QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION: A FOUNDATIONAL BEDROCK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL, HIS LOCAL COMMUNITY AND NATION

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Abstract

This paper looked at Quality Basic Education: A Foundational Bedrock for the Development of the Individual, Local Community and Nation. Basically, the paper looked at basic education and the ingredients needed to make it a qualitative one, how quality education at this level helps the individual citizen, his local community where he hails from and his nation at large. Factors that militate against the success of quality basic education were also highlighted and discussed and the ways forward were pointed out. Recommendations were proffered to help school proprietors (public & private), teaching and non- teaching staff in the school system, policy makers to mention but a few to provide quality education to young children from pre- primary to junior secondary school.

Keywords: Quality, Basic Education, Individual and National Development.

Introduction

The importance of quality education generally and basic education specifically cannot be overemphasized. Of all the levels of education such as pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education, the basic education which is a foundational background of education is the zenith and most important in terms of the importance of grooming human beings. How most human beings turn out in life, is greatly dependent on their background, same perception goes for education. There are different types of education but the three basic ones are: formal, informal, and non-formal. This paper is concerned with formal education which is the education that is accessed through the four walls of a building called school, with human and materials resources provided to train the population of pupils in it. Education, is a social responsibility, specifically, it is referred to as the national programmes of the government, intended to promote the welfare of the population through assisted measures guaranteeing access to sufficient resources for food,

shelter and promotion of health and wellbeing for the population at large(Aghenta,2006)

This paperfocuses on basic education which encompasses the pre-primary, primary to junior secondary schools 1-3: In Nigeria these levels of education have been merged together to be called basic education. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) defines this level of education as consisting of: pre-primary, primary and junior secondary education. This encompasses, early childhood education,(pre-primary) (one year), primary school (6years), and 3years of junior secondary school (J.S.S. 1-3), Children between 0 and 15 years are in this category (FRN 2013). At this juncture, it will not be out of place to mention the philosophy of education in Nigeria and zero in on the general and specific goals in education. FRN (1998, 2004, 2013) specified that the philosophy of education in Nigeria are:

a. Education is an instrument for national development and social change;
b. Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria;
c. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society;
d. Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and
e. Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society;

This philosophy of Nigeria education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary level both inside and outside the formal school system. General goals of education include:

a. Development of the individual into a morally sound patriotic and effective citizen;
b. Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigeria society and the world;
c. Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system;
d. Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and
e. Development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

The specific goals of education are:

a. Ensure and sustain unfettered access and equity to education for total development of the individual;
b. Ensure the quality of education delivery at all levels;

c. Promote functional education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction;
d. Ensure periodic review, effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum at all levels to meet the needs of the society and the world of work;
e. Collaborate with development partners, the private sector, non- governmental organizations and local communities to support and fund education; and
f. Promote information and communication technology capability of all levels.

The goals of basic education according to FRN (2013) are to:

a. Provide the child with. Diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurs, wealth generation and educational advancement;
b. Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and in the performance of their civic responsibilities;
c. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour;
d. Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion ethnic-and socio economic background; and
e. Provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity

The purpose of early childhood care, development and education according to FRN (2013), include the following;

a. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
b. Prepare the child for the primary level. Of education;
c. Provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents. are at work
d. Inculcate social, moral norms and values;
e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, etc;
f. Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
g. Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits; and
h. Teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

In order to realize these goals, the government also put in place measures to actualize them. These include:

a. Educational activities shall be learner centred for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment;
b. Teaching shall be practical, activities based, experiential and it supported;
c. Education shall be related to overall community needs;

d. All tiers of government shall promote the establishment and support of reading clubs in schools, community libraries and other such resources that will enhance effective learning;
e. Special provisions and incentives-shall be made for the study of the sciences at each level of the education system;
f. Continuing education shall be part and parcel of the education system; and
g. Every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education. In addition, it is expected that every child shall learn one Nigerian language.

The quality of instruction at all levels of education shall be oriented towards inculcating the following values:

a. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
b. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
c. Moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
d. Shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
e. Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
f. Acquisition of functional, skills and competencies

The philosophies and goals of Nigeria education are beautiful and commendable but these seem to be theories that still need to become practical experience. The actualization of these goals will make Nigeria great among the nations of the earth. The original intention of these goals was made for them to be actualized but from observations, these goals are far from being actualized. What went wrong?

The basic education of any child is very important to the growth and development of the child. If youths are actually the future of any nation, then the nation must of a necessity give quality education to the children who later grow up to become youths that can contribute meaningfully to the development of his individual life, his local community and his nation at large. When the children are not properly given the basic education they deserve, such as 'catching them young', they become ill-prepared for the future. As individuals, they will not have the necessary ingredients to compete favourably among other youths internationally, they will lack self-confidence and will become crooked,. they depend on others to lead the way, they involve in criminal activities. In other words, they cannot be champions, as individual members of the community, they are most times exploited by political and community leaders for nefarious activities, They involve in corrupt practices, because they are not properly educated, they are incompetent and unskilled, and cannot contribute meaningfully to the upliftment of the community and as citizens of the nation, they are not ready for the world of work because they are unskilled and incompetent in their area of stud. They cannot represent the nation internationally, they go abroad to do unskilled jobs rather than dignified jobs in their home country. This may account for one of the reasons why

Nigerian youths are streaming abroad, because when an individual lacks what it takes to be distinguished and responsible, he becomes vulnerable and a hustler that will do anything just to survive.

Quality basic education should give its recipients education that imparts knowledge for life, competence in skills acquired, so much so that if the granduands are not able to proceed to higher education, they can take care of themselves through skills acquired, that way, they can contribute to their community and their nation positively. When they cannot get government job, they can be entrepreneurs and become employers of labour and are not easily exploited. That way, the nation and her people grow and become self-reliant. The lack of quality basic education spells trouble for the individual, community and the nation.

Concept of Quality Education

Education according to Bello and Janguza cited in Osarenren-osaghae and Irabor (2016) is a vast in size, multi-dimensional in function and goal oriented in operation and could only be managed effectively by experts and professionals. FRN (2004) states that education policy in Nigeria is general statement containing principles,, regulations and rules that govern many of the decisions on how to educate children, where to get them educated, who to teach them, how to finance their education, what to teach, how to impact skill, goals, objectives and philosophy. Formulation of educational policies and implementation of education in Nigeria was said to emerge from democratic ideas that individuals need to be educated for the growth and development of the society. Thus, education came to be regarded as a necessity to the state because it seemed to be the path to prosperity and power. Ijaduola, Odunaike & Ajayi, cited in Osarenren-Osaghae, Isabu & Imoroa (2018), asserted that It is inevitable to talk about quality education without mentioning one of the factors that underline quality.

Evaluating the quality of education, standards of education must be met. Educational standards often define the norms, skills and knowledge that students should acquire at the point of graduation. A lot of authors have looked at standards from different angles. Obedun, (2015) looked at education standards from the outcome of products of schools such as the positive contribution of graduands to their community in the knowledge domains of psychomotor, cognitive and affective. Standards have been set as earlier indicated FRN (2004, 2013). Using these standards to evaluate quality in Nigeria education, it is obvious that Nigeria missed the mark.

A lot of factors contributed to this situation but that is not the focus of this paper. In this period of the 21st century, nations are blazing the trail and setting the pace in their education for their citizens. This century should be seen to be developing children in critical thinking, needful skills and competencies, information and communication technologies among others that will provide unlimited possibilities to young minds for growth and advancement in the world.

The present state of Nigeria development is a pointer to the level of quality education, the nation has imparted on the youth, when the philosophies and goals of education in general or Basic education in particular as enumerated in the national policy on education, have not been actualized then it can be said categorically that the education given to the youths in Nigeria is sub-standard because it has not be able to meet its vision statement.

Quality education cannot be said to have been given corresponding variables that will energize the fulfillment of goals set. Some of these variables includes: adequate and qualified human resources, adequate state-of-the-Art infrastructural and instructional facilities, adequate education funding, basic amenities like light, water, good roads, housing and Government sincerity. It is widely known that studies have concluded severally that these variables are yet to meet the recommended national and international standards. How can the nation ever get to the state where graduates of the education system be quality graduates? How can the graduates ever gets to the level of confidence? How can they ever contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the nations? It is often said that youths are the future of the nation. If this is true, then, Nigeria is losing her future to foreign nations because virtually all youths are aspiring to go abroad and remain there because their nation has failed them.

Basic education is the foundational bedrock of the education system. The idea of "catching them young" applies here. Any building that must last long deserve a solid and qualitative foundation. Same principle applies to education. Education that must yield dividends must be tackled from the basics. Therefore, quality basic education is imperative to the advancement and development of the nation. This level of education deserves "whatever it will take" to make it a success and to produce skilled and competent graduates for higher education, entrepreneurship and productive citizens.

Challenges Confronting the Successful Actualization of Basic Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian government has tried to put up programmes to eradicate illiteracy. Initiated efforts according to Ohaji (2005), Osarenren-Osaghae (2015) include: conferences, lectures, seminar, universal primary education (UPE) that metamorphosed to universal basic education(UBE), workshops to educate communities on the need for education, forums etc, such as: National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Universal Basic Education Programme, Family Support Basic Education Programme, Fast Track Initiatives, Education for All (EFA), National Commission for Mass Illiteracy Programme and Non-Formal Education among others, more so, because of vision 20:2020 focus for Nigeria. But in all the governmental efforts, Nigerians seem not to be responding to these offers, otherwise, how can the current mass illiteracy in Nigeria be explained? The reasons are perhaps not far-fetched. Challenges facing

education in general and basic education in particular, in Nigeria include: economic, social and political problems.

Economic Problems: Some ofthe economic problems confronting the basic education program in Nigeria include:

1. Inadequate funding from the government who holds the explicit right to educate the citizens through tax money. The negative effects of inadequate funding to the smooth running of an organization cannot be over-emphasized; Aghenta,(2006), Arubayi (2016), Nwanchukwu,(2014), Nwangwu, (2010), Ololube,(2007)Osarenren-Osaghae, (2017), Osarenren-Osaghae& Aigboje,(2015), Umoh,(2006),.
2. It has been observed that no follow-up or accountability for programmes are put up, most times these programmes become abandoned projects because of lack of continuity among governments changing batons, i.e. any new government voted in, starts a fresh projects and abandons his predecessor's
3. Systemic corruptions, for example, which involve government in power borrowing money from world bank, international money fund(IMF) and other international organizations, in the guise of education spending, these monies end up being diverted to different pockets, these actions throw the nation into debts with other nations, therefore, generations yet unborn suffer the consequences,
4. Inadequate human and material resources: the quality and quantity of human and material resources supplied to schools are inadequate as have been shown by many field studies that included; Arubayi (2016), Babalola (2008), Ogunu (2016), Osarenren-Osaghae &Aigboje (2015).

Basic education schools do not have the necessary gadgets, even the few available resources are not adequate enough to cope with the rising population of pupils registered. Some teaching staff are majorly not qualified to teach subjects assigned to them to teach, this is because the qualified ones are in short supply.

Political Challenges: Political challenges affecting basic education in Nigeria are inexhaustible, some of which are:

1. Political games are played with basic education by leaders who claim to be defending it, promises are made during political campaigns and are most times forgotten once positions are occupied.
2. Yearly budget allocation for education which is below the 26% as suggested by UNESCO (2008), is further depleted and paid in piece mille, little batches that will not be enough to carry out any major projects and recurrent expenditures, but just enough to get by with staff salaries payments. The effects of inadequate funding can be seen everywhere in schools and they are

disheartening. Aghenta, (2006), Arubayi, (2016), Babalola,(2014), Osarenren-Osaghae, & Irabor, (2012),

3. Teachers generally do not like to be posted to rural areas to teach, for obvious reasons, such as; dilapidated school buildings, unavailable facilities, no basic amenities such as light, tap water, good road etc., no extra money paid to rural teachers to encourage them to remain. These teachers end up advocating for their transfer to urban areas by any means, relocating themselves to urban areas thereby leaving the children in the rural areas unattended to.
4. There are inequalities of basic education offered to Nigeria children, because of the resources provided by the government to urban and rural located schools. The introduction of private schools where children from the rich and middle class families go to private schools and public schools are left for the less privileged and for the inability to afford the expensive private schools, where school fees are out of the reach of the common man.

The public schools are inadequately equipped, therefore, cannot impart a comprehensive and in-depth basic knowledge on pupils the way they ought to, Aghenta(2006), said that, this is as a result of the inability of the government to properly fund public schools. Private schools are approved by the government to be established by individuals and corporate bodies that can afford the government fees; this has made the government to partially abandon the public schools. The public schools are treated as if the grandaunts will end up in the farm and are not needed in other aspects of life.

5. In addition, in a world where technology is moving at a fast pace, the nation's basic schools are yet to be technologically equipped to cope with the times, but the current situation from observation, is that politicians in a bid to get voted for or command the praises of people, make donations of computers that are inadequate to go round the children. These computers end up being locked up in the school's store rooms where they are exposed to rats, cockroaches, rain water from leaking roofs and other destructive agents. Some are even stolen away by their custodians because of the lack of qualified teachers to teach the subject, no technical and maintenance staff, to repair them.

Social Challenges: These are major factors confronting the basic education in Nigeria. Working on the girl-child education, Osarenren-Osaghae, Imhangbe & Irabor,(2019), found out that the following factors do indeed affect education of the girl-child and by extension, education of all Nigerian children; level of understanding, level of acceptance, parents' illiteracy, ignorance of benefits accrued and cultural/traditional prejudices among others. These factors contribute to social factors that militated against basic education.

1. Level of understanding of the importance of education at the basics, by the people, is very important to the development of the community, without the

grasp of understanding of the purpose of education at the basic level, government efforts may be efforts in futility.

2. The level of acceptance of basic education by the people must also be high, otherwise; it will have negative effects on school attendance by pupils and illiterate parents willingness to send their children to school.
3. Parent's illiteracy can also have negative effect on the need to send their children to school instead of going to farm or helping to hawk goods that can make them money, for example, the mindsets of the rural dwellers concerning the education of their children have been established for centuries, therefore, to change it, will require total overhaul.
4. Parents can also be nonchalant about sending their children to school when they are ignorant about the education benefits that accrue to their children, community and the nation, therefore, parents and local community leaders need to be carried along.
5. Cultural/traditional prejudices can also be problematic, especially against the girl-child, because some communities practice the belief that a girl child is for marriage and having babies, therefore, training her in school is a waste of resources and efforts; this is perhaps because of the patriarchy system practiced over the years.
6. The male child is accorded superiority over his sister who is probably an elder sister to him. Some communities don't send their children to school at all because they do not see the need to; their mentality tells them that their forefathers and mothers survived without schooling. It will take a lot of hard work from the government to change such mindset. This can be done through consistent and persistent enlightenment programmes until understanding is accessed by the people. These challenging factors mentioned in this write-up are by no means exhaustive.
7. There are other factors of economic, political and social related problems that hinder the basic education of Nigerian children. The government has a lot of work to do in providing what it will take to eradicate illiteracy. The basic education is an important foundational building block in the educational path of any child, which if gotten right can yield a lot of dividends for the nation.

Conclusion

Basic education is the first level of education that introduces children to life outside the home, in the case of Nigeria, Basic Education takes its tentacles further to include junior secondary school one to three as indicated earlier. This is a stage of education that when knowledge is eluded, recipients may never recover from the mistake and the nation may never recover from the effects.

Some economic, political and social factors that militate against its successful implementation were enumerated, although not exhaustively discussed but has been able to paint a picture of the reasons why basic education in Nigeria

has not been able to achieve the national goals as specified in the national policy of education. Also discussed were the consequential effects on the individual, his community and nation, which are numerous and include that; the individual is not prepared for the world of work and so, lacks confidence to do anything tangible. The community is stagnant in terms of development and the nation will not be recognized scientifically and cannot compete favourably in the committee of nations.

The current level of basic education received by young children in Nigeria, is substandard and may not be able to meet the solutions of the national challenges even in the 21st century. 'Catching them young' in their education path to success, is perhaps one of the best blessing/gift a nation could ever ask for.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward to help revamp basic educational system, if put to work:

1. Government leadership must stop playing bad politics with education because of her important role played in the life of the citizens and nation building.
2. UNESCO's suggested budgetary funding of 26% must be adhered to as the minimum and be gradually increased as the years roll by. If the government believes in 'Education' as a tool per excellence to develop the nation, it is a wonder to see the same government not funding it appropriately.
3. Budgetary funding must be released fully and not in piece mille, so as to enable school managers embark into meaningful projects that can help to rapidly improve teaching and learning in schools.
4. Vigorous campaigns, tireless enlightenment programmes are needed by stakeholders until the people understand the need for educating their children..
5. Quality and adequate quantity of human and material resources must be provided by all stakeholders.
6. Staff posted to schools in the rural areas, popularly called 'village schools' must be compensated to encourage them to remain in their duty post.
7. Public schools must have the same provisions the private schools have, in order not to create an obvious dichotomy between the rich and the poor children.
8. Urban and rural area schools must have the same provision of quality and quantity.
9. There must be continuity in government's programme and projects in education despite different governments.
10. There must be follow-up and accountability from stakeholders saddled with the responsibilities of programmes and projects set up by the governments and communities.

11. Basic education must be co-sponsored by the government, non-governmental organizations and individuals in the society for the purpose of eliminating barriers that may hinder the effective impartation of knowledge.
12. Honest inspectors/ supervisors in education should stop taking bribes and conduct themselves in a respectful and honourable manner to do their jobs of inspecting schools appropriately, follow-up educational developments, find out areas of need, make reports on them, also make recommendations and pursue to a logical conclusion. These will help to improve the schools.
13. All hands must be on deck to promote and provide adequate human and material resources in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) due to the changing times, school age children need to flow with the tide, so that they can be relevant. In today's world.
14. This century should be seen to be developing children in critical thinking, needful skills and competencies, information and communication technologies etc. that will provide unlimited possibilities to young minds for growth and advancement in the world.

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