Primary Education for Sustainable Peace and National Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Way forward

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Abstract

Education is an important key to achieving sustainable national development. For a state or nation to achievea sustainable national development, the quality of the education provided at the grassroots level should be improved. This paper attempts toexplain the concept of primary education, the concept of peace as well as the concept of sustainable national development with the aim of examining the linkage between the three concepts. The paper provides an insight into three major challengesfaced by primary education in Nigeria whichincludethe issue of funding, the issue of qualified teachers and over crowded classrooms as well as the issue of language of instruction. The paper believes that if the stated challenges are properly addressed, then Nigeria will sustain the needed peace and national development.The paper finally suggested ways on how to solve the challenges confrontingprimary education in Nigeria. This is to be done through adequate allocation of funds by all the three tiers of government in Nigeria for educational development. Quality assurance in primary education should ensured through community active participation in primary schools to ensure the creation of conducive atmosphere for learning stimulated by supply of qualified teachers. Equally, the Federal Government should set machinery in motion for the development of a national from the three major Nigeria languages, to be used for instruction in primary schools.

Keywords: Primary education, Peace and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Education is humanity's best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve sustainable development. This powerful statement was made in 1997 in the UNESCO report: *Education for a sustainable Future.* Five years later, it was brought to the world leaders at the Johannesburg World Submit on Sustainable Development, paving way to the establishment of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005 - 2014). UNESCO was designated as the leading agency for implementing the Decade.

Education is the single most important means for empowerment and sustaining improvement in all human society. Sustainable development is a basic Human Right and unless this target is reached with the potent tool of Education the purpose of Education would remain unfulfilled. Building a culture of peace and learning to live together is the responsibility of everyone, and education is the principal means by which this goal can be achieved.Education is said to be the Conner stone of Economic and Social development.Education has been seen as the greatest force that can be used to bring about changes. Gbaiye (1983) sees education as any process by whichan individual gains knowledge, develops attitude or acquire skills. Haralambos and Holborn (2004) consider education as simply one aspect of socialization, which includes the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills. Dioha and Baiti (2002) see education as a good thing essential to human well-being and is also a process by which a society or a nation moulds the individual by subjecting him/her to a selected and controlled environment for the purpose of makingsuch an individual to attain social competence and optimum development. This means that Education is a basic component of human development since its aim is to make individuals become useful to themselves and to the community or social environment which they belong to. From the foregoing therefore, it can be said that education at all levels can be seen as a vital tool for addressing virtually all global problems.

However, the success of the education system of any country may be said to have depends entirely on a very strong pillar and that pillar is the type of education provided at the grassroots level; otherwise known as elementary or primary education.In Nigeria for instance, the National Policy on Education (2004), defines primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. The same policy document maintained 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.Against this background therefore, this paper presents a discussion on the challenges confronting primary education as an agent of sustainable peace and

national development in Nigeria with the aim of re-addressing them and providing the way forward.

Concept of Primary Education

Primary Education is made up of two words, i.e. primary and education, which need to be briefly explained as follows;

1. **Primary**: The Oxford Advanced Leaners' Dictionary of current English explains primary as"the earliest in time or order of development" Something is said to be at the primary stage when it is at the beginning.The beginning of everything is very important. If the beginning is strong, it is likely that the subject will endure, but if the beginning is weak the subject may fail or die. Education:Education on the other hand can simply be viewed as "a process of training and giving instructions especially to the young and inexperienced." It is through training and instruction that children acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and readiness for living a better sustainable life.
2. **Primary education**: Primary education is therefore the education given to children in the first six years of school. It is for children between age 6 and 14(NTI / PTTP Course Book on Education, 2000). Although in Nigeria and some other countries children may have the Early Childhood Education (in the form of nursery/kindergarten) before being admitted into a primary school. But the nursery/kindergarten schools are usually regarded and referred to as pre-schools which means before formal education.Therefore, even within the context ofNigeria's Basic Education, primary education is still considered as the first stage as it continually referred to as the 'Lower Basic.' Above all, the Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) defines primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Equally, the revised edition of the same policy (NPE, 2013) described primary education as the education given to children aged 6 to 12. The child at this stage of development views the world as a whole and interacts with the physical environment through geography and social activities. (FME: STUP, 2007).

However, both editions of thepolicy clearly spelt out the goals of primary education as follows;

➢ To inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively,

➢   To lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking,
➢   Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity,
➢   Instill social, moral norms and values in the child,
➢   Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment,
➢   Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable, the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacities.

Concept of Peace

The term 'Peace' has been defined in several ways by deferent scholars. Some of these definitions include that of Galtung (1996) who describes peace in terms of the conditions that hold when a peaceful state is maintained and promoted "Peace consists of positive thoughts, pure feelings, and good wishes. Peace is more than the absence of war, it is living in harmony and not fighting with others. Boulding (1996) pointed out that Peace is the main characteristic of a civilized society. Peace is not just the absence of war; it is the practice of love. Peace is a calm and relaxed state of mind.To stay peaceful requires strength and compassion.World peace grows through non-violence, acceptance, fairness and communication. In a peaceful society people would work together to resolve conflicts, develop morally, treat each other with justice, satisfy basic needs, and respect each other. In essence, they would live in unity.

According to Julius, Ngao, David and Paul (2012), peace can take place within the individual.Some believe this inner peace can be strengthened through our relationship with the Divine. Inner peace involves peace of mind and absence of fear. Outer peace is peace in society. The focus of the world in the 21st century is to achieve holistic inner-outer peace which has both spiritual and material dimensions.The need for peace and peaceful co-existencein human societies can be cultivated through the process of instructions in schools.According to Kumar (2010).Peace Education can be envisage as the processof developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and values that enable learners to: identify and understand sources of local and global issues and acquire positive and appropriate sensitivities to these problems; resolve conflicts and to attain justice in a non-violent way; live byuniversal standards of human rights and equity by appreciating cultural diversity and respect for each other.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The term sustainable development was first used in a publication titled "Our Common Future" a report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. This report was also known as the Brundtland Report in recognition of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's role as Chair of the commission that produced it.

Brundtland Commission Report defined sustainable development as the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations. Another useful definition of sustainable development was given by Helen Bergsten (in Chalmers Annual Report, 2006): 'Sustainable development is a perspective or a vision which provides room for many starting points'. The most interesting aspect of sustainable development is the fact that it puts in to consideration the present conditions of people as well as not compromising those that come later. Therefore, the concept of sustainable national Development remains the modern parameter of measuring development. (Boyi, 2013).

Munasinghe (2004) cited in Boyi (2013) pointed out that sustainable national Development is a process ofimproving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve theiraspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic,social and environmental systems.Age (2005) also cited in Boyi(2013) identified some objectives which sustainable national development is expected torealize: increase capital income and employment, promoting human welfare satisfying basic needs;protecting the environment, considering the path of future generation, achieving equity between rich and poor and participation ona broad basis in which development and decision making is important.

Primary Education for Sustainable Peace and National Development

Having stated above, the various definitions of primary education, peace and sustainable national development, it is imperative to examine the connection between the three concepts.

In every country in the world, (including Nigeria), educationremains the major instrument for effective national development. For instance, the philosophy behind the division or social hierarchy among countries in the world is based on the level of education attained by a particular country. As such some countries are regarded as

greatesteconomies, some as developingwhile others as Under-developed economies by using their level of education as parameters. In line with this therefore, it can asserted that the national goals of each country are achievable within the framework of the country's educational system.

For instance, Nigeria as a nation has five main national goals as stated in the Constitution of the Federal Republic. The goals include the building of;

➢   A free and democratic society;
➢   A just and egalitarian society;
➢   United, strong and self-reliant nation;
➢   A great and dynamic economy; and
➢   A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

The belief of Nigeria as an independent nation, is that if these national goals will be realized, the expected all round development will be sustained. But, the realization of these national goals is dependent upon the functionality of the country's educational system.However, the success of the education system of any country depends entirely on the type of education provided at the grassroots or lower level; otherwise known as elementary or primary education. In Nigeria for instance, the National Policy on Education (2004), defines primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. The same policy document maintained 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. In line with this therefore, it could be rightly asserted that, the full realization of Nigeria's national goals depends entirely on the provision of functional primary education.

Looking at primary education from the view point of its various definitions, there is no doubt in describing it as the education for sustainable peace and national development; because it is imparted at the grassroots level and the objectives which it seeks to achieve are directly inclined towards equipping the individual who received it, with knowledge for all round development, i.e. the knowledge through which one becomes intellectually sound, initiative, creative, peace loving, loyal to the constituted authority and so on. Therefore, development attained through grassroots education isoften assumed to have significant influence on the lives of its recipients (i.e. the young members of the society). The child learning at the primary level of education is at a stage of development in he/she views the world as a whole and interacts with the physical environment through geography and social activities that deals with mental, physical, psychological and social development of the child. In a

nutshell, primary education is an instrument for man power development; a fulcrum around which every other activity needed to promote peace and national development revolves. From the foregoing therefore, itis obvious that the promotion of sustainable peace and national development lies beyond the environment of education as a system, but rather primary education as a grassroots form of education.

Challenges of primary education for sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria

In every country in the world, (Nigeria inclusive), education remains the instrument for effective national development. However, there are issues that offer continuouschallenges to the effective provision of education and the challenges cut across all levels of education including primary education, there by limiting its capacity to bring about sustainable peace and national development. The challenges faced by the primary education sector in Nigeria are many. However there are some outstanding that are, to this paper, parts of the major challenges that have been there for ages and refused to go, as such the paper directs its attention on them, they include;

- The issue of Funding;
- The issue of Qualified Teachers andOvercrowded classrooms;
- The issue of Language of instruction.
- The issueof funding.

Funding is no doubt the most important single factor that is central to all issues relating to the provision of education in Nigeria. However, education in Nigeria (in all its forms) can not be said to be adequately funded andeducational managers in Nigeria (ranging from Head teachers of primary schools, Principals of secondary schools, Rectors, Provosts and Vice chancellors manning the tertiary institutions)willbear testimony to this fact, considering the state of affairs and the quality of instructional process in these institutions.This menace of inadequate funding is much more pronounced at the primary education level in Nigeria, as it could be seen in the degree of inadequacy in terms of infrastructure; that is the physical and spatial enablers of teaching/ learning. They include classrooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops, play fields, school farms and gardens as well as provision of water and sanitation. These have to be of the appropriate quantity and quality to meet the minimum standards for promoting any meaningful teaching and learning condition at the primary education level.

The issue of primary schoolteachers' salaries is another area signifying the problems of funding in primary education; most of the times industrial actions are embarked upon by classroom teachers as a result of non payment of salaries for several months. Another issue that is often seen as the testimony to the problems of funding of primary education is lack of necessary teaching and learning material in almost all public primary schools.

The problem of funding in primary educationin Nigeria is directly connected to the issue of corruption. Primary education as a component of the UBE programme in Nigeria, is jointly funded by several sources. According tothe UBE Laws (called the Compulsory, Universal Basic Education Act of 2004) which established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) availed it of funds from the following sources;

Not less than 2% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CFR) of the Federal Government;
Funds/contributions in form of Federal Government Guaranteed credits and
Local/international donor grants.
The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) therefore ensures expenditure of the funds in the followings order;

Pre- Primary Education = 5%
Primary Education = 60%
Junior Secondary Education = 35%
The above expenditure by activities in each of the Components of the UBE Programme is as follows;
Infrastructural Development = 70%
Textbooks and Working Materials = 15%
Teacher Professional Development = 15%

Total = 100% (UBEC, 2010) cited in Nwokeocha (2013)

It can be seen from above expenditure that the primary education component of the UBE receives a greater percentage of the funding. However, the funds made available are always mismanaged and diverted from the educational system to other ends.

The issue of qualified Teachers and Overcrowded Classrooms

It is often said that no educational system in a nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. In other words, the success of the education system in any given country

rests on the availability of qualified teachers who are very much committed to manage the classrooms. Qualified teachers are the tools for rapid improvement of the education sector since they are the final stage managers when it comes to educational policy implementation.However one can argue that there is wide gab between teacher demand and Quality teacher supply in the Nigerian primary education sector. The UNESCO institute for statistics reiterated that teachers play a critical role in enabling students to achieve good learning outcomes within effective education systems. While the ability to positively shape a child's learning experience depends on a myriad of factors, the first step towards good learning outcome is to ensure that there are enoughqualified teachers in classrooms. According to Nwokeocha (2013), the UNESCO institute for statistics has revealed that in sub-Saharan Africa, due to the high pressure to supply teachers for the UPE and to counter teacher attrition rates, the governments often resorts to recruiting unqualified teachers and this practice tends to lower the national teacher professional standards as well as jeopardize education quality and students learning outcomes especially for students in overcrowded classrooms. However, the genesis of over crowded classrooms in primary schools in Nigeria is connected with the introduction of UPE of 1976 which brought about a sudden population explosion in primary schools and its resultant effects on teacher-pupil ratio. Classroom over crowdnessis now the order of the day in all public primary schools in Nigeria. Due to overcrowded classrooms in our public primary schools today, there are hardly enough places for the number of pupils in classrooms. This type of atmosphere is not conducive for effective teaching/learning process and the NPE prescribed teacher/pupils ratio may not be possible in an atmosphere of this nature.

Junaid (2011) gave a predictive statistics of the primary schools pupils enrollment, teacher out put and qualified teacher requirement in Nigeria covering a period of one decade as can be seen in the table below;

Table 1:   Pupils enrollment, teacher out put and qualified teacher requirement in Nigeria (2005 – 2015)

S/N	Year	Pupils enrollment	Qualified Teacher Requirement (1: 4)	Teacher output in NCE Awarding Institutions
1	2005	22,076,401	551,910	64,087
2	2006	24,284,041	607,101	59,784
3	2007	26,712,445	667,811	46,446
4	2008	29,383,690	734,592	34,524
5	2009	32,322,059	808,051	56,737

6	2010	35,554,265	888,857	59,807
7	2011	39,109,691	977,742	62,877
8	2012	43,020,660	1,075,517	65,974
9	2013	47,322,726	1,183,068	69,017
10	2014	52,054,999	1,301,375	72,087
11	2015	57,260,499	1,431,512	75,157

Source: The average annual production rate: 60,590 (Junaid, 2011) culled from Nwokeocha (2013)

The issue of Language of instruction

In Nigeria the official language is the English Language; it is the language of communication, administration and instructional delivery in schools. English language is the language of the colonial masters which should have been discarded long ago in order to pave way for the country to attain greater level of development. Although series of national debates have taken place in the past with regard to issue of a national language for Nigeria, no single positive result came out and all the attempts made ended up as futile exercises. Even the effort made to allow for the use of mother tongue for teaching in Nigerian primary schools, permission has been limited to only the lower primary school classes (i,e. primary 1 -3) as enshrined in the National Policy on Education. Majority of the countries colonized by the western powers, (specifically British colonized nations) have since realized the wisdom in limiting the status of the colonial language they inherited by keeping it aside and uplifting an indigenous languageto assume national prominence despite their diversity. India and Pakistan are notable examples of such British colonized nations that have made wise use of their brains and obtained a second independence; today, these two countries are becoming a force to reckon with in the field of science and technology. Nigerian case is not unique and as such there seem to be no reason whatever why the country should move forward.

The Way Forward

The following are some of the way forward in the struggle for Nigeria to sustain peace and national development via productive primary education:

1.   There is the need for allocation of more funds by the three tiers of government in Nigeria to the UBE scheme and judicious utilization of the funds by the various components of the UBE. Equally, there is the need for community participation in the management and supervision of primary education

projects for quality assurance. This will essentially help to reduce the corrupt practices of diverting funds and facilities and as well help to ensure effective maintenance of existing dilapidated infrastructural facilities and to improve the welfare teachers in all public primary schools in Nigeria

2. For the purpose of achieving sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria, there is the need for the federal and state governments to make the teaching / learning process a qualitative one by constant supply of qualified teachers, maintaining the NPE stipulated teacher / pupils' ratio for primary schools through expansion of facilities.

3. There is the need for the Federal Government of Nigeria to find a lasting solution to the issue of national language. A functional national language is needed for this great nation called Nigeria, to enables it to have sustainable peace and national development.Essentially, a national conference is needed in which all stake holders in education and linguistics will meet to determine for Nigeria a national language that should replace the English language in all matters of national transformation and development.Nigeria is great country and a much diversified one too; having a population of 170 million people it is said to be the 7th most populous nation in the world. There is about 400 ethno linguistic groups in the 36 states. This perhaps, is what often makes decision regarding selection of a national language difficult.

4. However, this paper want to suggest for the use of the three major Nigerian (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) as pilot studyto establish a national language of instruction. The testing should be in the following procedure; Hausa language is no doubt the most popularly spoken in the north, should be used as the language of classroom instructions at the primary level throughout the six year duration, all text books and graphic instructional aids for pupils in this region should be printed in Hausa language. However, Yoruba, Igbo and English languages should be made compulsory subjects in all primary schools in the northern region. Equally, Yoruba language is no doubt the most popularly spoken in the South-West, should be used as the language of classroom instructions at the primary level throughout the six year duration, all text books and graphic instructional aids for pupils in this region should be printed in the Yoruba language. However, Hausa, Igbo and English languages should be made compulsory subjects in all primary schools in the South-west region. Similarly, Igbo language is no doubt the most popularly spoken in the South (South-east and South-south combined). Therefore, Igbo language should be used as the language of classroom instructions at the primary level throughout the six year duration, all text books and graphic instructional aids for pupils in this region should be printed in Igbo language. However, Yoruba, Hausa and

English languages should be made compulsory subjects in all primary schools in that region. The curriculum contents should be uniform for the three regions, and text books should have same contents but to differ only in the use in writing them.

Conclusion

In 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the UN declared the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) ranging from 2005 to 2014. From that moment the concept sustainable development came into full usage and the necessity of having education aimed at achieving a sustainable development was recognised.

Education for sustainable peace and national development aims at helping people to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future, and to act upon these decisions. Primary Education therefore, being the pillar of any education system, seeks to integrate and instill the principles, values, and practices of peace and sustainable development into all categories of learners learning at the grassroots level of education, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems faced in countries world wide.

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