

Primary School Education in Nigeria: Problems and Solutions

Academic Planning Units, Federal University,
Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Ogunode Niyi Jacob

Abstract

The importance of primary school education cannot be overemphasized. The primary school education is the first basic education designed for the children. It is very important for citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society. It is the education that moulds character, moral training and the development of sound attitude and developing in the child's ability to adapt to his/her changing environment. For past decades, the primary school education has been facing challenges. These challenges are reducing the quality and the effectiveness of the primary school education. This paper discusses the concept of primary school education and objectives of primary school education in Nigeria. The paper also discusses some challenges militating against primary school education in Nigeria and discusses the strategies to improve the quality of primary school education in Nigeria. The paper recommends that government should ensure that adequate funds are provided for the development of primary school education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Primary School, Education, Teachers.

1. Introduction

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Primary school education provides the first education that educates future leaders and develops the high-level technical capacities that aid economic growth and development, (Obi, 2014). Obi went further to posit that the main purpose and relevance of primary education in Nigeria is the provision of basic education for the children. Such foundation education at the primary level is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development. According to the Abubakar (2004) primary education is expected to: inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively, the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society, character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes. Considering the importance of primary education, Obi (2014) submitted that the funds allocated to primary education should not merely be considered as an expense but a long-term investment, of benefit to society as a whole. These benefits are reflected on a societal level in terms of lower illiteracy rates, better healthy society, reduction in child labour rates and early marriage and more involvement in societal activities.

According to David (2019) Nigeria's basic education sector is overburdened by strong population growth. A full **44 percent of the country's population** was below the age of 15 in 2015, and the system fails to

Ogunode Niyi Jacob, ogunodejacob@gmail.com

integrate large parts of this burgeoning youth population. According to the **United Nations**, 8.73 million elementary school-aged children in 2010 did not participate in education at all, making Nigeria the country with the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. The lack of adequate education for its children weakens the Nigerian system at its foundation. To address the problem, thousands of new schools have been built in recent years. The Nigerian government has the official goal to universalize free basic education for all children. Yet, despite recent improvements in total enrollment numbers in elementary schools, the basic education system remains underfunded; facilities are often poor, teachers inadequately trained, and participation rates are low by international standards.

In 2010, the net enrollment rate at the elementary level was **63.8 percent** compared to a global average of 88.8 percent. According to recent statistics on **completion rates**, approximately one quarter of current pupils drop out of elementary school. These low participation rates perpetuate illiteracy rates in Nigeria, which, while relatively high compared to other Sub-Saharan countries, are well below the global average. The country in 2015 had a youth literacy rate of 72.8 percent and an adult literacy rate of 59.6 percent compared to global rates of 90.6 percent (2010) and 85.3 percent (2010), respectively (data reported by the **World Bank**). Within Nigeria, there is a distinct regional difference in participation rates in education between the oil-rich South and the impoverished North of the country, in some parts of which elementary enrollment rates were reportedly below 25 percent in 2010. This paper aims at discussing the various challenges facing the primary school education in Nigeria and to suggest some solutions for primary school sustainability in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Primary School Education

Primary education is the bedrock on which other levels of education are built. The National Policy on Education (2004) refers to it as “Education given in an institution for children, normally aged 6-11”. This is the level that prepares pupils for Secondary Education. It is necessary that basic skills are inculcated into learners as specified in the objectives. According to Ogunode (2009) primary school education is the foundational education that children receive in the school. It is the education that every other educational institution depends on. It is the basic education that teaches the child how to read and write. The primary school education is replaced with the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. Accordingly, The Universal Basic Education was launched in Nigeria in 1999.

2.2 Universal Basic Education is to be Implemented with the Following Guidelines Given in 2014

The curriculum includes: English, Mathematics, Nigerian language, basic science and technology, religion and national values, and cultural and creative arts, Arabic language (optional). Pre-vocational studies (home economics, agriculture, and entrepreneurship) and French language are introduced in Grade 4. Nigeria’s National Policy on Education is that the language of instruction for the first three years should be the “indigenous language of the child or the language of his/her immediate environment”, most commonly Hausa, Ibo, or Yoruba. This policy may, however, not always be followed at schools throughout the country, and instruction may instead be delivered in English. English is commonly the language of instruction for the last three years of elementary school. Students are awarded the *Primary School Leaving Certificate* on completion of Grade 6, based on continuous assessment. The National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that the minimum entry qualification into teaching in primary school is the Nigeria Certificate in Education

(NCE) and that the teacher must be registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. At the primary school level, the recommended pupil-teacher-ratio (PTR) is 35:1.

2.3 Objectives of Primary Education

The National Policy on Education (2004) stated the objectives of primary education as follows:

- a. The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively.
- b. The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- c. Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- d. Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- e. Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- f. Giving the child opportunity for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity; and
- g. Providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Mark (2013) carried out a research to find out the level of the achievement of the objectives of Primary education in Nigeria. The result shows that to an extent, the primary education objectives have been achieved.

2.4 Management of Primary School Education in Nigeria

In the Management and administration of Primary education in Nigeria, the institutional responsibilities are shared by three tiers of government – Federal, State, and Local. These institutions will play a differentiated key role in addressing social risks and impacts of the Program. At the Federal level, the Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE) has a policy formulation and coordination mandate in the education sector. The National Council on Education (NCE) coordinates policy making across the different tiers of government, gathering more than 1200 stakeholders including the Federal Minister of Education and all state level Commissioners of Education. It plays an important role for the effectiveness of the basic education policy across the country as a collegial decision making body. The NCE decides on the national curriculum and has been instrumental in the institutionalization of SBMC across the states. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) is the executive agency of the federal government responsible for basic education policy implementation. The board members of UBEC are appointed by the President upon recommendation from the Minister of Education, and represents various stakeholders, including FMOE, the teachers' union, PTA and women's groups (NOUN, 2009).

2.5 State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB)

Primary schools also relate with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). The Board is saddled with the responsibilities of administering primary schools (as well as junior secondary schools) at respective state levels. Its functions include those specified for the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), but at the State level.

The specific functions of SUBEB are;

1. Management of primary schools (as well as junior secondary schools) in the State.
2. Recruitment, appointment, promotion and discipline of teaching and non-teaching staff on Grade levels 07 and above.

3. Posting and deployment of staff including interstate transfer.
4. Disbursement of funds provided to it from both Federal and State sources.
5. Setting up an effective functional supervisory unit;
6. Retirement and re-absorption of teachers;
7. Undertaking new capital projects;
8. Responsibility for the approval, training and retraining of teaching and non-teaching staff.
9. Assessment and funding of salaries and allowances of teaching and non-teaching staff based on the Scheme of service drawn up by state Government.
10. Ensuring that annual reports are rendered by Heads of schools on teachers appointed to serve under them, (Noun, 2009).

2.6 Local Government Education Authority (LGEA)

This is an agency established for each local government area of the state and it is subject to the control of SUBEB. **The Agency relates with primary schools in the following areas:**

1. The day-to-day administration of primary schools
2. The appointment, posting, transfer, promotion and discipline of staff on grade levels 06-10.
3. Making recommendations to SUBEB on promotion and discipline of teaching and non-teaching staff on grade levels 07 and above.
4. Submission of annual estimates, annual accounts, and monthly returns to SUBEB;
5. Payment of salaries, allowances and benefits to all the teaching and non-teaching staff.
6. Acquisition and distribution of materials and equipment to all primary schools.
7. Undertaking general maintenance of primary school buildings and infrastructure.
8. Stimulating, promotion and participating in the running of primary schools, (Noun, 2009).

3. Challenges Confronting Primary School Education in Nigeria

There are many challenges confronting primary school education in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include;

3.1 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Ehiamezor (2001) describes infrastructure as the operational inputs of every instructional programmes and constitutes elements that are necessary for teaching and learning. Such include buildings, laboratories, machinery, furniture and electrical fixtures. These must be functional in relation to other aspects of the community, such as health centres, libraries, and good roads and must be large enough to allow for expansion as enrolments expand. Inadequate infrastructural facilities are among the major problems facing the primary school education in Nigeria. Infrastructural facilities refer to the numbers of classroom available for teaching, staff room, chairs, tables, desks, laboratories, Computer lab and exam halls. Ivowi (2011) pointed out that poor infrastructures, inadequate equipment, lack of sufficient textbooks and laboratories are problems facing primary school education.

3.2 Inadequate Funding

Inadequate fund refers to the shortage of funds made available for a particular project. Nigerian primary school education is underfunded. The major problem in primary education management as observed by Durosaro (2004)

is inadequate funding. According to World Bank survey on Nigeria, the Federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10% of its overall expenditures. UNESCO recommends that developing countries like Nigeria should dedicate at least 15 to 20% of their spending to education. But since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the country **has never budgeted** more than 12% of its public resources to education. In Nigeria's 2018 budget, **education is set to get** N651.2 billion (US\$1.88 billion), or about 7% of the total expenditure. Less than 20% of this will go to building new schools, buying learning equipment and other capital projects.

3.3 Poor Stakeholders' Participation

Adebayo (2013) holds that the roles of education stakeholders are inevitable in the school system. These include an advisory position, developing strategies to train and retrain staff and leaders, turning the academic research into practical points for policy making and international cooperation among countries to promote efficiency of processes and production of reliable leaders, co- training of teachers among sub-African and improve teachers' integrity. The education stakeholders are the people or group of people who are actively interested in the development of education. According to Ogunode (2009) stakeholders' involvement in the management and administration of primary schools in Nigeria is weak and below expectation as compared to other African Countries.

3.4 Lack of Infrastructures, Laboratories and Equipment

Ogunode (2009) submitted that teachers' qualifications are low at primary schools. The learning environment does not promote effective learning. Basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-pupil ratios are high. General performance in examinations is poor and the graduates have low levels of competencies in the work environment. Bajulaiye, (2006) has shown that there is gross inadequacy of resource materials in Nigerian schools especially in primary schools.

3.5 Shortage of Teachers

The teacher is one of the prominent and indispensable members of the school organisation team. Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, the National Policy on Education has placed emphasis on the quality of teachers in terms of qualification, intervention and commitment to teaching to ensure a high productivity (Bassey, and Joshua, 2004). The primary schools in Nigeria are faced with the problems of shortage of qualified teachers. Many primary schools do not have enough Mathematics or English teachers. According to Ejere (2011) the basic education level in Nigeria is plagued by acute shortage of professionally qualified teachers.

3.6 Poor Teacher Motivation

The condition of teachers' service has significant impact on instructional delivery. Teachers' salary is a major problem in Nigeria. In 2009, teachers at primary and secondary levels went on strike nationwide. They demanded implementation of Teachers' Salary Scale (TSS). Ogunode (2009) lamented that primary-school teachers are poorly motivated.

3.7 Poor Capacity Development

The training and retraining of primary school teachers in Nigeria is very poor. Many primary school teachers have not received any form of professional development programme to improve their teaching skills and

knowledge. Ogunode (2009) recommended that the government should ensure that primary school teachers are going for trainings and retraining programmes such as conferences and seminars.

3.8 Non-Conducive Learning Environment

Oloruntoyin (2011) stressed that many of the buildings were erected in the late 1950s and early 1960s with mud blocks. Today they are not only a health hazard but also potential death traps. In fact, in many areas, classes are being held in the open during the dry season and when the raining season sets in children are crowded into the few available ramshackle buildings.

3.9 Poor Student Quality

Majority of primary school students in Nigeria primary schools are not well fed. Research has it that the economic difficulties of the country aggravate the situation at the household level, where the level of poverty makes it difficult for parents and families to support children's education. "The UBE programme was not actually performing on its mandate because of the harsh economic realities of parents, which have forced many school age children to be out of school in search of means of livelihood through hawking or other menial jobs."

The amount of writing materials available to children under five in the primary school was measured and it was discovered that the trend is downwards. Whereas the 2007 survey reported that 14% of children under five had at least three children's books, this dropped to 6% in 2011 and to 5.6% in the 2016/17 survey.

3.10 Teacher-Student Ratio and Quality of Teaching and Learning

The implementation of the recommended ratio of 1:35 in primary school and 1:40 in secondary school by the National Policy on Education has not been possible in Nigeria due to population explosion of pupils and students which is not matched with increase in the number of employed teachers. Eke (2011) revealed that the national average of teacher-pupil ratio in Nigerian primary schools in 2003 was 1:44. In some states, e.g. Gombe state, the ratio is as high as 1:176. A study carried out in Anambra state by Osuafor and Okoli (2010); revealed that the teacher-student ratio is as high as one teacher to over two hundred science students. Obviously, it is practically impossible for any teacher to cope with this number of pupils/students. The consequence is that some teachers now devise strategies to survive the bad situation to the detriment of good standard. For instance, practical and laboratory experiments are hardly done, thereby giving no attention to psychomotor development; no attention is given to affective domain that will mould the character of young people; assignments and written exercises are hardly given and when given, are not properly marked; marks are awarded arbitrarily at least to have something to record in the grade book and so on. Due to shortage of teachers, the available ones are sometimes deployed to teach subjects they do not specialize in and may not be competent to teach.

3.11 Ineffective Monitoring and Evaluation

Inspection and monitoring are meant to improve and enhance teachers' performance. According to NOUN (2007) inspectorate division of both State and Federal governments have complained of inadequate staff, vehicles and some other infrastructure. These affect regular inspection of primary schools. The quality of instruction delivered by teachers, in turn, is affected because the mechanism for quality assurance (inspection) is ineffective.

3.12 Lack of Data

UNESCO's Education review of Nigeria in 2015 addresses this challenge as one of the main obstacles to achieving progress. "The 2002 Global Monitoring Report documented the fact that Nigeria was one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa without data on UPE. The report also shows that Nigeria had no data on Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), and that the country is one of the 11 African countries at serious risk of not achieving the goal. The exercise to analyse progress towards the goal of UPE has been based on country net enrolment ratios, and these countries had NERs of less than 80%."

3.13 Lack of Instructional Materials

Teachers require instructional resources like teaching aids to complement their instructional delivery. Ogunode (2009) observed that most primary school teachers do not have access to teaching aids in their school and do not use instructional materials for teaching. This makes some of the concepts sound abstract to learners.

4. Possible Solutions to the Challenges Facing Primary School Education in Nigeria

4.1 Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities

The availability of the infrastructural facilities in primary school education is very important. Without the infrastructural facilities, teaching and learning cannot take place in the school environment. According to Ejere (2011) every primary and junior secondary school must be provided with adequate infrastructure and other physical facilities like classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computer centres, potable water, electricity, toilets and furniture. Lawason, Oluwakemi, and Tari (2011) posited "the quality of education that children get bears direct relevance to the availability or the lack of physical facilities and overall atmosphere where the learning takes place" (p. 48).

4.2 Provision of Adequate Funding

The place of finance in the achievement of objectives of primary education cannot be over emphasized. The extents to which financial needs of primary education are met, determine the quality of subsequent levels of education. Adequate funding determines the quality of infrastructure, teaching and non-teaching staff as well as access to this level of learning materials. According to Amuchie, Asotibe & Christina (2013) the UBE programme should be properly funded. The funds so provided should be properly utilized for sustaining the programme. Accurate projections and effective cost analysis should be carried out to avoid under-funding. The expenditure should be properly monitored to avoid wastage of scarce resources or embezzlement.

4.3 Improve Stakeholders' Participation in Primary School Education Management

The government must come up with a policy that will include the full participation of all the education stakeholders in the Country. This will help to strengthen the quality of primary schools' education in the Country.

4.4 Provision of Instructional Materials

Instructional resources should be provided for teachers in primary schools. Teaching aids help to make teaching and learning concrete and easy to understand. Ogunode (2009) noted, it is the duty of the government to provide the needed instructional resources for the teachers at the primary schools.

4.5 Employment of More Qualified Teachers

Adebayo, (2013) says - on the teacher is the onus of educational system in any country and the pivot on which all the educational objectives' achievement revolves. Therefore, teachers' roles are indispensable and his integrity needs to be addressed for improved teaching and learning process. Adebimpe (2001) opined that for the UBE to succeed, adequate provisions should be made to produce sufficient qualified teachers and make them relevant within the limit of their area of specialization. Salaries need to be paid as and when due, because it serves as a motivation factor towards productivity.

4.6 Ensure Teacher Motivation

More teachers should be employed into the primary education system, especially at the rural areas and there should be room for training and retraining. Teachers in the primary schools should be highly encouraged to work in the rural areas where their duty is highly needed. They should also be supported with necessarily school facilities and teaching aids for effectiveness in performance. Salaries of teachers should not be delayed and they should be motivated.

4.7 Capacity Development

According to Odo (2000), "at present, some non-professionals are being specially employed for the purpose of the UBE scheme with the hope that quick orientation/training will be given to them after which they will serve as teachers under the scheme". The government should quickly train those teachers to make them professionally fit to participate in the UBE programme. Also during the planning, funds should be set aside for regular training and retraining of teachers.

4.8 Provision of Conducive Learning Environment

The primary school environment should be made conducive for teaching and learning by ensuring security and noiseless environment. The schools, mostly in the rural areas, for example, should be provided with adequate facilities to enhance conducive learning environment.

4.9 Improve Student Quality

The government should provide breakfast for primary school pupils. Ogunniran (2018) recommended that students, on the other hand, should be encouraged by a daily meal, like a good strategy some state governments have employed.

4.10 Improve Quality of Teaching and Learning by Employing Qualified Teachers

The position of teachers is very important in realizing the objectives of primary education. The quality of these teachers determines the quality of instruction they offer. Thus, one knows what teacher quality implies, problems associated with teachers' quality in primary schools and how to minimize the problems. The availability of quality teachers determines quality instruction. According to Vandewort, Amrein-Beardslay, and Berliner (2004), the quality of teacher in the classroom is the single most important factor in determining how a child learns.

4.11 Ensure Effective Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of primary school education programme should be carried out periodically and continuously and in a professional manner. Ogunode (2009) observed that primary schools' supervision

and inspection should be given more priorities because it is the only means to achieve quality education. Instructional supervision is very necessary for sustainable primary education in Nigeria.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The place of primary education in the achievement of overall educational objective cannot be over-emphasized. If the laudable objectives for primary education are to be attained effectively, primary schools' activities have to be moderated. Therefore, Ministries of Education at both Federal and State levels have vital roles to play. This paper hereby recommends the following:

1. Adequate funding should be provided in the Budget to fund the primary school education.
2. The government should provide enough capital to fund the infrastructural facilities in the primary schools across the country.
3. Develop strategies for the systematic recruitment of potential teachers. This implies effective employment process which results into selection of qualified and competent teachers from the pool of applicants.
4. The government should ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of primary school in all the nooks and corners of the country.
5. The government should involve the educational stakeholders more in the management and administration of primary schools' education to ensure quality assurance.
6. Strengthen inspectorate and monitoring division in the Ministry of Education.
7. Provide teachers with better resources for good teaching aids.
8. The government should improve the data and information collection of primary school to enable effective planning.
9. Payment of agreed teachers' salary scheme by the States that are yet to be implemented in the new scheme as a form motivation.
10. The government should make the primary schools more secure to allow an effective teaching and learning environment.

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