

REPOSITIONING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FLORENCE CHINWE EBOLUME

*Department of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education,
Federal College of Education (Technical) Gombe,
P.M.P. 060 Gombe, Gombe state.*

Abstract

There is no doubt that petroleum (crude oil) has contributed substantially to Nigeria revenue since its discovery in 1956 and more especially since 1970 when its price was on the upward trend. It is however a well-known fact that Nigerian's continuous large earning or revenue from the sector will be impossible due to the reduction in oil price. It is a known fact across the globe that for a country to attain growth and development, youth empowerment must be preeminence. As a matter of fact, there is an urgent need for the Nigerian government to begin looking into sustaining the economy through the educational sector so as to attain solid economic growth. For this to be effectively done, primary education must be preeminent. This paper therefore focuses on the repositioning primary education for sustainable youth empowerment and national development. It emphasizes the need for special attention on primary education both in terms of qualified teachers, improvisation of equipment and facilities and time scheduling. The paper recommended that the federal, state and local government should make provision and incorporate entrepreneurship in primary education curriculum for sustainable youth empowerment and national development.

Keywords- Repositioning, Sustainable, Empowerment, Primary Education and National Development

Introduction

Education is the key, Education is the Pillar and Education is the cornerstone. It starts from the cradle and that is where the tap root is formed. Without effective education at the childhood level, the future is bleak. Functional education in every woman endeavor cannot be overlooked because it is seen as the corner stone of every development. It forms the basics of literacy, skill acquisition, technology advancement as well as the ability to harness the national resources of the country for optimum productivity.

Education institution should be properly maintained because according to (Nwakocho, 2006) management in education aims at using both human and material resources available to education system for the realization of education objectives. It is only when the objectives of education are realized that the gain of education will manifest. It is always maintained that for the full development of an individual, education is the answer. Government investment in primary education can be an essential component in youth empowerment and national development.

Education can also be viewed as a discipline comprising a body of knowledge, skills, values and experiences designed to be learned by members of a society in order to guide them in the society approved direction and enable them achieve their goals and aspiration (Anero, 2018). This implies that education is the only means by which the individual can acquire specialized knowledge and skills. Therefore no country toys with education of their citizens, recognizing that they are the wealth of the nation.

Formal education is one of the fundamental rights as contained in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which stipulates that “everyone has the right to education” (adopted by the UN General Assembly, 1949). It has been recognized in all countries of the world that formal education is the cornerstone for sustainable youth empowerment and national development.

Primary Education for Sustainable Youth Empowerment

Primary Education, as the name implies, is prime. It must therefore, be given prime position and we have to learn that the primary task is to do first things and well (Aminu, 1990). As it sounds, primary education is a pre-requisite not only to secondary and tertiary education but to continuing education. Children need sound primary education as much as a house needs real solid foundation in order to stand. Primary education is the gateway to whatever individuals can achieve through education. Primary education is the most crucial stage in educational development of the individual. It is at this stage that the child is given the background preparation for his educational careers by equipping him with the basic knowledge of his physical and social environment as well as the courses available in secondary and tertiary institutions.

Nwangwu (2008) defined primary education as the first stage of education. The new national policy on education (2014) defined primary education as that given in an institution for children aged six to eleven years plus. Since the rest of the educational system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was the Federal Government effort to salvage the primary education system which is the foundation stone of other educational levels and in fact, the cornerstone of national development (Okpala, 2007). This confirms the submission by the present authors that primary education is the foundation for qualitative higher education in Nigeria. This is because it is the primary education graduates that gain admission into secondary education and later proceed to higher education. In this regard, the quality of output from primary education will definitely produce future professionals, such as technologists, engineers, educationists, lawyers, some of whom will become lecturers in higher education to teach students whose educational foundation is from the same primary education system. The term “qualitative” is used to portray the expected better output from higher education based on the desired good foundation laid at the primary education level.

The National policy on Education admits as much by describing it as the key to the success or failure of the whole system (FRN, 2004). This is the first formal education port of call for those who go on to become teachers, managers, doctors, engineers, scientists etc. We need to realize that efforts made at improving the quality of education at the secondary level, without first laying durable foundation at the primary level, are very likely to fail. We also need to show that we are guided by this vision in our planning and resource allocation in the

entire educational sector. On its own, Primary Education is the most cost effective education which society can give to a citizen. It is regarded as the most profitable form of investment in education both to the individual and to the society, followed much further behind by secondary and tertiary education.

Objectives of Primary Education

1. The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively.
2. The laying of sound basics for scientific and reflective thinking.
3. Citizenship education as the basics for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
4. Character and moral training and development of sound attitude.
5. Developing the child ability to adapt to his changing environment.
6. Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his city.
7. Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The stated goals are attainable hence the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) on education states that these goals must be pursued through making primary education tuition free, universal and compulsory, implementing the curriculum; providing educational services, using practical, exploratory and experimental methods of teaching, using the language of the environment for the first three years as a medium of instruction; making the teacher-pupil ratio 1:35; promoting pupils from one class to another based on continuous assessment; discouraging the incidence of drop out at this level; integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into education in Nigeria; proving basic infrastructure and training of teachers for the realization of these goals at the primary school level, etc. These proposals on the one hand, simply present the functions expected of government or relevant government functionaries charged with the responsibility of management of schools, provision of infrastructure, equipment and instructional facilities. On the other hand, present the functions expected of teachers in laying the foundation for quality output in primary schools.

In pursuance of these goals, primary education is designed to be tuition free, universal and compulsory, the curriculum is to be made up of eight subjects; educational service are to be provided in five different areas; and teaching is to be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods. In order to achieve the objectives of primary education resources must be carefully managed. Participatory management style, which we advocate in the paper, is based on the co-operative management of resources available in an organization, by all concerned. When the management of an organization is open and accommodating, when its policy encourages workers involvement, a feeling of belonging is developed and ownership of the organization, including achieving its goals and accomplishing its objectives because the concern of all. If primary education should be repositioned for sustainable youth empowerment and national development, objective number six must be strictly followed. The young star should be trained on skills acquisition that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of its capacity.

Primary Education as the Foundation of Education

A house that has a shaky foundation will eventually collapse sooner or later. This is why it is advisable to employ the services of experts when one is set to build a house. In laying an enduring foundation for the entire education sector to build on, the providers of primary education should:

- a. Lay the foundation in quality of teacher
- b. Lay the foundation in quality of instructional materials/facilities
- c. Lay the foundation in proper funding
- d. Lay the foundation in quality output from primary schools

These are discussed below;

Laying the Foundation in Quality of Teachers

The teacher is the facilitator of learning. Without the teacher, most of the goals and aims of education cannot be achieved. The teacher holds the key to learners' educational attainment; if he can use the key effectively, the needed foundation will be laid in the primary level hence the need for him to be properly trained. The FRN(2004), recognizes this fact and emphasizes that teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. Presently, the training of teachers for this level of education is done at the colleges of education, National Teachers' Institute, Institute of Education and Faculties of Education in Universities and School of Education in Universities of Technology. This is because the government has phased out teachers with Grade Two Certificate (TCII), and pegged minimum qualification for teaching in the primary school at Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). These institutions that are mandated to train teachers for the primary schools should endeavour to enrich their programmes so as to equip these teachers for better foundation laying in our children. Competent teachers should be employed to train these teachers, and students without the required entry qualification should not be admitted in the teacher training programmes. The programmes should be reviewed from time to time to suit the changes in the educational system due to technological and scientific changes in the society. At the end of the programme, only the competent teachers should be sent into the system, because it is only this set of teachers that can lay a solid foundation in the primary school.

Laying Foundation in Quality of Instructional Materials/Facilities

The instructional materials and facilities are of great importance in the school system. Without them no meaningful learning can take place. For teaching, these materials should be provided – chalkboard, chalk, maps, globes, textbooks, magazines, chairs and desks, musical instrument, cupboards, school diary and register, continuous assessment, record books, charts, etc. others include school facilities such as buildings, pipe borne water, good lightning, television, video machine and tape recorder.

Similarly, Umoh (2006) maintains that the learners must be made familiar with radio, television, kerosene and gas cookers, scientific toys, instrument and machines. The learner must be allowed to use, touch, feel and play with them. He contends that, the construction of some of these instruments, where possible, by the teachers is to acquaint them with their structural components, even if the materials are improvised is an important part of science education in the primary school. For any teacher to perform the above functions

judiciously in the primary school, he or she must not only be well trained but must be adequately motivated for the job. But this has not always been the case with teachers in our public primary schools, hence the generally observed nonchalant attitudes to work by teachers, resulting in ill-equipped children or poor foundation laying in children. It therefore means that teachers are left out in the provision of instructional materials for effective foundation laying in the primary school. The school should provide the funds required for the improvisation of the relevant instructional materials for effective foundation laying in the primary schools. Some of the improvised materials can be supplied by the learners through their parents and the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA). Since government alone may not provide all the instructional materials needed for effective teaching and learning in our primary schools, where possible, it should be a joint venture between the parents and the relevant arm(s) of government concerned. The same approach may be necessary for the provision and maintenance of school structural facilities.

Laying the Foundation in Proper Funding

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) introduced in 1955 by the government of Western Region and in 1957 by the government of Eastern Region collapsed because of poor funding. In 1976, the federal government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education which also failed due to lack of proper planning and funding. Accordingly, Onwueme (2001), notes that funding of education in Nigeria has been problematic over the years. He maintains that funding of primary education in particular should be handled by the three tiers of government. Accordingly, Onwueme (2001), report that:

- a. Federal Government should be responsible for the provision of building and furniture, teachers' salaries and allowances and payment for the teacher-training programme.
- b. State government should be responsible for the provision of equipment and libraries.
- c. Local government should assume responsibility for non-teaching staff salaries, textbooks and maintenance of buildings
- d. Parents should provide writing material and clothing for their children. Furthermore, Decree 31 of 1988 which established the Primary Education Commission offered the formula for funding of primary education as follows: Local Government 80%, State Government 30%, Federal government 20% while decree (3) of January 1999 made 100% funding of primary school the responsibility of local government councils. According to him, the recent revision of allocation formula whereby 41%, 36% and 23% allocated to the Federal, State and Local Governments have not been received by all concerned.

Laying Foundation in Quality of Output from Primary Schools

The success of the entire educational system in Nigeria depends greatly on the output from the primary schools. By quality of output, it means the quality of the child or children processed from our public primary schools after six to eight years of schooling. This concern was expressed by Okoro (2005) by posing the following questions – what emerges from the learner who has acquired this level of education? What are the expectations? What can the person (child) do? What can he not do? What problem can he/she solve for self, family and community? What problem is beyond the scope of the education the person has acquired? A careful study of our primary school system, its functioning and output would enable us

provide objective answers to the above questions. But can we, on its face validity assert that there is anything like quality of output in our public primary school? Whatever the case, what are the expectations? The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) spells out the goals of what the learners are expected to do at the end of acquiring this level of education to include ability to communicate and think effectively, ability to think scientifically, reflectively, and acquiring permanent literacy and numeracy. Can we candidly say that such foundations have been laid in our children in primary schools? Can a primary school child confidently express himself orally or in writing as a proof of good foundation laying in schools? What really are the problems?

Actually, generally speaking, these children are unable to acquire the expected skills because of so many factors that militate against the effective functioning of our public primary schools. These include lack of commitment to qualitative education by all the stakeholders in terms of appointment and training of qualified teachers as administrators of primary schools, recruitment of qualified teachers, motivation of teachers, and regular payment of teachers' salaries. To this end, all the stakeholders must play their roles creditably. The three tiers of government must provide the necessary infrastructure, equipment and relevant instructional materials for effective teaching and learning in the primary schools. The recruitment and selection of teachers for primary school should be based on proven ability and interest in the education of the child and requisite entry qualifications into the teaching profession. Serving teachers should be sufficiently motivated so as to take their teaching assignment seriously.

Concept of Youth

Without doubt, the youth reflect the positive and negative picture of any society. Their energies, inventiveness, characters and orientations define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and social-political attainments.

In all societies of the world, a virile youth is the bedrocks of any nation. It is a fact that the stronger the youth, the more developed nation is. The role of the youth in the nation's building process cannot be over emphasized as countries that utilize their youth in the right directions seems to be more developed. The energy and brightness of the minds of youth act as touch – bearer for a nation. There is a confirmed connection between the prosperity of a nation and its youth development system.

The late British politician and writer, Benjamin Disraeli, Had rightly described “youth of a nation as the trustees of prosperity”. It is in the reality of this that many nations have made concerted efforts in galvanizing integrated approach in putting in place youth development structures that have a very high propensity to be a catalyst for their national growth. On the contrary the countries which fail to realize the importance of the youth lag behind in all aspect of life. It is, therefore, in realization of the positive value that the youth could add to the growth and development of any society, that the United Nations set aside a week every august from the 12th day to celebrate the international youth day. First celebrated in August 2000, the primary objective is to draw public awareness to youth-related issues and values.

Any nation that denies its youth the necessary enabling environment to enthusiastically participate in nation building merely does so at its own perils. Nation-

building is a dynamic process that calls for the participation of all segments of the society, including the often overlooked and undermined youth population and youth resourcefulness that will provide invaluable speed for the progress of any society as well as its development.

In Nigeria, the greatest challenge confronting the youth today is unemployment which has become a great challenge to national security. Despite alleged success of various youth empowerment programme across the country, over 54% of Nigeria youths remain unemployed. The unemployment record in the country clearly portrays an increase in idle hands across the length and breadth of Nigeria. It is often said that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, so an unemployed youth is a disaster waiting to happen.

Activities of groups such as Boko-Haram, Nigeria Delta militants, Kidnaping, Unknown gunmen, Bandits and Fulani Herdsmen groups have serious implication for national security in the country. Sadly, some of these rebellious groups have youth at the forefront of their nefarious activities.

The Concept of Empowerment and Sustainable Youth Empowerment

The word empowerment comes from the word "power". Thus to empower someone means to give authority to enable a person or group of persons gain power (Chaba in Victoria 2004). Empowerment means getting the power to make ones voice heard, to contribute to plans and discussions that affect one, to use ones expertise to improve one's performance (Foy, 1997).

Bhasin (1984) in Victoria (2004) noted that empowerment cannot mean power over others, power to control more than our share; it should mean power to be, power to control one's own greed, avarice and violence, power to nurture, heal, care for others, power to fight for justice, ethics, morality, power to achieve inner growths leading to wisdom and compassion. He also noted that the process of empowerment is a political process, because it aims at changing existing power relationships.

Youth empowerment means providing an enabling environment for youths to develop their true potentials so that they can contribute to the development of the society. The major instrument needed to empower youths is education. As already stated in the introductory part of this paper, entrepreneurship education gives necessary skills to individuals to make them self-reliant economically. This paper will discuss empowerment of youths to enable them become self-employed, gainfully-employed and self-reliant citizens that can contribute to the sustainable development of the youth in the society.

The Supportive Role of Primary Education for Sustainable Youth Empowerment & National Development

Primary Education are already explained earlier as education given to children from six to eleven years plus. At this stage, children play a lot. These plays are goal orientated and are geared towards the building of self-discipline and work oriented. Okoro (2003) in his findings discovered that a nation can only survive if its citizens are adequately equipped to meet the moral, scientific and technological challenge of the modern technological age.

According to Uzoigwe (2013), vocational education given to children is aimed at improving the welfare of the individual, families and societies at large through their cultivation of basic scientific approach and development of skills necessary for survival.

Children who have acquired relevant skills perform better roles as citizens through the cultivation of better attitude to life and work.

Primary education ensures that children possess some saleable skills. They can become highly productive in the society. Thus, their opportunity of security of securing meaningful jobs or becoming self-employed becomes much higher.

Knowledge is power as people say; children need to be educated and trained for the acquisition of knowledge and power. Therefore, it is pertinent that childhood education be provided to children so that they may effectively be able to train, instruct and edify other people to meet their goal to life. Children who have gone through formal education eventually develop confidence; stability and strong personality that makes them contribute their quota to the society.

In actual fact, right from birth, the seed of greatness, waiting for cultivation is planted in every child who needs to be tapped into to get the best out of them. Acquisition of Skills at Higher Levels of Education is Prerequisite for economic Development.

Aboyede (2013) noted that much depends on moral value and social ethics learnt at the primary school and retained by the citizenry, with these values once they assume the position of authority, there would be good governance without corrupt practice, better economic policies and adequate infrastructural facilities for effective economic development to thrive.

The school at the primary level is best positioned to inculcate in the individual in his formative year the correct knowledge, skills, character and desirable values that will foster such actualization and national development.

The values that make for good citizenship which we learn at the primary school level include honesty, tolerance, selflessness, hard work and personal integrity. The values provide the ground for grooming good leadership potential.

Primary education functions as a medium through which sustainable youth empowerment and national development would be achieved in the country. It contributed in providing the needed quality manpower for development. Children are prepared for adult life by giving them opportunities to develop appropriate value with which they can be trained in various skills and competencies to be able to physically, intellectually and morally contribute to the national development.

Conclusion

For sustainable youth empowerment and national development, primary education have to be repositioned because it is from primary education that foundation for correct skills, dexterity and values that make for good citizenship are inculcated which automatically lead to vibrant and amiable youth and good governance resulting in effective national development.

Recommendations

For the success and survival of primary education as a viable tool for youth empowerment and national development, the following recommendations are made.

1. Basic science laboratory should be equipped for the conduct of scientific research by the pupils.
2. Home economics and art laboratory should be equipped with stationary machinery.

3. Education system should be revisited with special emphasis on primary schools. It is regrettable that primary level has been neglected in most states of Nigeria. Government at all levels should increase budgetary allocation to education. More especially on primary education.
4. More qualified teachers should be employed for effective teaching and inculcation of desirable knowledge.
5. Federal state and local government should re-visit primary education curriculum for effective implementation of the manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.

References

- Aboyade, O (2013) *Development burden and benefits reflection of the development process in Nigerian and Africa*. Ibadan: Joance education publishers.
- Aminu J. (1990). *First things first: The primary (ask in improving the quality of primary Education in Nigeria*. Abeokuta; Balogun Printers Ltd, 154 - 158.
- Anero N. (2018) *Theory and practice of childhood education*. Ignatius Ajuru University press, Port-Harcourt
- Federal ministry of education and youth development (1993). *Basic education for all in Nigeria by the year 2000 master plan*
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press
- Federal republic of Nigeria (2014) *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, NERDC.
- Nwangwu, N.A (2008). *UPE issues, prospect and problems*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation
- Nwokocha, V. N. (2006) *Philosophy of early childhood education*. National Open University of Nigeria press Lagos.
- Okoro, O. (2006) *Critical Analysis of Terms: School Products and Educational Outcome*. In O. Okoro, & N. O. Nwankpa (Eds.), *Educational Outcome* (pp. 23-35). Onitsha: Lincel Publishers.
- Okpala, B. N. (2007). *Maintenance Culture and the sustainability of the UBE programme in Nigeria*. *JORDE*, 3(2), 115-122.
- Onwueme, M. S. (2001). *Management of Free and Compulsory Education in Nigeria: Issues and Problems*. *Current Issues in Educational Management in Nigeria*, 13-23.

Umoh, G. G. (2006). *Path to Quantitative Education: A Standard Book for Students, Teachers and Educational Administrators*. Uyo: Inela Ventures and Publishers.

Universal Declaration of Human Right (1943). "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Retrieved from www.ohcr.org/press release on 20th June, 2022

Universal Nations General Assembly (1949). Official Records of the fourth session of the General Assembly Resolution, Sept 20th-10 Dec, 15-16. Retrieved on 15th July, 2022.

Uzoigwe, F.O (2013) *Education for all, philosophy for Nigeria education*, Ibadan: Hnemann educational.

Victoria, N. P, (2004). Empowering Women for purposeful leadership in the democratic Nigeria of the 21st century, *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education (JOWICE)*.