

PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION: REFOCUSING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Education is rightly been described by many scholars as pivotal to development. Nigeria as a country is not left out in this quest for national development through education. The primary school is our children's first point of contact with formal learning and there is a need for it to be quantitatively and qualitatively adequate. Nevertheless, this condition is far from been achieved in Nigeria. The paper examines the present situation where the phenomenal increase in enrolment since the period of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has led to the acute shortage of everything that has to do with education and schooling. It looked at the issue of partnership stating that when parents, teachers, government at all levels and the donor agencies work together, children tend to learn better than when they work in isolation. A typical report on Bauchi state was presented which stated inter-alia "the Bauchi state Universal Basic education has partnered with UNICEF in 6 local government areas of the state". Since technology is creating changes in all areas of our lives and the society, it is also changing people's expectations of what learners will learn, how it should be learnt and under what condition they will learn in order to be able to function in the new world order (Abimbade, 2006). The emphasis therefore is that there should be a shift from the teacher-centered approach. This is made possible through the inclusion of information communication technology in our school curriculum.

A conclusion was drawn with various recommendations proffered for the refocusing of primary education.

Keywords: Learner-centered, refocusing, qualitative education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an investment for the development of the nation. As an indispensable asset, it demands the active promotion of all citizens of a nation, such that within every community there will be demand for it and those in possession of the financial means of promoting education misuse the funds, there should be a general and sustained outcry. (Maduewesi, 2005). In this regard therefore, education should be intra and interpersonal; national and international project for sustainability and accountability.

Nigeria is the largest country in Africa, with a population of about 158 million people. It is also the biggest oil exporter, with the largest natural gas reserves in the continent. Nigeria is considered a conflict-affected state, and ranks 152 out of 187 countries in UNDP's 2014 human development index. Nigeria joined the Global Partnership for Education 2012 and according to available records in 2010, the percentage of out-of-school children was 34 percent while the primary completion rate decreased from 91 percent in 2005, 76 percent in 2010. (www.globalpartnership.org.8:10:2014).

The above records definitely suggests the need for collaboration through partnership with a view to overcoming the problems of primary education in Nigeria.

1.1. The Present Situation

An examination of the current teaching and learning conditions in our primary schools has left much to be desired. In a similar vein, Ukeje (1989) remarked that the present Nigerian system of primary education is far from being quantitatively satisfactory. The phenomenal increase in enrolment since the period of Universal Primary Education (U.P.E 1976) has led to acute shortage of everything that has to do with education and schooling apart from the pupils themselves. There is a short supply of well-trained and qualified teachers,

conducive school buildings, classrooms and furniture, teaching and learning resource materials including textbooks.

The primary school system is characterized by poor teaching and learning among the teachers and their pupils.

This had hitherto become a source of worry among well meaning Nigerians since the foremost objective of primary education is the “inculcation of pupils’ permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively” (FRN 2004). This objective is far from being achieved. Many of the primary pupils or the product of the system are not literate enough or had achieved the level of numeracy desired by the national policy. Some primary school pupils can hardly write their names while their handwritings are not good either. Many of the teachers also lack requisite knowledge and skills of what they teach. The situation is unlike the 1950s and 1960s when primary school leavers were employed as clerks, typists and teachers. The questions are: “what are the problems confronting the education system in Nigeria and “how can primary education be refocused to meet the challenges of 21st century. This paper addresses these and other related problems.

1.2. Partnership

This is the act of sharing an activity with others either in pairs or beyond that. Global partnership in education had therefore been described as the most effective way of reducing poverty among the developing countries of the world. (www.globalpartnership.org,8:10:2014)

1.3. Educational Partnership

Partnership is based on the premise that teamwork divides the efforts and multiplies the effects. One of the central aims of partnership is involving the community more closely in how the local services are delivered. It refers to a single body that brings together the representation of the different sectors and communities (national and internationals) to pursue a common goal. Mittler (1988) views partnership as a sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences in meeting the individual needs of school children and their families.

At the micro level that is the home and school, it is believed that when parents and teachers work together, children tend to learn better than when they work in isolation (Ezeani, 2006). Another important partnership for the successful management of the education system is that between the Parents Teachers’ Association (P.T.A.), governments and the ministers of education. Supporting the above, Egbo (2005) observed that pragmatic partnerships between PTAs and local governments/school districts have been a permanent feature of educational systems in the western world. Improving education in a developing country like Nigeria requires the development of policy guidelines that promote and support collaborations between civil agents, governments, organizations and ministries as well as the sharing of resources and information (UNESCO, 1999).

Partnership at the macro level may mean the coming together of governments (Federal, State and Local), Non-governmental organizations, Community-Based organizations, International development partners and other relevant stakeholders to execute certain projects. It could also mean the engagement of these agencies plus other stakeholders to monitor and track implementation and sustainability of the mounted programmes. Educational partnership therefore entails good working relationship and collaboration between stakeholders in the educational service provision for the citizens of a given society aimed at realizing ultimate educational goals.

1.4. Objectives Of Primary Education In Nigeria

Primary education is the foundation upon which the rest of the educational system is built. The primary level being the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system, no nation can afford to toy with nor ignore it. Primary education is the core of development especially in a developing nation as Nigeria. The goals/objectives of primary education as is stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004:4) 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 him to function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity; and
- Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Since education plays a vital role in the acquisition of desirable knowledge, skills, values, habits and attitude for productive living in the society (Alade, 2006); It is necessary to increase its quality for the purpose of developing skills such as psychomotor (acquisition of mechanical skills), cognitive/development of intellectual capacities as well as affective, which deals with feelings, appreciation of values of the educated etc (Oni & Alade, 2010). To this end, primary education has witnessed two main reforms in Nigeria which are the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) of 1999.

1.5. Example of Educational Partnership

The Guardian Newspaper of 15th October, 2014, page 4; has a detailed account of educational partnership titled "Bauchi Partners UNICEF to Enrol 58,530 children".

The report reads thus;

The Bauchi state Universal Basic Education has partnered with UNICEF in 6 local government areas of the state. The SUBEB/UNICEF focal officer, Malam Ismail Umar disclosed at a one day enrolment campaign on 2014/15 strategy for effective school enrolment drive in Bauchi.

He said that the exercise would be carried under the UNICEF funded Girls Education Project 3 (GEP 3); to be conducted in 696 catchment communities targeting 50,208 households with focus on 210 selected primary/junior secondary schools. This include 35 from each of the 6 chosen local government areas. These are made up of 7,466 dropouts, 51,064 that never attended school at all, most of which are engaged in begging, hawking and doing one kind of trading or the other. According to Umar (2014), "These children are supposed to be in school but are out-of-school thereby contributing to low enrolment in schools". He stated that the UNICEF in partnership with SUBEB wants to ensure that these children are enrolled in schools at least to acquire knowledge and skills that would make them useful to themselves and society. This project is being carried out in four other states of Zamfara, Katsina, Niger and Sokoto.

Commenting on the essence of GEP 3 Project, the state co-ordinator, Malam Saleh Mohammed, explained that 10 million Nigerian children were missing out in educational schools, majority of which are from the Northern part of the country. Other international developments agencies include, UNDP, USAID and World Bank.

2. BENEFITS OF EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Educational partnership projects are designed to benefit all the partners by strengthening their capacities to teach, conduct research, administer programmes and serve their public constituencies. For instance, the educational institutions in these advanced countries are poised to share their professional and academic expertise with peers in foreign institutions while at the same time strengthening their own programmes of instruction through access to new professional networks, new research findings and new perspectives on their academic fields.

2.1. Re-Focusing Primary Education To Meet New Challenges

For primary education in Nigeria to meet the challenges of the 21st century, there must be changes in our theories and methods. There must be a definite pattern of shift from teaching to learning. Since technology is creating changes in all areas of our lives and the society, it is also changing people's expectations of what learners will learn, how it should be learnt and under what condition they will learn in order to be able to function in the new world order (Abimbade, 2006).

In response to the new mode of learning, there has to be a shift from the teacher-centered type of instruction to a learner-centered approach in order for the learner to acquire 21st century knowledge and skills. The focus in our schools will have to change from theory to practice. When attention is focused on the learner and learning, the learner becomes more involved and therefore learns better.

The teaching/learning process should be learner-centered. That means that in such a classroom, activities become interactive through the use of innovative techniques and instructional resources including Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools. The teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator, a coach

and a collaborator with the learners. Instructional emphasis is not on facts and memorization but on inquiry and discovery-based techniques. By establishing a relationship between what is learnt makes learning meaningful. The concept of knowledge emphasizes transformation of facts and not merely on its accumulation, (Adekeye, 2008).

Here the demonstration of success is measured against defined criteria, each learner working at his/her own pace. Assessment is continuous using many devices. The emphasis is on quality of understanding and the performance rather than the use of paper and pencil tests. Modern technology and ICT will be intensively used to gather information for homework etc. The learner is seen and heard in the classroom while the teacher guides, prepares and organizes what is to be learnt.

Therefore for a teacher to be able to perform well in the learner-centered learning environment in the 21st century, he/she must be well trained academically and possess the professional competence.

3. CONCLUSION

Primary education which is the foundation for all the other levels of our educational system is in crisis and of this is not dealt with as a matter of urgency, it can impede the nation's progress and development. Some of the problems confronting the primary education system include shortage of well trained qualified teachers, shortage of school buildings and classrooms, teaching and learning facilities including textbooks. The system is also characterized by poor teaching and learning which results in poor performances by the pupils.

This paper therefore recommends the way forward in refocusing of primary education in Nigeria to improve the quality and make it functional.

3.1. Recommendations

- ICT (computer education) should be incorporated into the curriculum and used to improve teaching and learning.
- Regular in-service training and re-training of teachers should be put in place for all the teachers.
- The government should allocate more funds to primary education as qualitative education requires a lot of capital and human resources.
- There should be the provision of necessary school infrastructures such as classrooms with chairs, desks and well-stocked libraries.
- Recruitment of qualified teachers in sufficient numbers is necessary in order to reduce the high teacher-pupil ratio per class for more effective teaching.
- Educational partnership between the federal, state, local and donor agencies is highly recommended in order to re-focus our primary education system.

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