

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE JOURNEY SO FAR

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ABSTRACT

Primary education in Nigeria and the journey so far in this sector was academically discussed. Primary education is the formal starting foundation level upon which other levels of education depend. The goals of establishing primary education by the federal government as highlighted in this article were properly documented but they have not been fully achieved. Based on this, the article went further and highlighted and discussed the various problems presently facing primary education in Nigeria. Some of the problems discussed are population explosion of Nigerians, high rate of corruption among many Nigerians, shortage of qualified and dedicated teachers, lack of chairs, desks, classrooms, among others. This article also suggested how these problems can be resolved in the primary education. Law to regulate births should be enacted by the Federal Government, Nigerians and their leaders should be patriotic, the financing and management of public primary schools should be 100% transfer from the Local Government to the State Government, among others. These were some of the solutions recommended to address the current challenges facing this sector. In all, the article concluded that leaders of Nigeria and Nigerians themselves should see government problems and properties as their own affairs and ensure that they are adequately managed. Also, Nigeria at 61 years, the majority of the public primary schools are still battling to survive like the Local Government Councils themselves.

Keywords: *Corruption, Primary Education, Problems, Solutions.*

INTRODUCTION

Education in Nigeria is divided into three levels, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Primary education is the formal starting foundation level of education. Primary education is the level of education where the learners are exposed to the basic skills of Mathematics, English language, Handwriting, General Studies, among others. According to Olaniyan and Obadara (2008), primary education is a foundation upon which all other levels of education such as secondary and tertiary schools are built. In other words, whatever that have happened to primary education, whether positive or negative, will definitely affect the secondary and tertiary levels of education in the same direction.

Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) defined Primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. This means that on entry into the primary school, the child must be at least six (6) years of age. Federal government of Nigeria (2004) also noted that since the rest of the education system is built upon primary education, this level of education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system in Nigeria. In addition, primary education will be for duration of six (6) years. The goals of primary education according to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) are to:

- (i) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- (ii) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- (iii) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- (iv) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- (v) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment.
- (vi) 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.
- (vii) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

In pursuance of the above goals, Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) also went further and said that:

- (i) Primary education will be tuition free, universal and compulsory for all children of school age.
- (ii) Teaching will be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods.
- (iii) The medium of instruction in the primary school will be the language of the environment for the first three (3) years. During this period, English Language will be taught as a subject.
- (iv) From the fourth year, English Language will progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the Language of the immediate environment and French will be taught as subjects.
- (v) For effective teaching and learning, the teacher – pupil ratio will be 1:35.
- (vi) Advancement from one class to another will be based on continuous assessment.
- (vii) The primary school leaving certificate will be based only on continuous assessment and will be issued locally by the head teacher of the school.
- (viii) To take care of those children that were dropped out from primary education, adult and non-formal education were made available by the government for such children to enable them continue with their education.
- (ix) To integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into primary education, and among others.

Looking at the goals of primary education and the manners in which such goals will be achieved, all are well planned for by the Federal Government. One thing about education in Nigeria, on paper it will be well planned and documented but there will be problems during implementation of those policies concerning education, why? Several reforms on primary education were developed and implemented by different administrations of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

According to Okoye (2017), effort at universalizing Primary Education in Nigeria became more pronounced through the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme on Monday 6th September, 1976 by the then head of the Nigerian Military administration led by General Olusegun Obasanjo at Oke-Suna Municipal Primary School in Lagos. According to Okoye (2017), the Universal Primary Education (UPE) made primary education free and compulsory for all children of school-going age. The author further added that the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was aimed at establishing equal educational opportunity for all children of school age in Nigeria and to gradually reduce illiteracy and ignorance in Nigerian society. On the running of primary education through the Universal Primary Education (UPE), Okoye (2017) also noted that financing of the Universal Primary Education became a constitutional problem following the adoption of the 1979 constitution that placed education under the concurrent legislative list. In line with the 1979 constitution as stated by Okoye (2017), the Federal Government ceased to have direct responsibility for the management of primary education in Nigeria. With this development, State and Local Governments assumed the management of primary education while Federal Government will give 15% block grant to support the running of primary education in Nigeria (Okoye, 2017). By placing the management of primary education in the hands of State and Local Governments marks the beginning of failure of primary education in Nigeria. Some State Governments of the Federation argued that running and management of primary education is purely the affair of the Local Government. Today, the story about primary education is different in the negative direction.

Furthermore, because of the weak standard of education across all levels of education in Nigeria, the then elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29th May, 1999, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was improved upon with the expansion of its scope from six (6) years to nine (9) years basic education and the scheme (UPE) was changed to Universal Basic Education (UBE) and was launched on the 30th of September, 1999 in the city of Sokoto, Sokoto State (Okoye, 2017). With this development, the basic education was extended to Junior Secondary Schools (JSS). This means that all children of school going age will receive nine (9) years of uninterrupted formal education—six (6) years of primary education and three (3) years of Junior Secondary Education. Under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, the Federal Government of Nigeria had made robust package to assist the various State Governments on the funding of Primary Education in their domains. This financial assistance is called Universal Basic Education intervention fund. All the State Governments can only access these funds after they might have paid the counterpart funds. Also, under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, these funds are meant for capital projects such as building of classrooms, fencing of the schools, provision of instructional materials, allowances for in-service training for teachers, among others. Upon approval of these projects by the Federal Government through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) when such State has met the requirements for such projects. Despite the robust financial package made available to each of the States of the Federation, some States still find it difficult to access the funds because they fail to pay their counterpart funds. As at today, there are millions of naira awaiting to be accessed by the States at Universal Basic

Education Commission (UBEC), Abuja. Furthermore, some of the State Governments that were able to receive the funds after they have met the requirements, sometimes, such funds were mismanaged.

Therefore, the essence of this paper is to examine primary education in Nigeria; the journey so far, various problems presently facing the primary educational sector and the possible solutions to these problems will also be discussed. Discussions in this article will be based on public primary schools.

Problems Facing Primary Education in Nigeria

Various problems that are presently facing primary education in Nigeria will be highlighted and discussed in this paper. Below are the challenges currently facing the sector.

1. **Overpopulation of Nigerians:** Countries where the population of the people is not regulated by the governments, such countries cannot effectively plan for their developments. Nigeria as a country is one of them. No doubt, the population of Nigerians has already been exploded (Aduwa, 2020). Aduwa (2020) further noted that educational facilities available at primary education level have been overstretched by the huge number of learners that want to acquire basic education especially for those public primary schools located in the urban areas. According to Campbell (2018), Nigeria as a country has no population policy that would limit births. Campbell (2018) further noted that the people of Nigeria have traditional valued large families. Nigeria is a country where couples give birth to children the way they want. Population of Nigerians is increasing on daily basis. This increase in the population of Nigerians has affected all sectors of the economy including Primary education negatively. The Federal Government on its part does not have the accurate statistics of population of Nigerians and this had affected the developmental planning of the economy.
2. **Corruption:** Saying the truth always is bitter. Any person that stands for the truth is normally regarded by many Nigerians as a bad person. Corruption is the willingness of the people to ignore what is right and do what is wrong (Aduwa, 2021). According to Aduwa (2021), governments at all levels that are supposed to fight corruption, they are indirectly supporting corruption. On yearly basis, Federal Government of Nigeria made funds available in the form of grants to the States for the management of primary education. Recently, billions of naira were made available to all the 36 States as bailout funds by the Federal Government of Nigeria. How these funds are utilized by the majority of the States is unknown to Nigerians (corruption). The politicians that are in the helm of affair have exposed many civil servants on how to embezzle public funds that are meant for certain projects in the primary education sector. Corruption has gone to the extent that average modern Nigerian children now see it as a normal way of doing things and also as part of our values and norms (Aduwa, 2021). Nigeria is a rich country. The problem of Nigeria is how to manage public funds effectively for the purpose they are meant for. Corruption has hindered progress of development in the public primary education in Nigeria. Majority of Nigerians are not sincere to themselves and the country at large.
3. **Delay in Salary Payment and Promotion of Teachers:** Whenever Federal Government approved new minimum wage for workers, workers in the public primary schools in the majority of the States will be the last set of staff that will receive the minimum wage. The issue of promotion of primary school teachers in majority of the States is a different story. In these States, primary school teachers with

B.Ed Certificates cannot rise above certain grade level unlike their counterparts in the public secondary schools. This is inhuman in its entirety. With this development, majority of the teachers in the public primary schools are not happy in doing their jobs (poor productivity). Also in those States, payment of salaries to teachers in the public primary schools is not regular. Effective teaching and learning will definitely be affected negatively in these schools.

4. **Lack of Classrooms for Effective Teaching and Learning:** In Nigeria, there are still public primary schools where two classes share one classroom during teaching and learning as a result of shortage of classrooms. It is possible that contracts for the building of more classrooms have been awarded to contractors by the governments, but such contracts have been abandoned by the contractors (corruption). These contractors, some of them are politicians. Funds have been made available to them without the projects being completed. In addition, some public primary schools that manage to have more classrooms, some of them are without roofs. During rainy season, teaching and learning cannot take place in such public primary schools.
5. **Lack of Chairs and Desks:** This is another serious problem presently facing public primary schools in Nigeria. In this modern era, there are still public primary schools where pupils sit on the bare floor to receive lessons in the classrooms. According to Ibrahim (2020), an online reporter paid a visit to two public primary schools located within Gombe Local Government area, Gombe State and reported that many public primary school pupils sat on the bare floor to receive lessons at different schools in different classes. This is an indication that such public primary schools have no chairs and desks for pupils to learn. There are so many of such schools without chairs and desks across the six (6) geo-political zones of Nigeria. To our understanding as teachers, meaningful teaching and learning cannot take place in those public primary schools with such conditions.
6. **Controversy over the Management of Primary Education:** Following the adoption of the 1979 constitution, Federal Government ceased to have direct management of primary education. With the 1979 constitution, the management of primary education is been placed in the hands of the State and the Local Governments. Odewale (2019) reported that Local and State Governments had constituted the real actors in the management of Primary education through the instrumentality of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). Odewale (2019) further noted that constitutionally and financially, Local Government remained the major actors in primary education. According to Odewale (2019), in practical, it is the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) that managed schools through the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) with little or no consultation to Local Government Council. This is where the confusion between the State and Local Governments over the management of primary education comes in. The Executive Chairman of SUBEB and Education Secretary of LGEA (as nominated by the executive chairman of the local government council) are appointed by the State Governor in each State. Some State Governors have argued that it is the duty of the Local Government Councils to manage and finance Primary Education. On their parts, Local Government Councils have equally argued that it is a joint responsibility of the State and the Local Governments to manage and finance Primary Education in Nigeria (controversy). With this controversy, there will be delay in the development of Primary Education in Nigeria. Again, this is why payment of salaries to teachers in the primary schools is often delayed.

7. **Abolition of Teachers Training Colleges (TC II):** As indicated by Onyeagba (2006), Saidu (2008) and Sen (2010) in Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013), primary education is the foundation for a learner's learning on which every other levels of learning depend. By this development, teachers to be recruited to teach at the primary schools should be the teachers that will undergo foundation training at the teachers training colleges. Primary education is a sensitive level of education. Teachers training colleges were abolished by the Federal Government of Nigeria when N.C.E. was made as the minimum teaching qualification. Now, compare the qualities of teachers that were trained at the teachers training colleges before proceeding to colleges of education for their N.C.E. programme in those days and the present teachers that went to colleges of education for their N.C.E. programme directly. The difference is clear. The minds of many average Nigerians that want to become teachers have already been twisted to that direction. With the more emphases on paper qualifications by the governments and indeed, Nigerians, very soon, B.Ed will become the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria. In addition, if this eventually happens, the standard of teacher education and the products from the various levels of education will be further devaluated. Federal government abolished teachers training colleges (TC II) and allowed the various technical colleges to exist in Nigeria.
8. **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** In terms of quantity, there are many teachers in the primary schools but in terms of quality, there are few teachers in the public primary schools. Teaching profession has been regarded as a least profession where all manner of graduates irrespective of their disciplines go and secure employment. With the recent policy of governments, more than 70% of members of NYSC, on yearly basis were mobilized and posted to public primary and secondary schools to teach. It is obvious that majority of them are not qualified as teachers. Even though some of the NYSC members that did education, they are not genuinely interested in the teaching profession.
9. **Weak Process of Recruiting Teachers:** In some of the States of the federation, man knows man always form the base for the recruitment of teachers. During the recruitment process, politicians will hijack the process and employ whoever they want to employ. In most cases, recruitment of teachers is no longer based on merit especially at the State level. This is a wrong signal to the development of primary education in Nigeria.
10. **Lack of Instructional Materials:** According to Federation Government of Nigeria (2004), teaching at the primary schools should be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods. Majority of the instructional materials that will enable the teachers to present the teaching more experimentally are lacking in the majority of our public primary schools in Nigeria. Instructional materials are the teaching materials that assist subject teachers to deliver their lessons in a clear and understanding manner to the learners in the classrooms (Aduwa, 2021).
11. **Examination Malpractice:** Examination malpractice is another serious problem presently facing primary education in Nigeria. Examination malpractice is a process of passing an examination through illegal means (Aduwa, 2021). According to Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013), examination malpractice in Nigerian educational sector is currently a big business involving syndicate and stakeholders in the schools at all levels. The authors noted that some teachers who do not teach effectively and cover their scheme of work do resort to helping pupils to cheat in internal and external examinations. According to the authors, by so doing, a wrong foundation is laid in the children. The authors added that as the pupils pass their common entrance examinations to secondary schools, the same virus of examination malpractice is

nurtured and they cheat from class work to external qualifying examinations. We had cases in Nigeria where headmasters/mistresses were made as supervisors to their schools during primary six (6) final external examination by the ministry of education. The issue now is what do you expect from such supervisors?

12. **Lack of Residential Accommodations and Transfer Allowances for Teachers:** Majority of the public primary schools lacked residential accommodation facilities for teachers. Some public primary schools that were built in the interior villages across the country and teachers were been posted to such schools without residential accommodations. It is unfortunate that governments at all levels have no value for teachers. In addition, no transfer allowances for teachers in the public primary schools in the majority of the states. Also, some of these public primary schools established in the rural communities are for the purpose of gaining political points by the politicians that facilitated the establishment of such schools instead of giving quality knowledge to the pupils.

Proposed Solutions to the Problems Facing Primary Education in Nigeria

Based on the highlighted and discussed problems facing primary education in Nigeria, the article recommends the following as the remedies to the current problems facing the sector.

1. Law for the regulation of births should be enacted by the Federal Government. In the law, couples should have at most four (4) children. This law is overdue because the manner in which the population of Nigerians is increasing is no longer sustainable for the development of all sectors including primary education.
2. The leaders of Nigeria and indeed, all Nigerians should be patriotic in handling issues concerning this country (shun corruption). Leaders, politicians, contractors and all Nigerians should do the right things concerning primary education at all times.
3. Constitutionally, financing and management of public primary education should be 100% transfer from the Local Government Councils to the State Governments in all the 36 states of the Federation. Based on what is on ground, Local Governments have no capacity to manage primary education in their domains. If this request is granted by the appropriate authority, teachers in the primary and secondary schools will received their salaries and other benefits at the same time.
4. Some public primary schools that are very close to each other in the rural areas should be merged together for effective management.
5. Government should ensure that only qualified teachers that possessed at least N.C.E. preferably in primary education are employed.
6. Facilities such as classrooms, chairs, desks and instructional materials should be adequately provided by the government. Also, headmasters/mistresses should ensure that the provided facilities in their schools should be judiciously utilized.
7. The N.U.T. executive in each state should shun politics with government. Some of the N.U.T. executives in Nigeria have completely deviated from their normal responsibilities.
8. All Nigerians should have positive attitudes towards education of our children and follow the laid down guidelines stipulated by the National Policy on Education (Aduwa, 2021).

Conclusion

Primary education is the foundation level of education upon which other levels depend. On the journey so far on primary education in Nigeria, practically, the goals of establishing primary education as highlighted in this article have not been fully achieved. The majority of the public primary schools are still battling to survive like the Local Government

Councils themselves at Nigeria at 61 years. Leaders of Nigeria and Nigerians themselves should see government properties as their own properties and ensure that these properties are well managed. The era of seeing government's properties as nobody's properties is over. Nigeria is blessed with abundant resources both capital and human, but how to manage these resources to the overall development of primary education is the nation's problem (corruption).

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