

## **Rethinking the Problems of Primary/Basic Education Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents a rethinking on some of the current problems of primary/Basic educational development in Nigeria. Some of the problems discussed are; issue of responsibility and control of the society's education; conflict between the federal, state and local government; prevalence of multiple system of education; unstable staff; unstable curriculum and subject syllabus among others. Suggestions were given which include clearer policy guidelines on the issue of control and responsibility, unified central examination body should be set up by the federal government for pupils leaving primary schools, a contract should be signed before employment of teachers and the government should intensify supervision to ensure stable curriculum and syllabus. This paper concludes, hoping that government and all the stakeholders involved will address this issue appropriately.*

**Keywords:** Problems, Primary education, Development

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### **Introduction**

Education is the solid foundation and the surest investment on which the scientific, technological and social economic development of the nation is laid (Marafa, 2009). Education is surely the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development. It increases people's capacities to transform their vision of society into reality. The government of Nigeria like any other country considers education as a fundamental human right and an essential means to ensure that all Nigerians realize their full potentials. It places special emphasis on primary/basic education as a priority area within the poverty reduction strategy (Oguntimehin & oni, 2010). But just as all sectors of national development, so the development of primary education in Nigeria is hampered by a variety of problems.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Problems:** This refers to something that is difficult to deal with or understand. It can also refer to deal with or dealt with (Oxford Dictionary, 2006).

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**Primary education:** This concept was addressed by the Hadow report of 1962 as education for children between the ages of 5-11 years (Tukur, 1999). Primary education in Nigeria refers to education which children receives from the age of 6 -11 years plus, Primary education is the foundation of our formal education (Ibrahim *et al*, 2006)

**Development:** This refers to a process by which the members of a society increases their personal and instructional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvement to their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations (Korten 1990; in Aref, 2010). Castle (1972) in Adeyinka, (1992) defines development as a situation where in man himself becomes both the object and subject of his own improvement, not merely an instrument in a process imposed from above and from without.

### **Problems of Primary Education Development in Nigeria**

Adeyinka (1992) went as far as listing twelve (12) problems that hampers the development of education, namely:

1. The issue of responsibility and control of the society's education. Conflicts between the federal, state and local governments.
2. The prevalence of multiple systems of education.
3. Diversification of the education system.
4. Unstable curriculum and subject syllabuses.
5. The problem of relating the curricula to national manpower needs.
6. Unstable staff
7. The poor state of the nation's economy: the financing of the education system.
8. Politicization of education
9. Procurement and servicing of equipments,
10. Inadequate classroom accommodation,
11. Poorly equipped libraries, and computer rooms. And
12. Scarcity and prohibitive cost of books.

These problems will serve as the basis for these discussions:

Issue of Responsibility and Control of the Primary Education: Conflicts between the Federal, State and Local Government

One of the problems of primary educational development all over the world is that of responsibility and control. In this exercise, the various agencies of education are actively involved, at times in unhealthy rivalry or competition, but the patten

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of this rivalry or competition is often determined by the nature of the problem of development itself (Adeyinka, 1992). The question as to who should assume responsibility for, and control of different issues or aspects of primary education is as old as the country itself. The conflicts of opinions as to what should be the appropriate roles of various agencies of education are a proof of this assertion. Hence, there is no rigid rule as to what should be the limit of the education of such agencies as the family, religious sects and the state.

Saleh (2013) asserted that the problem of primary educational development in Nigeria is that of conflict of responsibility and control between the federal, state and local government; the control of primary education is neither fully in the hand of the federal government, nor state or local government and this is a great barrier for effective educational development at basic level. Important critical issues for the development of primary education are tussled from federal, state and local government with no one ready to take responsibility and control especially when there is financial need. And this brings it at the mercy of no one and thus hinders any progress for its developments especially in urgent situation.

So, it is clear that one of the most prominent problems of primary education in Nigeria today is that of responsibility and control: the conflicts between the federal, state and local governments in the management and control of primary education in the country.

### **Prevalence of multiple system of education**

Another major problem of education development in Nigeria today is the prevalence of multiple systems of education. As of today each state has its own primary educational system that is unique and backed up by the federal or state education laws. In a situation like this, uniformity is virtually impossible and this has the potential for disrupting the education of the children of federal staff moving from one part of the country to the other. Anabigail (2015) traced the existence of the multiple education system back to the British administration and the creation of regions in 1954. The colonial administration before independence administered education through the use of education ordinances and education laws. These ordinances include the educational ordinance and regional laws of 1945. Multiple system of education has continued down to this day for instance, Awolowo introduces Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the then western region in 1995. The western region has its own too. Adeyinka (1992) believes that the national education system should supersede the state systems. In other words, the nation (the federal government) should set a standard, a pattern of operation to be adopted by all states. The present system whereby each state follows its own

way, particularly in the operation of the primary school systems does not make for uniformity.

This contradicts the statement of the federal government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education 2013 and the Universal Basic Act 2004 to provide uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria. For example there are variations in the duration of primary schooling between and within states, even in spite of the provisions of the current National Policy on Education. Further, there are variations in the nature and scope of school leaving examinations set for outgoing pupils of primary schools in the various states. This is because each state is independent in this area of academic activity. Thus, there is no central examining body to organise a Joint School Leaving Certificate Examination for children in the final year classes of the primary schools, as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) does for senior secondary school leavers and thus hinders the development of primary education.

### **Diversification of the Education System**

As a result of the prevalence of multiple systems of education in the country, there is the problem of diversification (Adeyinka, 1992). Differences in school duration, subjects, nature and scope of examination diversify the administration, planning and management of primary education. Who inspects what subjects, how often and for what purpose becomes diversified. In short, government educational efforts are diversified leading to dual inspections and control, sometimes leading to conflicts, misunderstanding and retrogression within the school system and as such preventing the development of primary education.

#### **Unstable Curriculum and Subject Syllabuses**

Because of the need for secondary schools to meet the requirements of certain examination bodies, Nigerian primary schools change their syllabus from time to time to gain acceptance and patronage from parents and public. Even when the national subject curricular are constant for some years, the school subject syllabuses are subject to modification by teachers, particularly where subject teachers are changed frequently. This is particularly the case with most rural primary schools where teachers frequently ask for transfer to urban primary or secondary schools. In effect, primary schools are usually filled with itinerant teachers, youth-corps members, fresh graduates on state service, teaching practice students or other categories of newly employed and lack experienced teachers who have no other options. Most of these categories of teachers usually modify the syllabus to suit their taste and achieve their own aims. This poses a great threat to the standard and uniformity of the system and as such poses a threat to primary educational development.

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### **Problem of Relating the Curricula to National Manpower Needs**

One major aspect of Nigerian education that has been quite often criticized is the curriculum. The early critics include members of the Phelps-stoke and Advisory Commissions who submitted their separate reports in 1925. The Phelps-stoke Commission noted with respect to the Nigerian educational system; are not adequately related to the economic and character needs of the people (Ejeh, 2005). He observed that the education system is patterned like that of the British and totally alienated from the needs of the country. It is interesting to note that a few decades after the publication of the Phelps-stoke and Advisory Committee Reports, particularly after World War [I], slight adjustments were made in schools curriculum which were now slightly oriented towards African life. More innovations are still done, but the progress in this direction is still unremarkable, up to date, education in Nigerian primary schools is still too literary; not practical, not adapted to the needs of a developing agricultural nation. This type of academic education only ‘tends to produce proud, lazy people that dislike manual labour and prefer white collar jobs (Adeyinka, 1992).

Today, most of our primary schools give major emphasis on learning and speaking English and even punish pupils that speak other languages, but little emphasis is given in developing science, agricultural and entrepreneurship skills in children. But all educational authorities in Nigeria are aware of the pressing need to relate our curricula, at all levels especially the basic level which is the foundation of the whole educational system, to our national manpower needs. Conferences on curriculum development and the utterances of renowned professors of education and government officials are a proof of the people’s awareness of this major flaw in our educational system and of the pressing need for reforms most especially at the basic level of education.

### **Unstable Staff**

As for teaching staff in Nigerian primary schools today, the problem is no longer that of unavailability, but that of instability. This does not help the development of the education system but rather drastically cripple the system (Saleh, 2013).

Constant change of teachers in primary schools hinders the academic performance of schools, before a rapport is established between the teacher and pupils it takes a while. And teachers who do not know their students and understand their needs cannot teach effectively. This can affect the performance of pupil negatively and thus hinders the development of primary education. Because of the comparatively poorer conditions of service of teachers in the Nigerian primary schools, the tendency for many teachers in the nation’s primary schools is to use the teaching

profession as a stepping stone to other highly esteemed and more attractive jobs. In consequence, teaching is gradually becoming a profession for fresh graduates of Universities and Collages of Education who are ready to call it quit, without provocation, as soon as they find greener pastures. Therefore, there can be no primary educational development in Nigeria without stable staffs/teachers

### **Poor State of the Nation's Economy: the Financing of the Education System**

Another major problem of educational development in Nigeria today is that of providing funds for the implementation of government policies on education and carrying out curriculum innovations in various disciplines at the basic level of education. The National Policy on Education has not fully been implemented (Oguntimehin & Oni, 2010). Many schools do not get adequate supply of equipments and instructional materials. Further curriculum innovation has not got adequate attention and sponsorship by government because funds are not usually available. For example, to introduce a new curriculum (computer studies for instance), a number of workshops must be held in order to bring together experts in all fields of learning. The results of the deliberations by these experts must be widely published to afford members of the public the opportunity of following the new trend in the development of education in their own country.

To teach a new curriculum at the primary level, the teachers or instructors currently employed by the government have to receive further training in teaching the new body of knowledge. All these projects depend on the availability of funds. The picture today is that funds are not sufficiently allocated to primary education. As 2000 statistics show that the federal government expenditure on education was below 10% of the overall expenditure (Saleh, 2013). This posits a great threat to the development of primary education.

### **Politicization of Education**

The politicization of education is another major problem of educational development in Nigeria. In an attempt to catch up with their counter-parts, many states in Nigeria, indulge in the opening and running of many primary institutions flawlessly, even when they are least prepared to do so (Saleh, 2013). Because both the people and politicians are aware of the importance of primary education, the politicians easily use it to achieve their own aims. This affects the policies drafted, implementation, and even funding of this educational system.

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## **Procurement and Servicing of Equipments**

A majority of the primary institutions in the country lack the various equipments needed for effective teaching and learning such as chalk board, chalks, chairs and desks etc. Government at the federal, state and local levels, do not seem to have enough funds to provide these essential equipments for schools; and were they are available they are not adequate (Adeyinka, 1992). The growth in the enrolment of primary school pupils is above projection and this leads to inadequate classroom accommodation (Tukur, 1999). Many primary schools in Nigeria have inadequate classroom accommodation; classrooms meant for thirty to forty pupils are used by fifty to sixty pupils. Pupils are seen sharing chairs and desks, standing up or even sitting on the floors. When students are overcrowded like this, there is a stalling of the teaching-learning process and a disruption of the children's mental ability.

Many primary schools have buildings that they call libraries, but most of them are not equipped with books, journals and magazines. In such a situation like this, the teachers cannot put in their best and the learning process is stalled and the overall development of the children is within the school system is retarded.

## **Scarcity and Prohibitive Cost of Books**

In Nigeria the book production/distribution industry is that the production cost of each book would be higher than before. It does not matter whether the books are imported or produced locally. If imported, the cost of buying them in Europe or America and the cost of transporting them to Nigeria would be high. If they are printed locally (that is in Nigeria), the cost of importing raw materials (paper, ink) would still be high, shooting up the overall production cost in either case. Therefore, the unit cost of every primary school book is high. Text books of subjects such as mathematics, English, story books etc are very expensive and unavailable. Pupils hardly have access to text books, and this factor militates against effective teaching and learning and the overall development of the Nigerian primary education system.

## **Suggestions**

1. There should be clearer policy guidelines on the issue of responsibility and control of primary education. The federal, state and local government should sit and explicitly specify the roles to be taken by each one of them towards development of primary education.
2. The federal government should set up a unified central examination body for pupils leaving primary schools to ensure uniformity of the primary education system.

3. The federal government should sit with the states to unify the primary education system for easy administration and planning.
4. The government should intensify supervision to ensure stable curriculum and subject syllabus in schools.
5. The curriculum should be made relevant to the needs of the pupils and the Nigerian society. Teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills to relate the curriculum to the present needs of the society.
6. A form of contract should be signed before employing teachers to ensure stable staffing.
7. The government should allocate more funds to education like it is done in America, Canada etc
8. Politicians should stop politicizing education. They should wake up and perform their duty in the provision of qualitative education for the development of the entire country.
9. Primary school administrators, community members, students and entire public should contribute towards the procurement of reading and learning facilities, classrooms, chairs and desk, etc. A positive attitude towards maintenance and care for government facilities should be harnessed.
10. Government should intervene by subsidising the cost of printing materials for publishing primary school text books, note books and drawing books, etc.

### **Conclusion**

It is realized that the problem of Primary Basic Education have been an issue since the beginning of education system in Nigeria. A rethinking of these problems reminds us of this issues and the need to address them appropriately. Part of these problems are the issue of responsibility and control of primary education: conflict between the federal, state and local government, prevalence of multiple system within the primary education system, unstable staff, inadequate classroom among others and suggestions were made such as; there should be clearer policy and guidelines on the issue of control and responsibility, the need for a unified central examination body for pupils leaving primary schools, more funding should be allocated to primary education among others. It is hoped that government and all the stakeholders involved will address this issue appropriately with commitment and dedication.



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