

ENHANCING PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Education has long been regarded world as a panacea for improving the individual and consequently the nation in the political, economic and social sectors of the polity. Primary school education holds key to the laying of that solid foundation of the other tiers of education. For now, that sector is beset with a myriad of seemingly insoluble problems. An examination of the problems besetting this sector still raises the hope that the sector can be revamped if all the suggestions proffered are seriously examined by policy makers and fully implemented by professional actors on the stage in the nation's primary education sector.

Introduction

Education is a process that attempts to develop the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain areas of its recipients. Through education, the individual is helped to attain his or her optimum in his manifest and latent potentialities. The government too has long recognized the fact that education is the only panacea that can be effectively utilized to tap to the fullest its human resources- Ultimately, it is the human resources development of any nation that is responsible for the pace or degree of a nation's political, social or economic ladder. Therefore, if education through its curricular programmes in schools is unable to offer the type of experiences required to tap maximally, the potentialities of its recipients than no other variable can. Since the advent of colonial education, education has for long been looked upon as the magic wand for improving and rising the quality of an individual's life. In the same vein, it is deemed to enhance productivity in all areas of activity as well as facilitate participation in political, social and economic life. At no other level, other than the primary educational sector should the clarion call for functionality in the educational programme be drummed, for effectiveness. Dissatisfaction still abounds in this sector of education.

The Primary Education Sector

The primary school sector, apart from the kindergarten or nursery (for those who were opportuned to attend) wields the most intense impact of any school in the educational system. The first year of the child at this level is just one sixth of his or her entire life to that point. Therefore, the lack of adequate provision for group and individual differences frequently can result in intense feelings of failure and rejection as well as retardation or elimination from school for some children. Failure to achieve in any of the essential functions of the elementary school level can exact a high price at other levels where the resulting deficiency can hardly be overcome. The National Policy on Education (1994 revised) stipulates six years of primary education for the Nigerian school child. During this period the child is expected to exhibit the following developmental tasks according to Hass (1993):

- Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games;
 - Building wholesome attitudes toward oneself as a growing organism;
 - Learning to get along with age mates;
 - Learning an appropriate masculine or feminine social role;
 - Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing and calculating;
 - Developing concepts necessary for everyday living;
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- Developing conscience, morality, and a scale of values;
 - Achieving personal independence;
 - Developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions.

These developmental tasks are supposed to be achieved through the following objectives as spelt out by the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1994):

- The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity;
- Providing basic tools for the further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The subjects currently being taught to bring about the realization of the above listed loadable objectives are: English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Physical Education, Health Education,¹ Integrated Science, Home Economics, Moral and Religious Education, Cultural and Creative Arts: (Music/Drama etc.), Handicraft, Agriculture, Citizenship Education, Nigerian Language, if the objectives of education are to be matched with the subjects that are supposed to elicit the values implied in primary school education, it would look like this.

Table 1: Objectives and Subjects

	Objectives	Curricular Content
1.	Right values and attitudes for survival.	Integrated sciences, cultural and creative arts, music/drama, religious educ., agric science, health handicrafts etc.
2.	Understanding the world.	Social studies, Int. science, mathematics, languages.
3.	Acquisition of practical skills.	Handicrafts, creative arts, practical agriculture, home economics.
4.	National consciousness and unity.	Citizenship education, civics, Nigerian language, music/drama.

However, the Implementation Committee on National School Curriculum discovered that the common list on time tables in state schools are the following: English Language, Maths, Elementary Science, Social Studies, Health Science, Physical Education, Home Economics, Domestic Science, Gardening/Agriculture, Signing/Music, Handwriting, Nigerian Language, CRS/IRS and Moral Instruction.

Problems Facing Primary Schools

In spite of bending the national curriculum to suit perceived state specifications, it is still discovered that dissatisfaction with the products of primary school abounds all over the country. Mwoltu (1991) discovered in his survey on the performance of primary schools in one local government area in Plateau State that: even local government officials including those managing education, head teachers, class teachers, parents and even pupils themselves were dissatisfied with the performance of primary school products in terms of their scores, performance in public examinations and their acquisition of basic skills for effective participation in the community.

Macauley (1991) also discovered that classroom environments vary between one local government area and the other. While some are more conducive to learning others are not. She also identified among other problems the need to properly train teachers.

Other myriads of constraints to curricular implementation gathered from nine different sources in one state. Ministry of Education, Local Government Council members, Local Government Education Department officials, traditional heads and elders, religious education bodies and authorities, teachers, parents, pupils, and Education Research Council reveal among others the following:

- Over ambitious programmes plus too many schools.
- Shortage of funds. Too little supervision.
- Non-involvement of local communities in policy formation.
- Lack of capital investment, grant and effective P.T.A.
- Rampant indiscipline.
- Lack of integration of the traditional, cultural and moral training in the curriculum.
- Insufficient classroom furniture, equipment and desks.
- Poor or unforced conditions of service for teachers and low teacher morale.
- Indiscipline among teachers and pupils alike.
- Absence of moral and religious instruction in schools; no schemes of work or lesson plans.
- No teacher guides or teaching aids.
- Unenlightened communities.
- Need for teacher's accommodation near schools.
- Absence of parent's enlightenment about values of education.
- Poor relationship between communities and schools.
- Increasing incidence of disobedience in children.
- Low competence of teachers.

Though some of these problems cut across all the states of the federation, each state has its own peculiarities. Some of the common problems include overcrowded classroom, lack of funds, lack of resource materials, lack of teaching staff, unprofessional teachers, low rapport between the schools and their communities, and parental attitude to education.

Curricular Elements to be Seriously Addressed

Any recognized institution operates a formal curriculum. A formal curriculum addresses the elements of:

- 1) Determination of objectives.
- 2) Selection of content.
- 3) Selection of learning experiences.
- 4) Organization and integration of content and learning experiences.
- 5) Evaluation.

The government through its curricular agencies normally addresses the first two elements. For now, there is nothing wrong with government's specification on the objectives identified for this level as well as the curricular content. Though (here has been criticism that the content is too large, this paper is of the opinion that it is not, if (he specified objectives are to be realized.

Secondly, it should also be noted that curriculum is a dynamic concept which is supposed to take cognizance of the changing demands of the society. The only area where the government has failed is its nonchallant attitude of making sure that it is revised every four or five years to cater for current societal exigencies.

Thirdly, it is a glaring fact that as a result of technology and its profound effect on all sectors of life, children are changing biologically, intellectually, and sociologically and in other ways. These changes are researchable and are a very definite reality. So the curriculum is expected to address these changing needs in children. That is exactly what the expanded curricular content had done.

The elements that need very serious attention are the last three elements on the selection of learning experiences, organization and integration of content and learning experiences and evaluation. Research indicates that a learner learns what he does. The experiences to which students should be exposed must satisfy the criteria of learnability, cumulation, interest, variety, and validity. Remembering Burner's, thesis of anything being taught to any child provided it is done in "an intellectually honest form; can the nation boast of the fact that all its primary school teachers can . teach effectively in the class? Have they been sufficiently exposed to the pedagogical skills needed-by them in the effective and efficient dissemination of information? Are they sufficiently remunerated-to be motivated enough in the sincere discharge of their duties? Has the government boldly told untrained teachers to get themselves trained so as to be relevant in the present system? Above all has the open door policy to the teaching profession been

closed? These and many more questions need to be addressed.

For learning experiences to be fully integrated, government needs to provide the required teaching resources in terms of equipment, furniture, equipped and attractive classrooms etc. It is not unusual, to see students either sitting on bare classrooms for their lessons or subjected to the drudgery of bringing their own benches from home on a daily basis. Are these the conditions that will facilitate learning? Subjects like Home Economics, Agriculture Education, Health Education, Handicraft and Integrated Sciences need copious resources and facilities beyond the ordinary textbook to make meaningful impact in the lives of the children and engineer them towards specialization in those areas. The simple truth is that education has been relegated to the background for too long by the Nigerian governments, local, state and federal. The truth is that any nation that toys with the development of its citizenry through education is imperceptibly destroying the political, and socio-economic fabrics that catapult any nation in the realm of affairs, nationwide and worldwide. If anybody doubts this, why are private schools succeeding where public schools are failing? So, where teachers have not taught well, either because of their own personal handicap or government's handicap or both, definitely results can never be achieved.

The third element that needs serious attention is evaluation. Teachers must teach well and students must reciprocate through learning before evaluation takes place. The current emphasis on evaluation nationwide incorporates the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domain areas of learning. Not only that, this type of evaluation demands a wide variety of instruments like interviews, observations, rating scales, questionnaires etc. among others and the popular pencil and paper tests. Apart from this, their use demands a lot of time. How many teachers use these instruments to evaluate their students? How many of them are trained in their use? How many of the even know that these instruments exist? Do they even know the objectives they are pursuing in their various subject areas? These days, teachers at this level now and then embark on strike because of wages and conditions of service. So, where a teacher has not performed well, he or she now connives with his students in examination malpractice. This is a child to whom he should be a model, a model of identification. So, where is the moral in such a teacher? This type of teacher or teachers fail to realize that this stage of education represents the foundation for all other levels to be built upon. Where the foundation is hazy, faulty or shaking or awkward, no one should expect miracles from the other levels. Therefore, the foundation laid at the primary school level yesterday is the fruit manifesting today while at the same time, the foundation for tomorrow's future is being laid today. All teachers may not be guilty of some of these misdemeanours but since a tree does not make a forest, the impact of these few teachers is being overwhelmed by a general sense of decadence.

Which Way Out?

The entire primary school sector needs complete overhauling to rid it of its present state of decadence, through the following:

- ✓ Complete overhauling of the nation's classrooms to make them attractive for learning.
- ✓ Untrained teachers should immediately be shown the way out or should be sponsored for in-service training.
- ✓ Copious resources should be made available and teachers should be trained in their use.
- ✓ The world is gradually becoming a global village so information technology should feature in all the nation's primary schools.
- ✓ The open door policy in teaching should forever be sealed.
- ✓ Inspectors from the Ministry of Education should do their work thoroughly and painstakingly.
- ✓ The Parent Teacher Association should be inaugurated where there is none and the existing ones should not be allowed to die.
- ✓ A serious monitoring team should be set up by each state to monitor the activities of the schools apart from those from the Ministry of Education.
- ✓ Awards should be given to schools which excel in Common Entrance Examination and which have not been influenced by the Nigerian factor.
- ✓ Disciplinary measures should be instituted for schools that fail to comply with set standards
- ✓ Primary school curricula should be revised every four or five years to cater for the changing need of the society.
- ✓ Questionnaires should be administered by the Ministry of Education to both staff and students of

schools on yearly basis to sound their opinions on a number of curricular issues as it affects their operations.

Conclusion

In conclusion however, it is to be noted that Nigerians have never lacked words to express their yearnings and problems in the educational sector but nothing seems to be happening. Year in year out, conferences, seminars and workshops have been organized but the result and effect of the recommendations proffered are yet to be effected in the educational sector. What can be done to reverse this trend so that education can once again regain its rightful place in the scheme of things?

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