

CREATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Mark Terlumun Ijov

Department of Educational Foundations,
Benue State University, Makurdi,
Benue State.

And

Philip Shiaondo Nomayu

Department of Educational Foundations,
Benue State University, Makurdi,
Benue State.

Abstract

The role of primary education to individual and national development cannot be overemphasized. This is because primary education is the first formal level of education in Nigeria. It lays the foundation upon which other levels of education are laid. Ensuring a functional primary education requires a multi-faceted approach. This paper attempts to diagnose and address the challenges facing primary education in Nigeria ranging from funding, poor planning, lack of political will, inadequate and decayed infrastructural facilities, lack of qualified teachers, negative attitude of teachers, incidences of wastage and lack of appropriate curriculum in primary education. The paper also suggested how to tackle these challenges. It is therefore hoped that the recommendations made herein, if properly adopted will be headway to ensure a functional and creative primary education system in Nigeria.

Key words: Creativity, Functional Education, Primary Education, Nigeria.

Education has contributed immensely to development in Nigeria in terms of manpower development. It has recorded remarkable progress in human capital and infrastructural development. No wonder education is generally acknowledged as the bedrock of any

nation. It is the life wire of every society (Aja-Okorie, 2015). Education is considered as a life transforming activity which empowers its receivers to make positive contributions to the development of the society. No wonder, it is used as a vital instrument for social and economic

mobility at the personal level and an instrument for transformation of society at the national level (Ijov, 2012).

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), primary education is the education given in institutions for children aged six (6) to eleven (11) plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years. The purpose of education in any nation is to have individuals who are balanced, that is, those who are intellectually sound, emotionally stable, physically fit with good health habits. Unfortunately, most individuals in Nigeria today are experiencing deficits in almost all the attributes of the educated. This partly elucidates the reason for the high level of unemployment and violent tendencies in the country (Anashie & Ijov, 2015).

Since after independence in Nigeria, successive governments have given priority to the education of Nigeria citizens. A critical look at the Nigerian education policies shows that primary education has been a top priority on the agenda of the successive governments since independence. Its universalization has been taken as an international challenge; a national commitment and an important concern of states over time. This is why most countries all over the world are now conscious of the fact that a functional educational system at all levels holds the key to any society's advancement. Thus, the importance of primary education as the foundation upon

which other levels of education are built is obvious, deliberate and manifest as a development index. This is why Madugu (2000) asserted that it is a pre-requisite for the success of democracy and a functional ingredient for the development of human potential. At a time like this when Nigeria is refocusing her attention on the revival of education as a veritable tool in its transformation. This paper thus becomes imperative and auspicious as it examined some key concepts, issues/challenges of primary education as well as the way forward that will bring about creativity and functional primary education in Nigeria's comatose economy in the 21st century.

Concept of Education

The term education has no single universally acceptable definition as it is viewed by different authors from different perspectives or position of thoughts. According to Wikipedia (2017), education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include, story-telling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Ocho (2005) saw education as the inculcation of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and beliefs unto learners. Famuyide (2002) regarded education as a process of training, instructing or inculcating of designed and attitudes in the individuals.

Education is considered as a process that equips and creates new ideas and attitudes in the individuals. In other words, education is a means of preparing

an individual for productivity in his life (Bokah, 2015). It is an omnipotent phenomenon and an invaluable gift to mankind which influences the survival and development of human societies and cultures (Mobolaji, 2014). Bassey and Amang (2001) in Anashie and Ikwen (2014) viewed education as a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process. Akpakwu (2012) noted that education is a process of bringing desirable changes into the behaviour of human beings. Thus, these desirable changes and attitudes of individuals of the by-product of the knowledge and skills acquired make them useful and acceptable members of the society as well as contributing to the societal growth and development. Education is an ongoing learning process designed to furnish skills, understanding, and healthy values in the circular as well as spiritual spheres of individuals so that they can develop themselves and the society in which they live and operate (Denga, 2008).

Concept and Thrust of Primary Education

Primary education according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) refers to the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. The goals of primary education according to the document are to;

- *inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;*
- *lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;*

- *give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;*
- *mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;*
- *develop in the child the ability to adopt to the child's changing environment;*
- *give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;*
- *provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (FRN, 2014, p.9)*

Concept of Creativity

The term creativity according to Oyundoyin (2003) is the disposition to make and recognize valuable innovations. It manifests itself in the ability of the individual to create his own symbols of experience. A person is said to be creative if he has the ability to combine or rearrange established patterns of knowledge in a unique fashion. Ogbe (2012) in Bokah (2015) saw creativity as dealing with abstract thinking, imagination, originality, inventedness and or giftedness. This means creativity is all about abstract thinking and imagination to do or produce something which may be of economic value to mankind. Creativity focuses on the process of forming original ideas through exploration and discovery. In children, creativity develops from their experiences with the process, rather than

concern for the finished product. Creativity is not to be confused with talent, skill, or intelligence. Creativity is not about doing something, better than others, it is about thinking, exploring, discovering, and imagining (Kohl, 2008).

Creativity can mean different things to different people. For some, it is the imagination or inventive mind made, for others it is about originality. Thinking and producing that which has never existed. Most people believe that the term creativity only applies to those who possess artistic talents thereby associating creativity with the achievements of extraordinary people termed as geniuses (Otuka, 2015).

The concept creativity is derived from a Latin word 'Creo' which means "to create, make" and its derivational suffixes also come from Latin. Mwark (2013) says creativity is the capacity of persons to produce compositions and ideas of any sort which are essentially novel and previously unknown to the producer. It can be an imagination or thoughts synthesis where the product is not a mere summation. Mbahi (2015) looked at creativity as the genesis of the notion of free expression and that creativity is central to art. Mbahi adds that creativity is related to originality and imagination. It requires imagination to understand and create a work of art.

Concept of Functional Education

Functional education according to Idowu (2009) is the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials (cognitive, affective and

psychomotor) to the fullest and consequently be able to contribute maximally to the development of the society. Nwokolo (1997) posited that functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from a consumption to a manufacturing status.

Functional education is a means of being equipped to excel in the environment, to acquire necessary tools and skills to live in the modern world. Elombah (2010) defined functional education as the type of education that aims at equipping its products to live in the modern society, to handle relationships, learn about sex and marriage, how to package curriculum vitae and attend job interviews and get a job; how to use the Facebook, Google, Tweeter and Myspace. Learn about teleconference, Webinars etc; organize visits to parliament and state houses, teach about citizenship, human rights, child abuse, child trafficking, women trafficking and children rights, investment in the capital market, mortgages etc.

Challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria

Primary education as the foundation upon which other levels of education are built is faced with a lot of challenges in Nigeria. Some of the emerging challenges of primary education are but not limited to the following;

1. **Funding:** Funding is a major challenge facing the provision of primary education in Nigeria. To say that education is grossly under-funded in the country is to say the least. This is the major reason why public primary schools are not living up to expectation. Many people who could afford the exorbitant cost of privately owned schools prefer to give their children this level of education in private schools. Primary education in Nigeria is not properly funded by the government in the midst of rising cost and demand of education. According to Adedeji, Okemakinde and Sempebwa (2008), finance is one of the problems confronting education sector owing to a drastic reduction in both the actual and proportion of government fund allocation to the education sector, despite the UNESCO's recommendations of allocation of 26% of a nation's national income to the sector. Ladan (2012) affirms that the low level of fiscal allocation to the sector which is below the UNESCO's threshold of 26% of the total budget certainly affects the implementation of government policy on education in the country.

2. **Poor planning:** It is an undisputed fact that anyone who fails to plan, plans to fail. It is therefore obvious that no nation can achieve her philosophical objectives and make advancement in any sphere of development without proper and effective planning. Regrettably, some factors like political influence, inadequate data base, population explosion etc proper planning

of the education system (Anashie & Ijov, 2015). Okwori (2011) maintains that education is planned so that the limited educational resources of a society can be rationally allocated among the competing educational demands and programmes. The Nigerian education system is negatively affected as a result of poor planning which leads to ineffective, inefficient and uneven distribution/utilization of the nation's resources.

3. **Lack of political will:** The poor socio-economic condition in Nigeria and the inability of the leaders to create conditions necessary for higher national develop after years of consistent civil rule or democracy should be a concern to any person who cares about Nigeria. Owing to the nature of primary education and the school system in general, governments give less concern to issues of funding, provision of infrastructure and supply of qualified and experienced teachers (Opoh, Okou & Ubung, 2014). Given the obvious importance of teachers, problems in supporting newly qualified teachers, and a lack of career development opportunities in the school settings often combine to make teachers' effectiveness difficult. Esu and Inyang-Abia (2009) added that inadequate motivation arising from haphazard reward system and delay in payment of salaries has led to lack of commitment and therefore a slow but steady decay on any innovative programme.

4. Inadequate and decayed infrastructural facilities:

School facilities are the material resources that facilitate effective teaching and learning in schools. Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2003) states that they are things which enable a skilful teacher to achieve a level of instructional effectiveness that exceeds what is possible when they are not provided. The availability of infrastructures and facilities in the right quantity and quality is germane in education provision. According to Ahmed (2003), in most schools in the country, teaching and learning take place under unconducive environment, lacking the basic materials, thus hindering the fulfilment of educational objectives.

5. Lack of qualified teachers:

Teachers are the fulcrum of which the liver of educational system rests (Achimugu, 2005). The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) stated categorically that since no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. It is however so disheartening to note that the quality of primary schools in Nigeria is far from meeting the global best practice. Many people are teaching in primary schools without qualified teaching certificates. At the lower and middle levels of primary education, there are reported cases of increase in the rate of absentee and ineffective teachers in schools (Oloruntoyin, 2011). The conditions in primary schools are

particularly peculiar especially when there are lesser teachers to the number of classes that the teacher has to teach (Opoh, Okou & Ubung, 2014).

6. Negative attitude of teachers:

Another challenge facing primary education in Nigeria is the negative attitude of primary school teachers. According to Achimugu (2005), teaching in Nigeria has low status. While many teachers are involved in unwholesome practices such as examination practices, absenteeism from school and classes, late coming to school and classes, inappropriate and non keeping of records, trading within and outside school, commercial driving, immoral relationship with female students, extortion of money from students, drinking and smoking during official hours (Famade, 2001; Adeyemi & Ige, 2002; Ajayi & Shofoyeke, 2003; Achimugu, 2005). The inability of teachers to show commitment to teaching in schools has been attributed to the unseriousness, indiscipline, poor academic performance of students in schools (Adeyemi & Ige, 2002). The low status of teachers have affected them so bad that most teachers have lost their place of pride in society.

7. Incidences of wastage:

According to Ige (2013), wastage has been an issue of concern in Nigeria's educational system. At a time that Nigeria is clamouring for education for all its citizens, many pupils are dropping out of the primary schools due to institutional and non-institutional factors. This is why

hawking has become very popular especially in urban and semi-urban settlements. Many students drop out early due to their inability to cope with academic work.

8. Lack of appropriate curriculum: Curriculum refers to the experience/activities (co-curricular) that are provided under the auspices of the school to bring about the desired change in the learner. The idea of having a curriculum for education in Nigeria's educational system dates back to the year 1969 when a National Curriculum Conference was inaugurated, sequel to public criticisms of the educational system inherited from the colonial government (Ogunu, 2000 in Ige, 2013). Since that time, the curriculum of education has been undergoing review and improvements. The curriculum of primary education in Nigeria is argued by scholars in education to have been over loaded, content driven, not relevant, fails to give regards to vocational training and development of the Nigerian child as a major component of the child's development. The primary school curriculum is also too wide in scope, and does not take care of teachers' qualification and training as well as laying too much emphasis on intellectual development of the child (Akpan, 2008; Balogun, 2009; and Ukpai & Okoro, 2011).

Omotayo, Ihebereme and Maduwesi (2008) in Asodike and Ikpitibo (2014) indicated that poor implementation strategy, management and lack of assurance are factors that

contributed to the failure of the UBE to attain its goals since its inception. Other predicaments include misappropriation and embezzlement of funds, and financial crimes of all sorts being perpetuated by those in authority. As a result, there is an absence of adequate financial resources to implement programmes and policies that will promote this level of education.

Tackling the Challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria

In order to ensure a functional and effective primary education in Nigeria, it is imperative that the challenges facing it in Nigeria should be tackled so that there can be meaningful development at that level of education. In order to achieve this, the following suggestions are made;

1. **Adequate funding of primary education:** In view of the persistent limited allocation of fund to the education sub-sector, the government at all levels should increase the allocation to education so as to pave way for increase in the running grants to primary education. This will go a long way in tackling the challenges of facilities and infrastructure deficit. UNESCO recommended that 26% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be allocated to education. It will therefore not be too much if this standard is maintained in Nigeria so as to enhance a functional primary education system. Embezzlement and misappropriation of school funds should not be treated with levity so as to shun corrupt practices and serve as a deterrent to others.

2. **Proper planning of primary education:** Education is a complex function with diffuse goals. For it to achieve the goals for which it is meant requires proper planning and implementation of policies. As a matter of policy, it is expedient to ascertain the extent of the implementation of policy plans on primary education in terms of manpower, enrolment, funding, infrastructural facilities, as well as monitoring and supervision as encapsulated in the UBE Act of 2004. Effective and efficient managerial techniques should also be adopted to ensure the maximum cooperation of all the stakeholders to enhance a functional primary education in Nigeria.

3. **Strong political will:** Functional primary education cannot be achieved in a nation full of unending paradoxes of total decay of educational infrastructure, teachers' strike actions, inadequate funding, policy inconsistencies, and lack of teachers' commitment to work. A strong political will is required to tackle these challenges. This could be achieved through the promotion of visionary leadership and adequate funding of the educational system especially the primary education as a key to national development and transformation.

4. **Provision of adequate infrastructural facilities:** The degree of infrastructural decay in public primary schools in Nigeria is an eyesore that should give the government sleepless nights. There should be a complete

overhaul of primary education in Nigeria through the provision of adequate infrastructural facilities in primary schools in line with global best practices.

5. **Recruitment of qualified teachers in primary schools:** The government should recruit additional teachers from the pool of unemployed graduates that studied education and distribute them to primary schools. There should also be periodic training and retraining of teachers (both old and new) to keep them abreast with modern trends and improve their performance.

6. **Re-address the negative attitudes of teachers:** The negative attitudes of primary school teachers should be properly addressed. The saying that "a teachers' reward is in heaven" should be eliminated if we desire to have a functional primary education in Nigeria. Teachers' should be rewarded here on earth. The government should address the motivational needs of primary school teachers through prompt payment of salaries and allowances, training, regular promotion, insurance scheme, pension scheme etc. The teachers on their part, should be committed to their job in order to impact useful and meaningful knowledge to the learners who are the leaders of tomorrow.

7. **Curbing wastage in primary education:** The government in tackling this menace should award scholarships and bursary allowances to pupils to ameliorate the devastating effect of

poverty of their parents/guardians. The government should also re-introduce education loan for pupils to enable poor parents procure the necessary materials as well as pay their prescribed fees.

8. Review of primary school curriculum: The government should review the primary school curriculum and introduce entrepreneurship education in primary schools. This will help to equip the pupils with appropriate knowledge of how entrepreneurial firms operate. It will also enable the pupils to learn the skills that are necessary for various and changing challenges they face in their growth process.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Nigeria's desire for functional and qualitative primary education that will guarantee national transformation and development has not yielded the much desired outcome. The primary education that ought to be the driving force in the human engineering to inculcate appropriate/desirable skills for the individuals to live and contribute meaningfully to the development of Nigeria has failed in this responsibility. The system is currently faced with enormous challenges such as poor planning, lack of political will, negative attitude of teachers, lack of qualified teachers, lack of curriculum and so on. The government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency overhaul the primary level of education to make it more functional and creative through visionary leadership and adequate funding in order

to ensure that primary education is moved forward, from its status quo.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings.

1. As elaborately captured by Jaiyeoba (2007), there is a need for the government to produce more in terms of library amenities, laboratory facilities, games materials and general funding.

2. It is also very essential that a better monitoring strategy be adopted for the money released in primary education so as to guarantee sustainable usage of such funds. It should be noted that a well planned primary education system, that is well funded may become ineffective through embezzlement, corruption and poor statistical data on enrolment, number of schools and available human and material resources.

3. Government should ensure that these problems are addressed in order to protect the country's cherished primary education system.

If these recommendations are followed judiciously, primary education will still have more in stock to give to Nigerians in terms of national development as applicable in some other countries such as United States, the United Kingdom, Tanzania and Japan (Asodike & Ikpitibo, 2014).

References

- Achimugu, L. (2005). *The agonies of Nigerian teachers*. Ibadan: Heinemann Publishers Limited.
- Adedeji, S.O; Okemakinde, T. & Sempebwa, J. (2008). Teaching resources utilization and academic performance in technical colleges in Oyo State, Nigeria. *Kampala International University Research Digest*, 1 (2), 109 – 116.
- Adeyemi , J.A. & Ige , A.M. (2002). Examination malpractice in Nigeria educational system: Causes, effects and way out. *Journal of Clinical Counselling Psychology*, 8 (1), 59-64.
- Ahmed, T.M. (2003). Education and national development in Nigeria. *Journal of Education Studies*, 10, 35 – 46.
- Aja-Okorie, U. (2015). Underfunding education in Nigeria: Implications for effective management of tertiary institutions for manpower development and social transformation. *Journal of Teacher Perspective*, 9 (2), 267 – 276.
- Ajayi, T. & Shofoyeke, A. (2003). School discipline, teachers' attitude and ethics of the teaching profession. Paper presented at the workshop on skills improvement programme for performance of teachers in Ondo State, Nigeria.
- Akpan, B.B. (2008). Nigeria and the future of science education in Nigeria. Paper presented at the 51st Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN) held at Akure, Ondo State 23rd – 26th August.
- Anashie, A.B. & Ijov, T.M. (2015). Revamping secondary education through effective management for creativity and invention towards achieving sustainable development. *Journal of Teacher Perspective*, 10 (1), 30 – 40.
- Asodike, J.D. & Ikpitibo, C.L. (2014). Basic issues in primary education delivery in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8 (1), 150 – 164.
- Balogun, F.A. (2009). Structure of the (9) –year basic education curriculum. *Paper presented at a workshop organized by Ministry of Education for Education Officers in Ondo State*.
- Bokah, A.A. (2015). Creativity in teaching and learning in language art education. *Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction*, 11 (1), 112 – 120.
- Education – Wikipedia. Retrieved from <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educ..> On 5th July, 2017.

- Elombah, D. (2010). Functional education in a global economy. Text of address delivered at the African Leaders of Education Summit hosted by International Worldwide and sponsored by University of Hull at Wembley Plaza Hotel, 15th & 16th September, 2010. Retrieved June 4, 2015 from <http://www.elombah.com/index.php/d/articles/danielelombah/4019-fucntion-education-in-a-global-economy-v15-4019>.
- Esu, A.E.O. & Inyang-Abia, M.E. (2009). *Social studies: Technology methods and media*. Portharcourt: Double Diamond Publications.
- Famade, A.O. (2001). *Sociological foundations of education*. Lagos: Pumack Nigeria.
- Famuyide, S.O. (2002). *Citizenship education for Nigerian school*. Ilorin: Jolayemi Printers.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). *National policy on education*. Abuja: NERDC Press.
- Idowu, A. (1999). Functional education and nation building: The Challenge of the next millennium. *Lead paper presented at the 4th National Conference of the Federal College of Education, Kontagora, September, 8.*
- Ige, A.M. (20013). Provision of secondary education in Nigeria: Challenges and the way forward. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 5 (1), 1-9.
- Ijov, T.M. (2012). Impact of policy changes in the management of primary education on teachers' performance in Zone 'A' Senatorial District of Benue State. *Unpublished M.Ed Dissertation, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.*
- Jaiye oba, A.O. & Atanda, A.L. (2003). Community participation in the provision of facilities in secondary schools in Nigeria. *Paper presented at the skills improvement programme for effective performance of teachers in Nigerian schools at Ondo State, Nigeria.*
- Kohl, M.A. (2008). Fostering creativity. Retrieved June, 1, 2015 from <http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article-view.aspx?ArticleID=349>.
- Madugu, J.E. (2000). From UPE to UBE in Nigeria: what lessons and what hope? *Journal of Educational Studies*, 6 (8), 68 – 77.
- Mbahi, A.A. (2015). *Art curriculum design and implementation*. Maiduguri: Leniajj Publishers Limited.

- Nwark, D.M. (2013). *Aesthetics in arts education for tertiary institutions*. Mangu: Centino Printing Press Ltd.
- Nwokolo, P.O. (1998). Vision 2020: An educational dimension. *Asaba Journal of Educational Studies (AJES)*, 1 (1), 12 – 17.
- Obe, O. (2009). Issues of funding education for standards: Counselling perspectives. *Journal of Education Research Development*, 49 (3), 164 – 170.
- Ocho, F. (2005). Towards enhancing the teaching of Creative Arts in the secondary schools for national development. *Journal of Science Education*.
- Oloruntoyin, S.T. (2011). Quality assurance in rural primary schools in Nigeria. *Journal of Research ,Education and Soc*, 2 (3),122-132.
- Omotayo, D., Ihebereme, M. & Maduwesi, B.U. (2008). Management of universal basic education (UBE) scheme for qualitative education in Nigeria. High Beam Research.
- Opoh, F.A.; Okou,F.T. & Ubung, J.A. (2014). Improving the Standard and quality of primary education in Nigeria for national development. *International Journal of Research and Reviews in Education*, 1 – 6.
- Otuka, J.O.E. (2015). Creativity and inventions: The role of functional education to the target group. *Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction*, 11 (1), 1 – 10.
- Oyundoyin, J.O. (2003). Environmental and biological factors as correlates of creativity among secondary school students in Oyo. *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*.
- Ukpai, P.O. & Okoro, T.U. (2011). Science, technology and mathematics (STEM) education in Nigeria: The need for reforms. *A paper presented at the 52nd Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN), held at Akure on the 23 – 26th August*.