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NEEDS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION REFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is seen as a permanent change in behavior as a result of learning which consists of all efforts conscious or incidental made by a society to accomplish set objectives and which are considered to be desirable in terms of individual as well as societal needs. Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for individual and sustainable national development. The achievement of desired educational objectives and sustainable development depends largely on the effective implementation of government policy in an effort to translate the policies into meaningful actions. In Nigeria, several efforts have been made to shape the direction and dimension of the educational system through articulated policy. A plan for sustainable development must address the issue of effective implementation of primary education because it plays a vital role not only in expanding further educational opportunities , but also infostering basic intellectual abilities such as literacy that are crucial to success in a world where power is closely linked with knowledge. In the light of this, the paper focused and reviewed the basic aspect of educational reforms, sustainable development, education and sustainable development, Universal Basic Education (UBEI) program in Nigeria, primaw education reforms for sustainable development in Nigeria, The paper further identifIed the objectives of primary education and the- need for effective implementation of primary education reforms in Nigeria. Challenges facing the implementation of primary education reforms were

stated, conclusion was drawn and possible recommendations were proffered for the way forward. Among the recommendations are: The federal government should provide the bulk of funds in line with UNESCO budget recommendation of 26%fund to education, while state and local governments assist suffIciently to ensure proper management of the$mds available.

KEYWORDS: Effective, Implementation, Primary education, Reforms, Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Education is regarded as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and global competitiveness (Webb, 2010). A functional change is needed in the way education roles are perceived for global development as it has a responsibility of meeting 21 st century challenges and aspirations and fostering the right type ofvalues and skills that will lead to the sustainable development of the nation

However, primary education has been regarded as the most important level of education due to the fact that it is the foundation of educational pursuit which is expected to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens. The importance of primary education can be seen in the sense that beneficiaries of other levels of education by necessity have to pass through this level (Oni, 2008). In recognizing the importance of primary education, all tiers of governments in Nigeria have placed priority on it by making it the center piece of their educational policies. Since the colonial period to date, governments in Nigeria have instituted one form of education reform or the other. This indicates that there is a link between the past and present in the educational development ofNigeria.

However, serious shortcomings have appeared at every level of the education system, more especially primary education. Statistics revealed that approximately 14% of children in the range of primary school going age (4 - 15 years) do not attend school. Recent studies show that only about one fifth (1/5) of children attain mastery levels in writing and even less in mathematics. The education system does not produce pupils with the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes appropriate for successful living. The total personality development, characterized by creativity9 initiative, discipline, team spirit, respect and tolerance for other people and other cultures is not achieved without education

Therefore, effective implementation of primary education reforms has become **mr** urgent priority; it is an integral aspect of the development process ofthe entire nation

It must be done in the spirit of bringing benefit to all people and not as a means of conferring privileges on selected groups and areas. It is clearly a means of empowering every citizen and providing them with access to the valuable resources ofkbowledge and information. It is clear that states, local governments and districts are not equally provided with physical infrastructure and resources. These differences have a bearing on- how the education system functions. They affect the background of the learners, their participation in education, the expression of their potentials and their levels of achievement. Public demand, unemployment, poor performance at examinations, school drop-out and non-participation rates are all indications of the need for improvement ofeducation.

Basic Aspect of Educational Reforms in Nigeria

Reform means "to shape"; it is a verb that refers to improvement by alternative, a correction of error or removal of defects (Yahoo Education, 2007). Education reform as opined by Young and Levin (1999), is a program of educational change that are governmentally directed and initiated based on overt political analysis, that is one driven by political apparatus of government rather than by educators or bureaucrats and justified on the basis of the need for a very substantial break from current practrce

On the attainment of independence on the first of October, 1960, Nigeria retained the educational policy bequeathed by the colonial masters (the British Government). Nigeria is a federation with 36 states where both successive governments, democratic and military, operate centralized educational system, thus a single educational system operates in a nation of over 183,523,432 million people and with over 250 distinct ethnic groups (World Bank, 2015). The first serious attempt at reforming the educational program of the country took place in 1969, through a curriculum conference held in Lagos. The conference brought about radical changes in the country's educational system (Fafunwa, 1974).

Over the years, educational reforms have been brought about by the need to tailor education towards changing the economic, social and political situation of the nation. The global change in the social and economic context, coupled with the economic situation of the country led to the adoption of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004. However, changes from earlier educational policies are enunciated as follows: First, which is the focus of this paper is concerned about the nine year basic education which eliminates disconnection between the primary and the junior secondary school, thereby ensuring a continuous curriculum (Obioma & Ajaglm, 2006). The level is structured into three levels: lower basic level (primary 1 – 3), where 8 core subjects and a

maximum of 2 electives are offered; middle basic level (primary 4 – 6), where 9 core subjects and a maximum of 3 electives are offered; upper basic level Gunior secondary 1 –3) where 10 core subjects and a maximum of 3 electives are offered.

The 6-3-3-4 system comprises four distinct stages or components: 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education for most of the sciences, arts and social sciences programs. The current reforms started in April, 2004 with the signing into law of the universal basic education acts, 2004 and have introduced three components ofbasic education thus:

- Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE)
- 6 years ofprimary education
- 3 years ofjunior secondary education

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Bruntland commission report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environment, social and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and an improved quality of life. These three spheres, society, environment and economy
rely on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens.

Sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it for instance, education and training, sustainable agriculture and forestry, sustainable production and consumption, good government, research and teclmology (UNESCO, 2012). Sustainable development includes a number of topics which are connected to education, environment, social, economic and political roots. These topics are complex and often difficult to define as well as find solutionsto, they include: reducing poverty, changing consumption patterns, global population growth and protecting human health, all of which constitute challenges to the social and economic growth of the nation.

Education and Sustainable Development

Education is the key to any sustainable development program and it is recognized **as** the process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environment and development issues (UNCED, 1992, Agenda 2 1). Education is an essential ingredient for a more sustainable future, **for** example it is through education that the next generation of citizens, voters, workers.

;:ofessionals and leaders are prepared for life-long learning, Without education, ;:ogress toward a more sustainable future will be compromised

L-niversal Basic Education (UBE) Program in Nigeria

?rimary education program is the foundation of all education and it is the basic xiucation made up of 6 years primary/lower basic section and the 3 years upper basic or junior secondary section as stated in section 3, sub-section 16 of the National ?olicy on Education (2004). Basic education is compulsory, universal and free and it covers adult and non-formal education program at primary and junior secondary education levels for adults and out of school youths. The National Action Plan (NAP, :006) articulated the reform agenda for basic education by 2015 with the following seven objectives :

1. Ensuring that by 2009, 100 % of all children of official school age (6-11) years will be enrolled full time in primary school or an equivalent education program, including all school entry age girls
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, girls as well as boys ofprimary school age will be enrolled in primary school or its equivalent
3. Improve by 2010 the school completion rate by 30% to an overall rate exceeding 90% ofthose in school
4. Mainstream 50% increase in the number of children with disabilities by 2015 into primary school

5 . Ensure transition rate of 90% from primary to junior secondary school
6. Ensure that by 2015, 80% of children up to the age of fifteen will be enrolled in school or an equivalent education program
7. Reduce by 80% by 2015, the percentage of working children of school age, while access to relevant basic education will be provided for children still working

Primary Education Reforms for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) defined primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged between six and eleven years. It went further to state 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. This underscores the importance the government attaches to primary education.

Primary education plays a vital role in fostering basic intellectual abilities such as literacy that are crucial to success. Education is one of the key elements of human asset; it is one of the principal sources of increased economic growth and sustainable development. A study revealed that households without any formal education have about six times higher poverty incidence than those who have access to education

t Rahman. Kabir & Alam, 2005). On the other hand, the right to education is a fundamental human right; however, the importance of primary education cannot be over stated because it creates the literacy base of a nation (Rahman, Kabir & Alam, 2005). Primary education has been made universal and compulsory and there is a large scale campaign for enrolling all school aged children at primary educational institutions. Primary education is a tool toward life achievement; it enhances, improves, and empowers one to attain economic and sustainable development. Ocho (2005) sees primary education as a process of equipping the individual with appropriate knowledge, skills and competence for effective functioning in his or her society. Ada (2009) opined that primary education is a process which provides young ones with knowledge, skills and values which the society cherishes and believes is necessary. Uzoigwe (2009) noted that education at the primary level is very crucial to the overall development of an individual. This is because primary education is expected to lay a solid foundation for effective and purposeful future life of the individual. The reforms as identified by the task force on general education is a consistent set. They aim at human development therefore every effort should be made to implement them. They cover major areas, all of which are inseparable aspects of formal education. These are:

a. Extending educational opportunity
b. Improving the quality of education
c. De\'elopingpractical skills
d. Education andtraining of teachers
e. Management and resourceprovision

Objectives of Primary Education

The goals ofprimary education are :

a To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively
b. To lay, a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
c. To give citizenship education as a basis for effective- participation in and contribution to the life of the society
d. To mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child e. To develop in the child the ability to adapt to child's changing environment i To give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that u'ill enable the child function effectivejy in the societv within the limit of the child 's capacit\
g. To provide the child u-ith basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and craft of the localiT}

=lese objectives are designed not only to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria butalso to quip children with the skills with which to become active and contributing members : their immediate community. The 1999 constitution further states that the state shall direct its policy toward ensuring that all citizens, without discrimination on any ;oup whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing means of livelihood as well as :dequate opportunities to secure sustainable employment. It is certainly not possible for a person to compete effectively and secure sustainable means of livelihood if he 3r she has not acquired basic education that will equip him or her with skills.

Effective Implementation of Primary Education Reforms in Nigeria

Tbe implementation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria started in 1976 under the name Universal Primary Education (UPE). The scheme did not fully achieve its goals. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) came into existence in September, 1999.So far, available records have not shown any departure from the Universal Primary Education (UPE) trend. The situation appears even worse due to the entrenched corruption in Nigeria.

However, the responsibility for the management of education involves the federal, state and local governments. The federal government's role in the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is to ensure quality control and maintenance of uniform standards and general co-ordination of program implementation The state government has a constitutional and legislative responsibility to manage the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and get 2% of the federal consolidated revenue as grants in support ofthe Universal Basic Education (UBE) program.

In order to ensure effective implementation of primary education reforms and see that educational objectives are attained, both the federal and state governments established a number of institutions charged with the responsibility for various levels of educational institutions. The administration of primary schools is delegated to the local government. In 1989, the federal government inaugurated the National Primary Education Commission (NPECD). As a result of this the primary education edict number 3 1 of 1988 was amended in 1993 and renamed National Primary Education Commission Decree (NPECD) number 96. The functions ofthe commission are to:

a. Prescribe the minimum standards ofprimary education throughout Nigeria b. Inquire into and advice the federal government on the funding of primary education
c. Receive the national primary education fund as established by this decree from the federal government and allocate the fund to the primary education board of each state and the federal capital territory, Abuja and to any agency responsible for the federal government sponsored special primary education

project in accordance with the formula prescribed in this decree as the traditional council may, from time to time, prescribe.

d. Collate after consultation with all the state governments, periodic master plans for balanced and coordinated development of primary education in Nigeria and such plans shall include:
    i. Proposal to the federal government for equal and adequate primary education opportunity in Nigeria
    11. Ensuring that the basic national curriculum and syllabus and other necessary instructional materials are in use in primary schools in Nigeria
e. Collate, analyze and publish information relating to primary education in Nigeria

f Carryout a regular personnel audit in each state of the federation

g. Carryout such other activities under this decree and such other functions as the secretary may, from time to time, determine

The National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) ensures that standards in primary schools are maintained and that teachers' salaries are paid as and when due. Any policy formulated by the NPEC is implemented in the primary schools through the State Primary Education Board (SPEB) and the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). In 2004, an Act of the national assembly known as the compulsory, free, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), replaced National Primary Education Commission (NPEC). The UBE act of 2004 provides for compulsory, free universal basic education for all children of primary and junior secondary school age in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Peretomode, 2004). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) aimed at:

a Ensuring an uninterrupted access to nine (9) years formal education by providing free compulsory Universal Basic Education (UBE) for every child of school going age

b. Reducing school drop-out and improving relevance, quality and efficiency c. Acquisition of literacy, numeracy, communication, manipulative and life skills and be employable, useful to himself and the society at large by possessing relevant ethical and civic values mPE, 2004).

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Primary Education Reforms in Nigeria

Problems and challenges facing the implementation of primary education reforms in Nigeria are numerous; these problems are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE). This indicates that the re-launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) with the new nomenclature

:iUniversal Basic Education (UBE) did not result from the failure of the Universal Primary Education (UPE). The quality of education at the primary level today is **4**-orse than the pre- 1976 era,

Okoroma (2003) stated that the effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education (DBE) program revealed significant inadequacy in the implementation efforts. Among the constraint that impede effective implementations are:

1 Inadequate funding or insufficient funds: The education sector is grossly underfunded and in some cases, the available funds are mismanaged. Inadequate funding is one of the obstacles to effective implementation of primary education in Nigeria. Aghenta (1984) opined that the success of any basic education depends upon the resources available to it. Money is very crucial because all other elements in the school can be obtained by it, ranging from school building, equipment, teachers' salary and general rullnlrlg expenses.

2 Inadequate infrastructure, facilities and materials: There are inadequate facilities and materials to facilitate learning. Such infrastructure and materials as classroom buildings, offices, workshops, libraries, power supply, laboratory, furniture, toilets and toilet facilities which are the basic requirements in every school system are seriously inadequate, while some are in dilapidated states. These facts were revealed by Kusamoto (2017) who noted that in the implementation of 9-3-4 system of education, the cart comes before the horse which is a reverse. Thus, many educational institutions operate in unconducive environments with inadequate facilities.

3 Inadequate manpower and personnel (Inadequate number of qualified teachers to execute the implementation process). The problem of inadequate qualified teachers and other supporting staff is seriously facing the implementation program in Nigeria. FaRmwa (1974) opined that the training and procurement of teachers must precede all other considerations. The development of any education level pre-supposes the availability of teachers in sufficient number to man the institutes. Widespread curriculum reforms in schools to introduce subjects like technical and vocational education will be useless unless qualified teachers are prepared,

4. Low participation of pupils in the primary education program: Participation in primary education is still low in comparison with primary school age population.

5. Poor supervision and monitoring: Supervision is live-wire concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of primary education.

6 Inadequate or lack of planning: Most policies are not well planned thereby making implementation difficult. Plans are not thorough and are mostly done through top to down approach; relevant stakeholders are hardly involved at the planning stages.

7 Resources available for the implementation of a given educational policy are over estimated and thereby elicit unrealistic expectations.

8. Poormotivationofteachers
9. Lackof guidance and counseling
10. Politics is the master challenge to proper implementation of educational reforms. Political instability has great impact on educational development; this is due to the rapid turnover of the political heads of ministries of education. Every new minister creates the impression of initiating a reform without completion of earlier ones.

CONCLUSION

The general goal of education which is to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under the broad national goals and live as good citizens as well as prepare the individual for higher education cannot be achieved without effective policy implementation of reforms at the grass root level. The nine years primary/junior secondary education in the context of the national policy of education and national action plan (2006) is both prevocational and academic. This education shall be tuition free, compulsory and shall teach subjects which will enable pupils to acquire further knowledge and skills more especially if the policy implementation process is effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The federal government should provide the bulk of funds in line with UNESCO budget recommendation of 26% to education, while the state and local governments assist sufficiently to ensure proper management of the funds available.
2. All public primary/basic education schools should be fully provided with adequate infrastructure, facilities and materials that would facilitate learning. Such infrastructure and materials as classroom buildings, staff offices, workshops, libraries, power supply, laboratory, furniture, toilets and toilet facilities which are the basic requirement in every school system are seriously needed, while the dilapidated ones should be repaired and maintained.

3. Adequate qualified teachers and other supporting staff that u'ould handle the number of pupils should be employed for the effective implementation process sinee the development of any education level pre-supposes the availability of teachers in a sufficient number to man the institutes.
4. Pupils' enrolment campaign should be launched all over to sensitize parents toward enrolling their children in schools at the right time.
5. Effective supervision and monitoring should be done to ensure effective policy implementation ofprimary education.
6. Reforms should be thoroughly and painstakingly planned, thereby making provision for reliable assessment of the country's needs in the areas of human, material, infrastructural facilities and statistics before it should be implemented.

7. Moderate estimation of resources available in primary/junior secondary education should be made to make the policy implementation program a reality.

8. Teachers handling the basic education program should be motivated with all the necessary welfare packages such as promotion, soft loan, in-house workshops and seminars, in-service training and above all, their salary should be paid as at when due to enable them perform their duties effectively.

9. Guidance and counseling unit should be fully established in all primary/junior secondary schools; that would enhance effectiveness in policy implementation.

10. Education should be removed from the sphere of politics; it should be made purely a constitutional matter.

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