

# INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION FOR QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL: CHALLENGES AHEAD

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## **Abstract**

This paper x-rays the issue of quality in basic education and the problems of quality maintenance. It thereafter addresses the need for Inter-agency coordination in meeting the challenges involved in the provision of quality basic education with concluding remarks on how best to ensure proper inter-agency coordination in quality basic education in the country.

## **Introduction**

The provision of free compulsory and qualitative basic education has been a major issue of concern to various governments all over the world. Right from time immemorial, the desire to provide quality primary or basic education has exercised the minds of educators. In Nigeria, particularly since independence, there has been growing concerns to deal with the problem of primary or basic education. This burning desire is based on the belief that quality basic education is a prerequisite for developing a viable educational system. In other words, basic education or primary education provides the foundation for other levels of education. Lockleed and Verspoor (1990) captured the essence of primary education when, in their influential book titled “Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries”, remarked that:

A poor system of primary education comprises the entire system of human capital development. It provides students who are poorly prepared for secondary and tertiary level of education and adults who are illiterate.. improving the quality of education for developing the human resource base to meet the changing technological demands for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

This implies that the quality of basic education will also determine the quality and outcome of the secondary and tertiary level of education.

The aim of basic education is to ensure that all children of school age are offered education to a certain level regardless of socio-economic background. Since the colonial era, Nigeria has experimented with basic education in the 1950s and 1960s to be precise with varying degree of success. The universal basic education policies were intended to provide free and compulsory elementary or primary education to all school age children. This development was sequel to the United Nations Charter on Human Right Article 26 which declared Universal Primary Education as the right of every child.

In 1976, the Federal Military Government under the leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE)

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programme. The aim was to make primary education free and compulsory for all school age children. While the programme was free, it was never compulsory. The problem of lack of adequate fund was a major obstacle that did not make the programme free and compulsory. Consequently, the desired quality and intent could not be achieved.

In September 1999, the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo initiated the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The aim of the programme this time, was to provide or offer universal, free and compulsory education to school age children of between six and fifteen years old. This programme was expanded or extended to span from primary school to junior school (JSS) level thus making it a 9-year universal free and compulsory basic education. This was in line with the United Nation Declaration that basic education should be free and compulsory for all children of school age.

In line with global trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the issue of quality basic education has become a topic of growing concern and interest. High premium is currently being placed on it. However, the task of providing quality, universal, free and compulsory basic education is not an easy one. The challenge is enormous. This calls for collaboration and coordination of bodies and agencies involved in the provision of primary or basic education. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine Inter-Agency Coordination in Quality Basic Education for all.

### **Conceptualising Inter-Agency Coordination**

Before delving into the issue, it will not be out of place to bring under clear focus or perspective the meaning of inter-agency coordination since it forms a major concept in the discourse. Inter-agency coordination takes the form of a network for the proper arrangement and implementation of the basic education programme. It is meant to provide a broad based linkage amongst the various agencies and bodies involved in the provision of basic education in the county. Inter-agency coordination is designed to ensure smooth running and provision of basic education. It is aimed at strengthening, patterning efforts and cooperation among the various bodies involved in basic education delivery.

### **The Issue of Quality Basic Education**

It is not easy to define the term “quality” in relation to education. This is because the issue is subject to different interpretations. In other words, the concept has been interpreted in different ways with variation in area of emphasis. According to Urevbu (2006), quality is a relative concept. He opined further that in simple and practical terms, the quality of basic education can be define with respect to a number different aspects of schooling, which remains fairly constant overtime. Citing Jansen (1995), he identified six aspects of quality in the educational literature to include:

- Quality as resource input

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- Quality as output
- Quality as process
- Quality as content
- Quality as reputation and
- Quality as values.

The quality of primary or basic education can be examined from this six perspective. However, no one single study till date has been able to apply all the six aspects (Jansen, 1995)

Quality as a resource input demand the use of qualified and adequate number of teachers. It is true that many primary schools lack qualified teachers. Besides, the number of teachers employed for our basic education programme are grossly inadequate. According to Urevbu (2006) in 1997, less than 70 percent of primary school teachers in the country had the Grade II teachers certificate which is widely regarded as the barest minimum qualification for primary school teachers. Although it has been a policy issue that the minimum qualification should be the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) only a marginal number of teachers have obtained their Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) in the country. Infact, as at 1999 only 40 percent of primary school teachers have NCE.

In addition, the training of teachers is also important in ensuring quality in resource input in basic education. In our case, many of our teachers are trained or turned out in our institutions which are deficient in content and methodology hence many of the primary school teachers are unable to teach effectively.

Furthermore, the school infrastructure is another area of challenge. Many of the physical environments in most schools in the country are eyesore. They present a sorry sight with dilapidated buildings, classroom devoid of seats and tables, dirty and non-functional toilet facilities to mention but a few. Quality basic education can only be ensured or guaranteed when the school infrastructure is appropriate and adequate. Here, various agencies or bodies can coordinate or collaborate to ensure that the right infrastructural facilities are provided. Textbooks and instructional materials must also be adequately provided. But this has not been the case in our primary schools.

Quality as output prescribes that quality of basic education depend also on academic achievement or outcome in terms of test scores, progress made and pass rate of those who attend such schools. There is need to monitor what students learns and determine whether they are actually achieving what they set out to accomplish.

In the area of quality as process, quality is assessed in terms of student-teacher interaction; level of learners participation and engagement in learning. In most of our primary schools, active learners participation is hardly encountered in the classrooms; lecture method is adopted for classroom instruction. In this regard, the teacher lectures while the pupils copy from the chalkboard with few opportunities for asking questions or participating in learning. Children learn by

memorizing what they are taught rather than work actively with the materials and there is little on good monitoring and assessment of children's learning through hard work, classroom quizzes and tests.

Quality as content deals with the curriculum content for basic education. Besides the subjects, certain educational services such as Resource Centre, Health Scheme, Counselling services etc are also expected to be provided. There is often inadequate attention being paid to these. Enough attention has not been given the development of curriculum along the line of multi-cultural values, sexuality education, especially in the area of HIV/AIDS education. A reordering of the basic education curriculum is desirable. There is also the need to enrich the achieved curriculum and the implemented curriculum. The achieved curriculum are the knowledge, skills and attitude which learners achieved or learned while the implemented curriculum is the translation of curricular intentions into reality in classrooms, laboratories, workshops and playground and other settings for learning (Urevbu, 2006).

Quality as reputation has to do with the general public perception and historical image of basic education. The general public perception of our basic education has been a very poor one. Many believe that actual learning is not taking place in our primary schools. The general impression is that the students are not taught anything. The schools are poorly rated or scored low in output or achievement or in terms of students learning.

Quality as values emphasizes influence of the learning on the overall development of the student. The impression given of the students in the basic education programme is that they are poorly equipped or trained. They are often not given good foundation at this level that they can build on hence, the poor performance of the products who move into the next level of their schooling. It is therefore, clear that there are great number of challenges confronting basic education. These challenges must be addressed squarely to ensure or guarantee quality basic education. It is these challenges we must now turn our attention.

### **Challenges of Basic Education**

A major challenge facing basic education and also affecting its quality is the issue of socio-cultural impediments which include the problem of child abuse, poor home environment and early marriages. Due to child abuse or labour which is prevalent in this part of the world, children are often absent from school especially children from poor homes who are engaged in time-consuming chores such as fetching of firewood, water, hawking on the streets in order to supplement family income. Furthermore, the home environment of most school age children is nothing to write home about. Many are not conducive for effective learning. Most of the homes lack basic home furniture such as chairs and tables, electricity etc. Many homes do not encourage children to do their home works. Some even discourage children from doing their homework by engaging them in other domestic activities which take all the available time of the child at home.

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Besides, there is also the problem of early marriage which is still a common occurrence in most culture or states in the country. Children are encouraged in some culture to marry early. In some cases, some girls are betrothed or given out in marriage early in their life thereby preventing them from participating in early childhood education.

Another challenge that confront basic education arises from gender role at home. In large families where funds are insufficient to enroll all the children of school age, priority is often or usually given to the education of the male child than that of the girl child. For most families, education is more important to the male child as the future bread winner of their homes than the girls whose role is confined to that of domestic affairs or household chores. In the provision of material support such as learning or in extrinsic motivation, the boys are also more favoured than the girls.

Lack of proper organizational structure and management framework for basic education present another remarkable challenge to quality basic education for all. The constitutional role of Federal, State and Local governments in the management of basic education has not been properly defined in the country. The 1999 Constitution put educational issue under the concurrent legislative list or status. This operationally means that both State and Federal Government have legislative jurisdiction and financial responsibilities with respect to education. The constitution fails to ascribe any specific responsibility to the Federal government in the provision and management of basic education. In practice the Federal government has been involved in the provision of basic education in the country. This does not augur well for the system. This explains the seemingly poor state of basic education or primary education in the country.

The cost of providing and running basic education is also prohibitive. For basic education to be free, compulsory and universal, it must be adequately funded. One major problem or crisis which basic education face in the country is inadequate funding. This explains why there are no good structures, infrastructural facilities, lack of textbooks, lack of instructional materials among others.

These challenges confronting quality basic education call for proper coordination of efforts in dealing with the problem. This brings us to the issue of the need for inter-agency coordination for quality basic education for all.

### **The Need for Inter-Agency Coordination in Quality Basic Education**

The need for proper Inter-Agency Coordination in providing qualitative basic education cannot be over emphasized. In the first place, as aforementioned, the cost of providing quality basic education is colossal. There is therefore, need to coordinate the efforts of various agencies involved in the provision of basic education in order to ensure enough or adequate fund for the programme.

Furthermore, coordination of Inter-agency efforts will also help to usher in good and proper organizational structure and management framework for quality basic education for all.

Besides, the needed infrastructural facilities and instructional resources and other support services needed for quality basic education can be guaranteed with proper inter-agency coordination. Above all, inter-agency coordination will help ensure that free, compulsory and universal quality basic education for all.

### **Conclusion**

Attempts have been made in the paper to highlight the issue of inter-agency coordination in quality basic education. In doing so, we have simply examined the issue of quality and draw attention to the major challenges confronting or hindering the efforts aimed at providing quality basic education in the country. These challenges will require attention in course of providing qualitative basic education in Nigeria. The problems are real and present a very remarkable challenge to the quest and provision of quality basic education for all. We have argued that inter-agency coordination is necessary in surmounting these challenges and ensuring quality basic education for all in the country. The role of inter-agency coordination in quality basic education cannot therefore be undermined.

We believe that our strategy for action in promoting inter-agency coordination should include:

- a. The provision of adequate fund. The first thing that can be done is to encourage inter-agency coordination in the provision of fund. Agencies can devote at least 5 percent of their income profit to basic education. The overall cost of quality basic education can then be worked. The fund needed can then be sourced through the agencies contribution.
- b. Secondly, inter-agency coordination can help to address, the problem of the present deficiencies in physical and infrastructural facilities for basic education.
- c. Thirdly, the development of proper organizational structure and management framework for quality basic education can also be facilitated through inter-agency coordination.

Finally, proper monitoring is necessary in ensuring qualitative basic education. Appropriate and proper monitoring of the basic education programme can be instituted through inter-agency coordination.

We can strengthen our basic education system and achieve the goal of providing qualitative universal, free and compulsory basic education if inter-agency coordination is encouraged and pursued diligently. Depending on what we do, we may not be able to maximize the inter-agency coordination in providing quality basic education for all. We must do everything humanly possible to encourage inter agency coordination in the provision and management of basic education otherwise our vision for quality, universal, free and compulsory basic education for all may remain a mirage.

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