

## **Revitalizing Primary Education as a Foundation for Qualitative Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Primary education is universally accepted as the foundation laying level of education in all nations of the world. It provides the mini-structural framework on which the quality of other levels of education is attached. It is on this basis that this paper examines the relevant issues that, if properly addressed would recall or revitalize policies in Nigeria for qualitative education at the secondary and tertiary levels. These issues include: A careful and sensible effort at achieving the goals of primary education in Nigeria, Revitalizing the ways to address the persistent problems of teachers and teaching in primary schools and the management of primary education in general, Dealing with the issue of examination malpractices at the level of primary education and its effect on higher education, this paper recommends, among others that the implementation of national policy on primary education both the public and private institutions should be closely monitored to ensure uniformity in quality output from the nations primary schools. All primary schools in Nigeria, should be given an encouragement with modern infrastructures in terms of building for administration, classrooms among others, and all relevant instructional materials to ensure effective teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** Primary education, Revitalization, foundation, qualitative, higher education

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### **Introduction**

Education is the best legacy a country can give to her citizens. It has transformed man from ignorance and misery to knowledge and happiness. It has made man useful to himself, his generation and beyond. Umoh (2006) asserted that, Education helps the individual to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and emotionally by providing suitable environment, teaching him new knowledge, attitudes and skills that will enable him to be useful to himself and his society. Federal Government of Nigeria (2013), defined primary education as the education given to children aged 6-12 years. The primary level of education is the

key to the success or failure of the whole system since the rest of the education system is built upon it. This statement ratifies the fact that, the primary level of education is the most essential to the success of other levels, hence the need for primary education to be the bedrock of educational system.

### **Objectives of Primary Education**

The goals play a vital role to the development of the Nigerian Primary School Children. It helps in revitalizing Primary Education as a foundation for the Qualitative Higher Education. The objectives are as follows;

- a. To Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability of communicate effectively:
- b. To Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking:
- c. To Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity:
- d. To Instill social, moral norms and values in the child:
- e. To Develop in the child ability to adapt to the changing environment.
- f. To Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity (FGN, 2013).

The launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was the Federal Government effort to salvage the primary education system which is the foundation stone of other educational levels and infact, the cornerstone of national development (Okpala, 2007). This confirms the submission by the present authors that primary education graduates that gain admission into secondary education and later proceed to higher education. In this regard, the quality of output from primary education will definitely produce future professionals, such as technologists, engineers, educationists, lawyers, some of whom will become lecturers in higher educational Institution to teach students whose educational foundation is from the same primary education system. The term "qualitative" is used to portray the expected better output from higher education based on the desired good foundation laid at the primary education level. Adedeji (2004), Onyeagba (2006), Saidu (2008), and Sen (2010) defined primary education as the foundation for a child's learning on which every other level of learning depends. In the light of these objectives, this paper examines how the primary school may be seen and rightly revitalize as foundation of education in the society. In other words, primary education is a foundation upon which all other levels of education are built.

### **Achieving the Goals of Primary Education**

The stated goals are attainable hence the FRN (2013) National policy on education states that these goals must be pursued through making primary education tuition free, universal and compulsory, implementing the curriculum; providing educational services, using practical, exploratory and experimental methods of teaching, using the language of the environment for the first three years as a medium of instruction; making the teacher-pupil ratio 1:35; promoting pupils from one class to another based on continuous assessment; discouraging the incidence of drop out at this level; integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into education in Nigeria. Similarly, teachers should discharge their duties in revitalizing and laying the foundation for quality output in primary schools. These are considered as follows:

#### **Making Primary Education Free, Universal and Compulsory**

For so many decades, the Nigerian government has been sponsoring universal, free and compulsory education for the citizenry. The Universal Primary Education was launched in the Western region on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1955. In 1957, the scheme was launched in the East. The scheme was reintroduced by Obasanjo's Administration in 1976 with an enrolment of 475,760 pupils in primary schools. In the wake up realization of the importance of education as the basic tool of the Nigerian child for all round development, Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education scheme on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999. It was predicted that, every Nigerian child would be entitled to basic education up to the junior secondary level. The education would be free, universal and compulsory for all children between the primary and junior secondary schools (Alabi, 2001).

#### **Implementation of Curriculum**

The prescribed curriculum for the primary schools, according to FRN (2013) include:

1. English studies,
2. One Nigerian Language
3. Mathematics
4. Basic Science Technology. Basic Science, Basic Technology, Information Technology, physical and Health education,
5. Religion and National Values; Islamic Studies, Christian Religion Studies Social studies, Civic education, Security education
6. Pre Vocational Studies; Agricultural science, Home economics,
7. French language, Culture and Creative arts, (Arabic Optional). For laying the solid foundation.

## **Integrating Information and Communication Technology into the School Curriculum**

This is a welcome idea in Nigeria, especially at the primary school level as the world is constantly changing. This is because the nation is advancing scientifically and technologically, hence the need to introduce information and communication technology into the first level in education sector so that the entire education all system can have a dependable foundation. According to Johnson (2007), information is a data that has been processed, analyzed, interpreted and meaningful to the recipient of the message. He also defines communication as a source of message and extension of imagination in latent form to assist production, perception and understanding of message. It is of great importance for primary school children to be able to define what information is needed, know how and where to obtain information, understand the meaning of the information received and programming, windows and computer rhymes. This will widen their knowledge as well as enable them to compete favorably with their counterparts in other parts of the world. This knowledge will help in revitalizing by laying a solid foundation in the primary schools.

### **How Primary Education can be revitalized?**

A house that has a shaky foundation will eventually collapse sooner or later. This is why it is advisable to employ the services of experts when one is set to build a house. In laying an enduring foundation for the entire education sector to build on, the providers of primary education should:

- a. Lay the foundation in quality of teachers
- b. Lay the foundation in quality of instructional materials/facilities
- c. Lay the foundation in proper funding
- d. Lay the foundation in quality output from primary schools

Laying the Foundation in Quality of Teachers: The teacher is the facilitator of learning. Without the teacher, most of the goals and aims of education cannot be achieved. The needed foundation will be laid in the primary level hence there's need for him to be properly trained. The FRN (2013), asserted that, Teacher Education shall continue to be given major emphasis, since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. Presently, the training of teachers for this level of education is done at the colleges of education, National Teachers' Institute, Institute of Education and Faculties of Education in Universities and Schools of Education in Universities of Technology. Hence the minimum qualification for teaching in the primary and junior secondary school is Nigeria Certificate in Education Holders (NCE).

Nakpodia (2001), assert that, teachers that are already serving should be retrained in order to make them functional in their jobs. This could be done through in-service education programme or courses which include workshops, seminars, conferences, induction or orientation programme, part time courses and effective supervision by the bodies concerned. Effective supervision can go a long way in helping the teachers in our primary schools to lay solid foundation for other levels to build on.

**Laying Foundation in Quality of Instructional Materials/Facilities:** The instructional materials and facilities are of great importance in the school system. Without them no meaningful learning can take place. For teaching, these materials should be provided – chalkboard, charts, chalk, maps, globes, textbooks, magazines, chairs and desks, school diary and register, record books, etc. others include school facilities such as buildings, pipe borne water, good lightning, television, video machine and tape recorder. Similarly, Umoh (2006) maintains that, the learners must be made familiar with radio, television, kerosene and gas cookers, scientific toys, instrument and machines. The learner must be allowed to use, touch, feel and play with them. He contends that, the construction of some of these instruments, where possible, by the teachers is to acquaint them with their structural components, even if the materials are improvised is an important part of science education in the primary school. This means that teachers are left out in the provision of instructional materials for effective foundation laying in the primary school.

**Laying the Foundation in Proper Funding the Universal Primary Education (UPE):** Introduced in 1955 by the government of Western Region and in 1957 by the government of Eastern Region collapsed because of poor funding. In 1976, the federal government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education which also failed due to lack of proper planning and funding. Onwueme (2001), noted that, funding of education in Nigeria has been problematic over the years. He maintains that funding of primary education in particular should be handled by the three tiers of government. He reported that,

Federal Government should be responsible for the provision of building and furniture, teachers' salaries and allowances and payment for the teacher-training programme.

State government should be responsible for the provision of equipment and libraries.

Local government should assume responsibility for non-teaching staff salaries, textbooks and maintenance of buildings

Parents should provide writing material and clothing for their children.

However, the funding of UBE Programme in Nigeria has been enhanced as pointed out by Egwuasi, Ekwere, Agunwena and Okodoko (2008) that, foreign governmental and non-governmental bodies are also rendering some forms of financial assistance. These bodies are the World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Laying Foundation in Quality of Output from Primary Schools: The success of the entire Educational system in Nigeria depends greatly on the output from the primary schools. By quality of output, it means the quality of the child or children processed from our public primary and Junior Secondary Schools after six to Nine years of schooling. This concern was expressed by Okoro (2005) by posing the following questions – what emerges from the learner who has acquired this level of education? What are the expectations? What can the person (child) do? What can he not do? What problem can he/she solve for self, family and community? What problem is beyond the scope of the education the person has acquired? A careful study of our primary school system, its functioning and output would enable us provide objective answers to the above questions. But can we, on its face validity assert that there is anything like quality of output in our public primary school? Whatever the case, what are the expectations?

The FRN (2013) spells out the goals of what the learners are expected to do at the end of acquiring this level of education to include inculcation of permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively, laying a sound basis for scientific critical and reflectively thinking, and. Can we candidly say that such foundations have been laid in our children in primary schools? primary school child confidently express himself orally or in writing as a proof of good foundation laying in schools? What really are the problems?

Generally speaking, these children are unable to acquire the expected skills because of so many factors that militate against the effective functioning of our public primary schools. These include lack of commitment to qualitative education by all the stakeholders in terms of appointment and training of qualified teachers as administrators of primary schools, recruitment of qualified teachers, motivation of teachers, and regular payment of teachers' salaries

Challenges Facing the Foundation of Primary Education: From the discussions above, it is evident that difficulties prosper in primary education in Nigeria. As pointed out by Adesina & Ajayi (2006), the problems in primary education in Nigeria include inadequate funding, inadequate facilities/learning materials, lack of motivation for teachers, inconsistencies in government policies, and inadequate school's supervision by government officials. Each of these problems have sub

problems for example, can we justifiably say that the so-called inadequate funding has been judiciously utilized for the management of our primary schools? Alani (2005), the problems of public primary schools are inadequate physical, material, and human resources needed to give qualitative education. He lamented that this has remained a continuing problem arising from long time neglect of the funding of education. However, Emetaron (2005) posited that, primary education is a constitutional responsibility of local government, the sector has consistently remained an orphan” which explains its inadequate state of affairs. This is a serious matter which should be carefully addressed by all stakeholders in the education sub-sector. Oladipo in Alani (2005), said that, the efforts made so far to make education qualitative and functional have not yielded desirable results in Nigeria due to socio-cultural and political diversity of the nation, since, the observed disparities in the implementation of the national policy on education. If education is the right of every Nigerian child and adult, to revitalize system, efforts should be made to remove every form of socio-cultural and political barriers against the successful implementation of primary education policy objectives in Nigeria.

Examination malpractice in Nigeria schools is currently a big business involving syndicate and stakeholders in the school at all levels. Unfortunately, this started as a familiar insignificant seed, planted by teachers with the support of some parents at the primary school level.

### **Conclusion**

The output of our primary schools are the ones that are fed into our secondary schools, hence, the quality of foundation laid for learning and understanding determine how they will perform in secondary and tertiary levels of education. This discussion on revitalization of primary school as a foundation of education in Nigeria calls for urgent attention on the issues raised in this paper which portrays the state of the art in our primary schools. The quality of student admitted into higher education in Nigeria is generally observed as very poor. It is therefore expected that the concerns raised shall be insistently looked into by the stakeholders in the education sector’.

### **Recommendations**

Government should ensure that the implementation of national policy on primary education by state owned and private institutions are closely monitored to ensure uniformity in quality of output.

Funding for primary education should be shared among the Federal, States and Local Government on a reasonable ratio in their annual budgets for education.

All primary schools in Nigeria, irrespective of where they are located should be renovated with modern infrastructure – Administrative building, Information and communication technology Centre, classrooms among others.

Only professionally trained and well screened teachers should be employed to teach in primary schools.

A better salary structure for teacher should be implemented to enhance their job satisfaction.

To check frequency of examination malpractices in primary schools, teachers should be prepared to teach effectively and cover their syllabus appropriately.

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