the policy did not prescribe the number of hours which constitute a school day, the extension of the school day by a minimum of two hours

can be counter productive. As the popularity of “after-school-lessons” increases in the primary schools, there is need for a more result-oriented management approach in the circumstance. This should be with a view to enhancing productivity and protecting the physiological and psychological development of the child.

#### **7. Dwindling Collaborative Efforts**

The management of the school is not the sole responsibility of the head teachers and his colleagues. It was in this regards the Parent-Teachers-Association, School Committees, Board of Governors were formed and encouraged as collaborative outfits in school management. The NPE (2004) gave impetus to this when it started that “—government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and organizations”.

Until recent years, these collaborative outfits were used to source resources for schools, to ensure the provision of teachers where they were under supplied. The efforts of these bodies are noticeable in private schools which ought to have been seen as the exclusive ventures of the proprietors. It cannot be challenged that there can never be a healthy understanding, obligation and commitment to school progress on the part of parents, without involving them meaningfully in the decision making process.

This is the dilemma of the Present day primary education management. Imana (2006) affirmed that “The parent-

Teacher-Association (PTA) which used to be the platform for cross fertilization of ideas concerning the school and the children are fast diminishing” in the school system. Headed, 80% of head teachers who responded on the issue in his study complained that parent responses to PTA meetings were generally poor.

#### **Conclusion**

Dearth of facilities, poor teacher recruitment, and retention and other concomitant variables are constraint to successful implementation of policy guidelines in primary schools. Consequently, these cannot guarantee the production of quality primary school graduates and so cannot be self-sustaining. As a reversal of this trend, it become very obvious that useful suggestions and recommendations are offered in the context of the present reality.

#### **Recommendation**

It is hereby recommended that as antidote to these observed lapses in the implementation of policy guidelines, the following measures are suggested.

1. Qualified and experienced teachers should be employed and retained and one of the ways to achieve this is by enhancing the condition under which they work.
2. Facilities should be supplied in proportion to class sizes and maintenance culture stressed.
3. Most of the private primary schools that operate in dilapidated and uncompleted buildings should be closed down by withdrawing the

earlier approval granted them. A situation where pupils are made to sit on bare floor and receive their lesson is not only wicked but an abuse to humanity which is demeaning to the worth of man and therefore, should be discouraged.

4. Public primary schools should be made attractive to regain the confidence of parents. It is only by so doing that a vote of no confidence can be passed on to some of these private primary schools which operate on make shift environments, a scenario considered very dangerous to teaching and learning.
5. Schools that elongate the school hours by way of teaching private lessons after the normal school hours should take into consideration the maturational level of the pupils under their tutelage and hence their attention span. This is very important so that their efforts in this regard will not be counter productive.
6. The curriculum has to be redesigned to accommodate subjects that are skill oriented. By this way, emphasis should be on teaching the pupils how to acquire skills in drawing, painting, molding, carving etc. Upon mastery of these skills, pupils, on graduation, can now create jobs themselves instead of waiting for white collar jobs that are very few.

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