

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

Adedayo Benson, AROMOLARAN¹; Sunday Joseph, ADELEKE²; Muideen Abiodun ISMAILA³; Eniola Abioye, ADEYEMO³

¹Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

²Department of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos

³Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos

**Corresponding Author:* Adedayo Benson, AROMOLARAN, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

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ABSTRACT

Education is said to be an instrument for economic prosperity, scientific and technological development, the means to reduce and remove unemployment, as well as the foundation of social equity. Primary education is a foundational level of education that needs to be adequately controlled, managed and well funded. Access to education by the citizenry in no small measure contributes to the socio-economic development of the country. Thus, effective, and good administration of Primary level of Education are measures for national growth and socio-economic development. The fact remains that despite all efforts at making the programme to meet its required objectives, it has been saddled with problems and challenges ranging from issues of enrollment, funding, infrastructure, teaching personnel as well as curriculum provisions. This paper discuss and examine the management of primary education viz-a-viz its roles at meeting societal demands, and prepare citizens towards contributing to socio-economic development of the society. Recommendations were made as regards the need for effective collaborations among and between all the stakeholders if the required objectives are to be met.

Keywords: Primary education, administration, socio-economic development, equity, challenges

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing recognition on daily basis of the invaluable role which education plays in the development of individual and the society at large. Education is globally accepted as the most effective agent of change since it is capable of transforming and reshaping the behavior pattern, social values, developmental rates and aspirations of people.

Education is also important in the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes freedom of expression, thoughts, belief, participatory and representative government among others. Education to sociologist provides necessary skills and knowledge as well as an avenue for training each generation towards fulfillment of group's significant positions

(Carper, 2000). Osakwe (2008) stated that education being an indispensable tool in nation building is a process of systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities which enables an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of his society.

Primary education does not only lay the foundation for further education, it also equips beneficiaries with survival skills (Osokoya, 2004). In an attempt to make everybody all over the world have at least basic education, there have been various declarations and conferences aimed at compelling all nations to provide education for all their citizens. One of such was the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in March, 1990 which declared that all children, young people and

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

adults have the human rights to benefit from education that will meet their basic needs.

Successive administrations in Nigeria over the years have embarked on several educational developmental programmes including the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the 1970s and the States Primary Boards approach of the 1990s (Brown, 2007).

However, as lofty as these ideas were, they could not achieve the purpose for which they were established due mainly to poor management and implementation borne out of such factors as inadequacy of infrastructural facilities, personnel, as well as finance to mention a few. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was launched in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria has now taken a central point for the advancement of the educational system in Nigeria since it is the foundation upon which every other levels of education will be laid.

NIGERIAN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

At the end of Second World War in 1945, a new constitution was imposed on Nigeria. This constitution was known as the Richards Constitution of 1945. The constitution was named after the author who was Sir Arthur Richards. He was then the Governor of Nigeria. This constitution divided Nigeria into three regions – East, West and North. These regions correspond with the three largest ethnic groups in the country, the Ibos in the East, the Yorubas in the West and the Hausa-Fulanis in the North. The Richards Constitution became effective in Nigeria in 1946. In 1948, Governor Richards was succeeded by Sir John Macpherson as Governor of Nigeria.

At this time, nationalists had intensified their efforts for self-governance. This led to the formation of political parties. These political parties were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.) led by Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Action Group (A.G.), led by Obafemi Awolowo of the West and the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.) led by Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. These three political parties contributed enormously to the emergence and growth of primary education in Nigeria between 1950 and 1964. Each of these political parties won

election in its ethnic region – the N.C.N.C. won in the East, the A.G. in the West and the N.P.C. in the North.

In 1951, the Macpherson constitution was introduced to replace the ineffective Richards constitution. Fafunwa (1974) noted that this constitution provided for democratic election into the regional houses of assembly, empowered each region to raise and appropriate funds, and more importantly, had power to pass laws on education, health, agriculture and local government. With the regionalization of education in 1951, both the Eastern and Western regional governments led by N.C.N.C. and A.G. respectively made education their priority.

THE EMERGENCE OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (UPE) PRIMARY EDUCATION IN WESTERN REGION

At the inception of his administration in 1952 in the Western region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo made it clear to the public that he would give priority attention to health and education. Consequent upon this, the then Minister of Education, Chief S.O. Awokoya presented a comprehensive proposal for the introduction of a free, universal and compulsory education also referred to as Universal Primary Education (UPE) for the western region by January 1955. According to Fafunwa (1974), the proposal included a massive teacher-training programme, the expansion of teacher-training facilities and secondary schools, the introduction of secondary technical education and secondary modern schools.

As proposed, by January 1955, universal free primary education was launched in the West for all the children in the region within school age of 6-12 years. This was an exciting occasion and was celebrated throughout the region with parades, sports and feast to mark the achievement of free universal primary education. According to Taiwo (1982), the Minister's message summarized the mood of the region:

"I am happy that in our life-time primary education for all has begun. We must not forget that debt we owe to those voluntary workers, educational agencies, missionary bodies, district planning committees, building contractors, officials great and small, who have laboured so hard to bring about this historic event."

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

Fafunwa (1974) noted that in 1954, some 457,000 pupils were attending fee-paying primary schools in the West, but when the scheme was launched in January 1955, some 811,000 children enrolled. These figures represented a jump from 35 percent to 61 percent of the 5-14 year olds. By 1958, more than one million children were enrolled in primary schools. The government, however, underestimated the figures expected at the initial stages; it was originally estimated that some 492,000 would be enrolled in 1955 rising by 100,000 annually, but more than 800,000 were registered. The number of primary school teachers rose from 17,000 in 1954 to 27,000 in 1955.

The West government's budget for education increased from £2.2 million in 1954 to £5.4 million in 1955 and nearly 90 percent of the budget was spent on primary education alone. The capital expenditure for the construction of primary school buildings was £2.4 million for 1955, while a total of £5 million was committed to primary school buildings between 1954 and 1958. By 1960, five years after the introduction of free primary education, over 1,100,000 children were enrolled. This represented more than 90 percent of the children of school age in the Western region. This explained the importance and priority as well as adequate attention given to education by the elites in the then Western region of Nigeria.

The introduction of universal free primary education by the Action Group – led government in Western region was a big challenge and threat to the N.C.N.C. – led government in Eastern region. Consequent upon this, the Eastern region also hastily embarked on Universal Primary Education Scheme in 1957

The development of education in Northern Nigeria was very slow. As the governments in the East and West aspired to provide universal free primary education to its citizens, the government in the North showed little or no interest in education. Fafunwa (1974) noted that this was due to some reasons. First, the resources were not there. Second, the population of children of school age resident in the region was very high as half of Nigeria's children of school age reside in the North. Third, some

Northern political and religious leaders were not eager to expose their children to western form of education. Fourth, Islamic education was preferred to Western education

POST-INDEPENDENCE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The Ashby Commission's recommendation was a major catalyst in the development of primary education in Nigeria. According to Fafunwa (1974), the Commission noted that Nigeria had made tremendous progress in the field of education. Specifically, it noted that in 1958 it had two and a half million children in primary schools and 25,000 teachers in training, while most of the 80,000 teachers in service were pitifully unprepared for their task, some three-quarters of them were un-certificated and from among those who were trained, two-thirds had no more than primary school education.

Thus, 90 percent of the teachers in the primary schools were not well trained for their work. The Commission which started work on May 3, 1959, submitted its findings to the Federal Ministry of Education on September 2, 1960, just a month before Nigeria's independence.

Taiwo (1982) reported that the development programme was designed to advance the primary school system towards the ultimate aim of universal primary education as soon as possible, while at the same time providing for an increase of post-primary facilities in order to ensure a balanced system of education.

Several other Commissions were established in the Western, Eastern and Northern regions to further deliberate and propose better means of advancing primary and as well secondary education in Nigeria. Of such Commissions were Banjo Commission of 1960 in the West, Ikoku Committee of 1962 in the East and Oldman Commission of 1962 in the North.

The first major basic educational policy embarked upon by the Nigerian Government after the end of the civil war in 1970 was the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. This was sequel to the assembly of Heads of States of the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) and now African Union (AU) that met in Addis Ababa in 1961 (Avosch in Nwangwu 2003). These Heads of State, realizing the

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

importance of education in the development of Africa formulated explicit and specific educational goals.

The 1961 Addis Ababa Conference agreed on 1980 as a target year for all African countries to attain UPE. In response to this conference, the then Head of State, Lt.

General Olusegun Obasanjo, launched the Universal Primary Education on September 6, 1976. Okpala cited by Nwangwu (2003) revealed that when the third national development plan which contained the UPE scheme was released, the Nigerian government outlined some educational objectives aimed at uplifting Nigeria's educational system. These included:

- To expand facilities for education aimed at equalizing individual access to education throughout the country.
- To reform the content of general education to make it more responsive to socio-economic needs of the country.
- To consolidate and develop the nation's system of higher education in response to the economy's manpower needs.
- To streamline and strengthen the machinery for educational development in the country.
- To rationalize the financing of education with a view to making the educational system more adequate and frequent.
- To make an impact in the area of technological education so as to meet the growing needs of the country.

The launching of UPE in 1976 was very significant in the history of the country, and by 1970 according to Taiwo (1982), the overall primary enrollment was put at 35 percent of school age children. In the northern states, the percentage enrolment ranged from 7 percent in the far north to 26.2 percent in the reverie States. In the Southern States, it ranged from 61.8 percent to almost 95 percent in Lagos. The federal government came to the conclusion that only the introduction of universal primary education in the country could solve the educational imbalance and provide the needed numbers for full utilization of human resources in the country.

MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Primary education is typically the first stage of compulsory education coming between early childhood and secondary education. It usually takes place in a primary or elementary school. It offers opportunities to all children regardless of age, gender or country of origin to achieve a balanced cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development. The main purpose of primary education is to give children a strong foundation in the basics of a general curriculum, with emphasis on reading, and arithmetic's. It is meant for children within the age range of five to eleven (5-11) years; while the targeted subjects are reading, mathematics, social studies, physical and health education as well as science.

It is quite understandable that one cannot understand and appreciate the concept of organization and management or rather administration of primary school without first of all understanding the meaning of school. Education and schooling are closely related. Education is an act that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. Teachers in educational institutions direct the education of pupils and might draw on many subjects including reading, writing, arithmetic's, science and history; this process is sometimes called schooling. Schooling is an integral part of education. Schools are regarded as public service institutions which are not profit oriented but service goal oriented as they work for the realization of common goals of society. In sociological perspective as said by Parson (1961) cited in Haralambos and Holborns (2008), such goals include transmitting of societal values and norms from one generation to another.

Policies could be said to be decisions of people in authority which convey the intentions of either the government or the organization to attain the goals of the government or the organization. Ocho (2003) however, defined policies as authoritative judgments which establish the bases for administrative actions. Ukeje (1992) identified three major functional areas in educational management as policies, resources and execution. He asserted that these

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

areas are not mutually exclusive. Ukeje said for a policy to be effective, its formulation considered available resources for the implementation. However, the resources include people, materials, money, time and authority; execution is the action in integrating and synthesizing the resources and the policy for the achievement of the goals of the organization.

When considered on the platform of education, a nation's policy on education represents procedures on which the affairs of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education should be managed. Improvement of the educational system of any country is a function of the ability of authorities to effect necessary changes in the existing patterns of actions in classrooms, schools and other ancillary structures. Authorities aspire to effect a change or retain those patterns of action through the formulation and the implementation of educational policies. All of these give room for effective management of educational activities earmarked for certain purposes and specific period of time.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria emerged through the proceedings and recommendations of the 1969 National Conference on Curriculum Development that took place in Lagos from September 8-12. This conference was sponsored by the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC), now Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council. Nwangwu (2003) noted that the conference was convened to deliberate on the objectives of Nigerian education, curriculum content, the methods, materials, equipment, aids and other relevant issues required for successful implementation of the curriculum in order to achieve the desired goals. This was in an attempt to do away with the inherited colonial adopted curriculum and system of education which by and large placed too much emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic. These criticisms culminated in the 1969 National Conference on Curriculum Development to fashion out a curriculum that responds to the needs and aspirations of Nigerian society. This curriculum was expected to incorporate what Adamu (2005) referred to as the four basic pillars of education; that is, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

A draft document of national policy on education was eventually presented by group of experts and this was accepted and first published in 1977. This gave birth to what we now refer to as the *National Policy on Education*. This educational policy which addressed all the educational levels in the country was launched as 6-3-3-4 system of education after its review in 1981 and was to be implemented in 1982. It is this document that outlines the goals of primary education in Nigeria.

THE GOALS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) defined primary education as education given in institutions for children aged 6-11 plus. It went further to state that 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. This underscores the importance the government attaches to primary education. The duration of primary education is six years.

According to this policy, the goals of primary education are to:

- inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and 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 adapt 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 (NPE 2004).

The concept of free primary education was reflected in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, under the fundamental objectives and direct principles of state policy, Section 18, Sub-section 1-3, when it states that:

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

- Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels;
- Government shall promote science and technology;
- Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end government shall and when practicable provide;
 - free compulsory and universal primary education;
 - free secondary education;
 - free universal education; and
 - free adult literacy programme.

Educational goals are designed not only to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria but also to equip the children with the skills with which to become active and contributing members of the Nigerian society.

THE PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

A lot of factors militate against management and implementation of primary education programme in Nigeria. UNICEF rightly observed that the problems confronting education in Nigeria are not different from those that had undermined economic and social advancements. These problems include widespread poverty, lack of skilled personnel, top-down bureaucracies, gender discrimination, rapid population growth, skewed distribution of education funds, bloated military as well as civilian spending and onerous foreign debt burdens (Ugwu in Nwangwu 2003).

Other problems confronting the implementation and management of primary education programme include:

Lack of Political Will

Nigerian politicians lack the political will and commitment to invest and promote education. This lack of political will and commitment was clearly manifested during the Second Republic.

Funding

One of the major problems confronting primary education in Nigeria is poor funding. UNESCO recommended that budgetary allocation to education should be 26 percent of the country's

annual budget. Ironically, no administration had got near to this recommendation. The funding of education in Nigeria is at very low ebb.

Lack of Awareness

There is insufficient campaign on the importance of education; while this explains why a good number of youths are taking to business.

The Teacher Factor

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) implementation guidelines underscore the importance of teachers when it asserted that no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers (FRN 2000). In this respect, the teacher factor includes the quantity and quality of teachers available for the implementation of primary education programme. One of the reasons why the 1976 UPE collapsed was inadequate supply of qualified teachers to cope with the population explosion in the primary schools. Recruitment of adequately qualified teachers in large numbers is a very important factor in the successful implementation of primary education programme in Nigeria.

Instability in Education Sector

The long period of military rule in Nigeria affected adversely the implementation of primary school programme. This led to instability in the education sector.

Lack of Facilities

Facilities refer to adequate classrooms, writing desks, recreational facilities and conducive teaching environment. Most primary schools lack both teaching and learning facilities and this affect adversely primary education. Adamu (2007) noted that approximately five percent of schools in the country have no school buildings. Classrooms are overcrowded with an average of 69 pupils per teacher in a regular 12m x 10m classroom.

Lack of Reliable Data

A major problem in primary education is the lack of reliable data for planning. Adamu (2007) reported that though the Federal Government produces data on executed budgets annually, contributions from States and Local Government Areas are not collated into comprehensive

Sociological Exploration and Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: Implications on Attainment of its Objectives

Government accounts. Funds expended on education by various bodies – grants and internally generated revenue are not reflected in the Federal, State and Local Government budgets; no adequate data on the number of qualified teachers and available facilities.

Financial Discipline

Many educational administrators are corrupt and dishonest in the management and disbursement of educational funds. Allegations of corrupt practice were leveled against the Education Tax Fund (ETF). Olowolabi (2000) reported that the missing 40 billion naira education tax collected by the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) has not been located. One of the major problems that confronted the implementation of 1976 UPE was fraudulent practice which led to many states inflating enrollment figures for purposes of collecting funds. Unfortunately, such funds were never used to promote education rather they were used to solve personal problems.

It is the government failure to provide qualitative education as a result of poor management and funding that necessitates increased private ownership of primary education system; and the urge by the parents, guardians to give the best to their wards in order to guarantee better future.

Primary education as the basis for other levels of educational development needs to be properly taken care of because, of the significant roles it plays, as well as its contribution towards individuals; society's political and socio-economic development.

For primary education in Nigeria therefore to adequately achieve its designed and desired objectives, the following recommendations were made:

- The primary education programme has to be monitored and assessed to ensure that the goals are attained
- Future development of the programme through regular review has to be given a priority by stake holders
- Staff of Local Education Authority responsible for primary school administration and management needs to be guided in the implementation of the programme

- Ensuring stability in management which gives room for and enhances productivity
- All the stake holders in education, parents, students, teachers, government most especially at the primary education level should be assured of fair treatment since everyone knows the principles as well as the procedures guiding education
- Provision of the required fund as at when due in order to facilitate effective running and management of the programme
- Regular recruitment and training of personnel that are specialists on the job. School managers should be mandated to attend training, workshop and conferences to improve their managerial skills

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