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## Primary Education: Integral Tool for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Education is the necessity for the betterment of individual and the rapid transformation of the society. Nigeria is one of the E-9 countries of the world having highest proportion of illiterate young children. A country where majority of her citizens lacks education would definitely continue to dwell in the quagmire of underdevelopment. This is because; knowledge is the right that fuels prosperity. Sustainable development may only be attainable if the younger generations are duly educated at their tender ages. This paper therefore discusses the concept and objectives of primary education in Nigeria, issues related to primary education, problems faced by the primary education, and way forward. The paper also proffers some suggestions, which serve as remedy to the problems. This among others include involvement of intellectuals in the nation's politics in order to correct the endemic being created by the 385 in our educational system,*

*more particularly primary education which is the basis of all other levels of our educational system.*

The need for primary education all over the world cannot be over emphasized. This is because, it is regarded as the foundation on which other level of our educational system are built. It is in this regard that the Nigerian Government in her National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) state that primary education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Ogbonna (2003) opined that every country gets the kind of education (in essence and quality) that it deserves.

On the other hand, sustainable development cannot take place in a vacuum. There must be transition of sound, moral behaviour from one generation of children to another. This can only be achieved through a qualitative primary education that will serve as a link that will enable a child to participate effectively in a more structural educational environment, getting along with others, developing a sense of self and appreciation of group-thinking (Florence.&Inakwu. 2011). A good primary education breeds appropriately leaning experience which will be suitable and relevant to the growing needs and background of the learners. The federal and state government of Nigeria places greater premium on the importance of permanent and functional literacy and effective communication among every Nigeria child. This is because, for Nigeria to qualify as a civilized society its teeming population should acquire some form of basic permanent level of literacy. The starting point for the acquisition, revolves around the child. The literate man of today was a child of yester years. As a result, the education given to the children at their formative stage of development is accorded every bit of prominence and concern.(Pokalas, 2008). It is in light of all these, that, this paper focuses on issues of primary education in Nigeria, its problems and prospects, and the way forward, as the issue present a serious draw back on children educational development and thus hinders society's growth and development.

### **Concept of Primary Education and Its Objectives in Nigeria**

Primary school is the foundation of education in all countries of the world. In Nigeria, the concept of primary school is optlystated in the National Policy on Education (2004), 'as the education given in institution for children aged 6 to 11 years plus.' According to Adepoju, (1988) in Orimidu, (2004), primary education is the type of education which is exposed to children in primary institution, where the child acquired fundamental knowledge and skills, through feelings and actions which are considered necessary for all citizens, regardless of social status, vocation or sex. Primary school according to Emeh, (1991), is regarded as the most important foundation on which to build the future. In addition Ekpo (1993), opined that, primary education consists of all the knowledge, skills, facts, which are important to children between the ages of five and twelve years.

Nevertheless, primary school is our children's initial point of contact with formal learning. In the past, the age at which the children come in to the primary school is 6 years plus, this excludes the hurried children who enter and leave earlier than this age. It is in this respect that Nigeria National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), stated the objectives of primary school education in Nigeria as:

- (a) To inculcate permanent literacy, and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
- (b) To lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (c) To give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in the contribution of the life of the society;
- (d) To mould the character and develop sound attitudes and moral in the child;
- (e) To develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- (f) To give the opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in it society within the limits of the child's capacity;
- (g) To provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trade and crafts of the locality.

The above are the laudable objectives or goals of the Nigeria primary education. Now, to be sincere with ourselves, does Nigeria primary education still able to achieve these goals? The most honest answer to this question is unequivocally, No. very few primary education pupils can achieve any of these goals as they leave school. These unhealthy products are placed in to the secondary schools and from the secondary to the tertiary institutions. Hence. The half baked graduates we have around today (Onyachom, 2011).

### **Issues of Primary Education in Nigeria**

Education is a process where-by one generation passes onto the next its knowledge and wisdom. Primary education helps to prepare young people for their active participation in the maintenance and development of the society. Education is a process that developed the human mind, the personality, the potentials and impact useful and relevant skill to individuals, thereby enhancing growth of the society. In essence, primary education prepares human minds and enables them to cope with the future challenges in life. Although there are some who think that primary education is an unnecessary luxury education, such people did not complete their primary education, or do not have experience of primary education at all.

Similarly, Akinbote, Odulowu, & Bashir, (2001) believe that there are those who are not against nursery and primary school education of the child, rather they are against the sub-standard of some primary schools established, which cannot provide the type of stimulation required for the child's proper growth and development. They further maintained that, in order to prevent a situation where by the child's rate of

maturation is retarded and eventually reduce his level of achievement as a result of lack of certain opportunities at home; the need for primary education is inevitable.

Primary education enhances effective brain development of a child and leads him into maturity and increases his level of achievement in future. Now, the Federal Government of Nigeria in an effort to make primary education a priority to all citizens towards eradicating illiteracy and deteriorating situations in primary schools, established a commission, which is known as National Primary Education commission (NPEC) as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education by Decree No.31 in 1988. According to Maisamari (2005), the Federal Government directly intervened in the funding and management of primary education through this commission but later NPEC was unexpectedly abolished by Decree No.2 January 1991.

Yet, seeing the importance of primary education to a nation like Nigeria, NPEC was re-established by Decree 96 of 1993 and by 2001 it was absorbed by Universal Basic Education. which is currently in practice.

### **Problems Associated with Primary Education in Nigeria**

Isaac (2000) opined that there are a lot of problems associated with the operation of primary education in Nigeria. Although government at her own end, has been trying to see that such problems are solved or brought to a minimal bearing level. The problems he discussed among others are as follows:

1. Lack of adequate finance
2. Mismanagement of funds
3. Lack of qualified teachers
4. Inadequate supervision by government officials
5. Poor condition of service
6. Over- population in schools.

**Lack of Adequate Finance:** Poor funding has been identified as one of the factors responsible for the deteriorating state of the primary schools. The level of funding is so pathetic that some schools can hardly supply chair to the teachers to do their jobs. Under this state of financial need, what type of study do you expect? Abdul,(2007) were of the view that,as a result of inadequate funding, most of the school have no fund to carry out practical's. Of course, these lacks are detrimental to the primary schools as teaching in the primary school is supposed to be by practical, explanatory, and experimental methods (FRN, 2004). Without fund to provide the requirements for these activities, learning will definitely be hampered.

**Mismanagement of Funds:** The system of fund management in Nigerian Primary schools is causing a lot of problems as the money meant for the actual project as allocated in the state budget are mostly diverted or used for other purposes by the top

management since from the source i.e. states Ministry of Education, and in most cases embezzled. To this end, lack of proper fund management for proper execution of primary school programme is becoming a serious matter of concern.

**Lack of Qualified Teachers:** This problem is common at all levels of our education system. It is however, acute at the lower levels where those that were trained to teach are not teaching, thinking that since it is a primary school it does not matter. But, this assumption is wrong. They took up the teaching appointment because they had no immediate alternative. As soon as they get another job elsewhere, they drop the chalk and go their own way. Although government has placed considerable attention to training of teachers yet the turnout is not adequate.

**Inadequate Supervision:** Primary schools are mostly not effectively supervised. Probably because the supervisors are too limited in number to go round the schools, or lack necessary logistics for the supervisors. These perhaps explain why teachers in such schools do not always take their job with all the seriousness it deserves.

**Poor Condition of Service:** Primary school teachers are passing through dehumanization situation from neglect, poor and unpaid salary, deprivation, non-promotion, low prestige and uncondusive working environment. These among other problems, have severely dampened the professional pride among teachers. As a result, teaching is used as stepping stone to other more lucrative jobs.

**Over-Population in Schools:** The recommended student population in a single classroom should not exceed 1:30 or at most a maximum of 35 (teacher student ratio; 1:35) (UNESCO, 2000, FGN 2006). But statistics from Federal Ministry of Education shows that as far back as 1994 the teacher-pupils ratio is 1:50 in 39221 public-primary schools and this keeps escalating annually (Oamiye, and Buari, 2011).

Therefore, one may practically see that, currently in most of our primary schools more especially in urban and semi-urban centres the ratio is almost-1:100 or even more. This is a very serious issue more especially if it comes to the issue of quality of education to be received by our younger generation.

### **Solutions to the Problems Facing Primary Education in Nigeria.**

- (1) Funding of primary school education should be made one of the top priority in government plans. All funds that is meant for a project in primary schools be judiciously used. Government should leave no stone unturned on any public servant who enriched himself by using public money. This will surely check the issue of corruption in managing primary education fund.

- (2) Recruitment of adequate qualified teachers in order to reduce the high teachers-pupil ratio per class and for more effective teaching.
- (3) Intensive monitoring and supervision joint committee of all the three tiers of government i.e. federal, state, and local government to ensure that, right things are done at the right time in the right place in all primary schools.
- (4) There should be improved salary and conditions of service for teachers. The government should implement the proposed teachers' salary scale (TSS) to revive hope and confidence in primary schools teachers, and thereby improve the quality of their services. That could attract talented young people to the profession.
- (5) Enough infrastructures should be made available in primary schools all over the federation. Any little loop-hole should quickly be checked, and any projects meant for primary school must be executed without delay. These include things like building, electricity, water supply, and so on. Libraries, workshops and other specialized rooms should also be made available in all primary schools. This is in order to meet the demand of our ever increasing esteemed citizens.

### **Conclusions**

Education being a fundamental human right, every child is entitled to it. It is critical to our development as individuals and as a society. Nigeria as a country has had a number of plans toward improving her educational standards, yet there are a lot of obvious shortcomings that are affecting the system more particularly the primary school education. More also, in this era of globalization and knowledge economy the importance of primary school education has become apparent that no one may have second thought about it. This is because, education equips the individual with relevant knowledge, skills and values to live as useful and contributes maximally toward social, economic, political and even moral national development. The foundation of all our education system is the primary school. Therefore, as a matter of fact, something very reasonable and urgent must be done in order to rescue the falling standard of our education from the grassroots, if the dream of sustainable development is to be achieved in future.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion and conclusion of this paper, the following recommendations were made.

1. There should be regular recruitment of more teachers and expansion of existing schools facilities to cater for the ever rising students' population.
2. Government intervention to primary schools be timely and be able to stand the test of time.

3. Better condition of service should be given to primary school teachers like in most other profession e.g. medicals and so on. So as, to attract and retain more people in it.
4. Intellectuals should go into politics as they better know the value of education in order to correct those problems that are been created by our political system.
5. Transparency and accountability should be ensured through the anti-corruption agencies.

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