

ENHANCING FUNCTIONAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN A COMATOSE ECONOMY

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Abstract

Primary education is regarded as the first formal educational pyramid and the bedrock of education. This is because it is the foundation upon which every other educational level is built upon. Through this level of education, learners are able to acquire permanent literacy which makes them able to read, write and speak very well. It is however, very unfortunate that in the contemporary society today, most primary school leavers seem not to be able to read, write or speak good English. This is a great challenge to all relevant educational stakeholders, because, in this comatose economy, it may be very difficult for a child to leave primary education and be useful and functional in the society unlike in the yester years when a child graduate from primary school and is able to take a paid job and work to a given task. The major thrust of this paper was to examine how functional primary education can be enhanced in a comatose economy. The paper specifically looked at the concept of education, primary education, aims and objectives of primary education, problems of primary education and ways to enhance functional primary education. It was then recommended among others that primary education should be given priority by government through proper funding in areas of provision of quality teachers, instructional materials and infrastructural facilities.

Keywords: Functional, primary education, comatose, economy

Education is the process of learning in order to develop physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually and economically (Edward, 2008). Agbe (2010) defined education as the process by which society through colleges, universities and other institutions transmit its cultural heritage and its accumulated

knowledge from one generation to the other. Obiabo and Alache (2003) regarded education as a process by which a community seeks to open its life to all individuals within it and enables them to take part of it. Thus, education may be defined as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. In Short, education is the development of individual according to his needs and demands of society, of which he is an integral part. The above remarks of different educators highlight the following special features of education. Education is both unilateral as well as bi-polar in nature, it is a continuous process, it is knowledge or experience, it is development of particular aspects of human personality or a harmonious integrated growth, it is conducive for the good of the individual or the welfare of the society, it is a liberal discipline or a vocational course and it is stabilizer of social order, conservator of culture, an instrument of change and social reconstruction.

The role of education in enhancing the development of a nation cannot be over emphasised. This is because, education seem to be an instrument or a tool that brings about positive growth and development of the society. In the opinions of Nkokelonye (2005), education is a powerful means of social advancement of any society. It is

the most powerful instrument man devised for his progress and advancement. In the march to civilization through education, new frontiers are explored, impediments are removed and new vistas are realized. Education has proved to be a force of great power, so powerful that it can reform any individual (Nkokelonye, 2005). Nkokelonye further stated that education enables individuals and the society to make an all round participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, abilities and skills. Education also plays vital roles in promoting respect for human rights and democratic values, creating conditions for equality, mutual understanding and cooperation among people in the society. This means that the society to a particular extent seem to depend on education for its survival and growth especially when a mass of people in the society embraces this concept.

The role of education and its positive contribution to intellectual growth and development has become points of common concern to relevant educational stakeholders in both advance and developing countries (Gudday in Akus, 2016). There are lots of international human right instruments that project education as fundamental human rights. This include the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR, 1948), International Convention on Economic, Social Cultural Right (ICESCR, 1960) among others. UDHR and ICESCR show that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour. Corroboratively, Ayeni and Adepoju (2013) asserted that

education is an instrument par excellence and the means of achieving human capital and national development. According to Ayeni and Adepoju (2013), this underscores the value being placed on quality and standards which encompasses quality learning resource inputs, instructional process, teachers' capacities development, effective management, monitoring and evaluation, and quality learning outcome in primary schools.

Education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades. It is also a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for survival in the changing world (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2007). Adesina (2011) posited that education is a major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. Adesina added that education has the capacity to bring about character and attitudinal change as well as reshaping human potential for desired development. However, its management in Nigeria has become a nightmare.

In Nigeria today according to Akinsanya (2007), the popular demand for education is on the increase not just because education is an investment in human capital, but also a determining factor to the growth and development of a nation. However, the belief that education is an engine of growth and development of a nation rests on the quality of education provided which is hinged on enhancing its functionality through giving of proper attention to it especially the primary education which is the key to success or

failure of the whole system (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Primary Education

Primary education is the first stage of compulsory education. It is preceded by pre-school or nursery education and is followed by secondary education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in her National Policy on Education it as the type of education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 years plus. It is the foundation level of the educational system which runs for six years. 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 and it is aimed at developing basic literacy, numeracy, communication skills and transmission of the culture of the people to younger generations. The duration shall be six years (FRN, 2014). This means that the major goals of primary education are achieving basic literacy and numeracy amongst all pupils.

Primary education is provided in schools where the child will stay in steadily advancing classes until they complete it and move on to high school/secondary school. Children are usually placed in classes with one or at least two teachers who are primarily responsible for their education and welfare for that year. This teacher may be assisted to varying degrees by specialist teachers in certain subject areas. The continuity with a single teacher and the opportunity to build up a close relationship with the class is a notable feature of the primary

education system (Bua and Ivagher, 2014).

Objectives of Primary Education

The main emphasis of primary education is to establish a strong academic foundation. In the light of this, FRN (2014, p.9) in her National Policy on Education have the following general objectives with regard to primary education:

- The inculcation of permanent literacy 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 further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Problems of Primary Education in a Comatose Economy

According to Durosaro (2002) in Bua and Ivagher (2014:57), there are numerous issues and problems involved in the management of primary education system in Nigeria. Some of the crucial issues include:

Funding: Inadequate funding is a major problem of concern in the management of primary education in Nigeria. According to a World Bank survey on Nigeria, the federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10% of its overall expenditures. For instance, between 1997 and 2002, the total share of education in total federal expenditure ranged between 9.9% and 7.6% with the trend showing a downward plunge (World Bank, 2002). In addition, inadequate funding of primary schools gives rise to large classes for teachers, meagre libraries, few instructional supplies, cheap building and poorly trained teachers.

Policy implementation: Over the last two decades, the management of primary education had been experiencing some problems as a result of policy implementation. This can be seen from the Universal Primary Education (UPE) to Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. These programmes are very good but the implementation has been very poor. The attestation to this is the issue of non-payment or irregular payment of salary and the provision of adequate learning facilities which has jeopardized the achievement of the objectives of this programmes. There has been a level of inconsistency ranging from State Government control to the Local Government and then to a Federal Commission. All this has affected the successful implementation of primary education in Nigeria (Durosaro, 2002).

Shortage of qualified teachers: The issue of shortage of teachers has affected the quality of primary schools in Nigeria because, most of the teachers who are teaching in primary schools do not have the requisite qualification to teach at that level. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education prescribes NCE as the minimum teaching qualification in primary schools. With reference to this provision, the National Council on Education provided in 1992 that no grade II teachers should remain in primary schools by 1995 and none below NCE in any of our schools by 1998. It was discovered that out of the total teachers' strength in Nigeria, 91,868 teachers were uncertified/unqualified Grade II teachers. In addition, 361,118 teachers were unqualified NCE teachers (NPEC, 1999); yet teachers with less qualification are still teaching in the primary school in Nigeria. This has posed a problem ineffective and efficient management of primary schools.

Poor supervision: Most of the schools and teachers are not well supervised to see that whatever kind of knowledge imparting in the pupils is such that will meet the set objectives of this level of education. In some instances, most of the supervisors are lower in rank with less knowledge to supervise teachers in these schools. This makes teaching and learning ineffective.

Inadequate instructional materials: Instructional materials used in primary schools include: textbooks, charts, maps,

audio tape, recorder, television, and video tape recorder. Other categories of material resources consist of paper supplies and writing materials such as pens, eraser, exercise books, crayon, chalk, drawing books, notebooks, pencil, ruler, slate and workbooks (Atkinson, 2000). This is grossly inadequate in primary schools today. This makes teaching and learning is nothing to write home about in primary schools, and the quality of teaching and learning is apologetic.

Inadequate infrastructural facilities: Inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities is one of the worst problems facing effective functioning of primary schools in Nigeria. O' Neill (2000) described infrastructures in schools to consist of buildings, furniture, sanitary facilities, electricity facilities, recreational facilities, libraries, laboratories, computer system, school records and instructional materials. This has been found to be inadequate. According to Arisi (2002), many primary schools have been built long time ago by both government and church missionaries. Hence, most of the buildings, roof-tops, desks, chairs, tables and floors among others have become extremely bad and dilapidated. Other problems of primary education are:

Large class size: This is one of the epidemics in the primary school education system with school rooms overflowing with students and no enough teachers to provide adequate amount of individualized attention, the student learning experience is therefore jeopardized.

Learning style: The academic course work in primary education is fixed, that is every child regardless of learning style receives the same information. Many teachers present information in a manner that will appeal to the majority of student but exclude those with different learning style.

Standardized test: These are administered to test students' knowledge in the area they are supposed to learn. Most of the students take test under pressure.

Budget cuts: Put a strain on primary education and quality of learning experience student receives. Budget cut impact what school can afford to spend money on learning tools, resources, furniture, renovated classroom and new technology and things primary school may have to forgo but in most cases student miss out.

A Comatose Economy

A comatose economy is an economy that is in shambles. In the opinions of Onyegu, Akinbode, Ugochukwu and Chukwuma (2002), a comatose economy is characterized by a modest inflation rate, high interest rate low capacity utilization and high unemployment. The authors further state that the economy needs expansionary policies to stimulate economic growth and generate new jobs. Such an economy is a critical situation, with a combination of different factors such as: depreciation of the naira, huge budgetary cuts, debt

burden, high unemployment, investment contraction, banks speculation and lack of transparency (Agbowuro, Saidu & Jimwan, 2017). According to Chiakwel (2016), Nigeria has so far achieved theoretical quantitative macroeconomic fundamentals, but a lot needs to be done particularly on stabilizing her bearish Naira currency. The author further noted that Although Naira is relatively stable it is weak when compared to major currencies like the Dollard and Euro. Presently Nigeria is having one of the lowest debts to GDP ratio in the world. This is attributed to her recent payment of foreign debt and the reasonably macro-economic stability she achieved through economic reform measures with a huge foreign reserve. Yet the value of the Naira continues to be depressed.

Ways to Enhance Functional Primary Education in a Comatose Economy

There are various ways that could enhance functional primary education in Nigeria which includes:

1. Adequate funds should be provided by government through increase in the allocation to the education sector so as to give room for increase in the running grant to primary schools. This means that more money should be released to the head teachers of primary schools for their day to day running of the school programmes. Government should also liaise with Non-Governmental Organizations such as United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID),

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Development Association (IDA) among others. By so doing, primary school environment would be conducive for teaching and learning and thus, quality will be enhanced.

2. In the area of policy implementation, Government should not only formulate educational policies like that of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Basic Education but also ensure such programmes are well implemented. This can be done through setting up of a well qualified staff as monitoring team to oversee the affairs of the programmes so as to ensure its proper implementation.

3. Government should make sure that only educationally qualified persons are allowed to teach in the primary school. Those who do not have the minimum NCE teaching qualification in primary schools should be relieved of their work or giving opportunity to go for further studies through giving them study leave. This will help them update their knowledge and come back to put in more effort in ensuring the functionality of this level of education.

4. Government should steer up her efforts in supervising the primary school teachers and head teachers. There should be regular inspection of primary schools by selected competent and qualified persons who would be strict at ensuring that the right thing is done without favour of any person. This will go a mile stone in ensuring quality as well as functionality of the primary school.

5. Adequate instructional materials should also be provided such as: pens, eraser, exercise books, crayon, chalk, drawing books, notebooks, pencil, ruler, slate, maps, atlas, encyclopedias and workbooks among others. They should also encourage the private sector, parents/guardians, companies, Non-Governmental Organizations to contribute in providing instructional materials to this level of educational system. By so doing, this level of education would prepare the pupils better ahead of educational pursuit as well as ground them in a manner that they can function in the society effectively.

6. Government and private school proprietors/proprietress should adequately provide infrastructural facilities such as: buildings, furniture, sanitary facilities, electricity facilities, recreational facilities, libraries, laboratories, computer system, school records and teaching aids among others to also to ensure the quality as well as functionality of the primary schools in this comatose economy.

7. Large class size should be discouraged by the government. This can be done through proper inspection of schools by inspectorate team to ensure the minimum teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35 as stipulated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2014: 11). This will help to avoid the issue of classroom congestion that does not create a conducive atmosphere for proper learning.

8. The management of State Universal Primary Education Board (SUBEB) should ensure that the learning styles used by teachers are such that

would be captivated by the pupils. It should be according to their age and individual difference.

9. The methods of assessing students should be such that do not create too much anxiety in the pupils but such that will make them motivated and be free minded to write and pass. Teachers should avoid the situation whereby students take test under pressure. This will help to create better understanding as well as make the well prepare for the test without cramming.

10. The kind of budget prepared by government for this level of education as well as private proprietors should include all the things needed for a holistic learning of the child.

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in looking at the meaning of education and primary education, it also highlighted the aims and problems of primary education in a comatose economy. Based on this premise, the paper concluded that since primary education is the foundation of education in which every other educational system is built upon, there is every need to corroborate efforts of all educational stakeholders in revitalising this level of education through, adequate funding, proper implementation of policies, quality supervision, recruitment of qualified teachers, adequate provision of instructional materials, infrastructural facilities, proper control of class size, use of appropriate learning styles, testing and budgeting. If all these are done, this level of education would be more functional in

a comatose economy.

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