

Primary Education as a Vital Tool for Achieving Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

This paper highlights primary education as a vital tool for achieving sustainable national development. It discussed concepts of primary education and its objectives; concept of sustainable national development, relationship between primary education and sustainable national development. The paper also looked into the challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria which include: Inadequate teaching staff, inadequate infrastructure, Lack of instructional materials, Inadequate funding, etc. The following were recommended: Government should employ more qualified teachers, adequate fund should be provided for primary education and all funds mapped out for primary education should be judiciously used for the purpose of achieving sustainable national development; there is need for teaching and learning to be done in a conducive environment therefore, dilapidated buildings and structures must be improved by government and even well-meaning individuals in society.

Key words: Education, Primary Education, Sustainable National Development

Education at all levels and all its forms constitutes a vital tool for addressing almost all global problems. Education is indeed a veritable tool for the development of any nation. Umoh (2006) observed that education helps an individual to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and emotionally by providing suitable environment, teaching new knowledge, attitudes and skills that will enable him to be useful to himself and society. Aminu (1995) observed that the greatest investment a nation can make for the development of its economic, sociological and human resources is that of education. Aminu, opined that education provides the society with people who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to meet with the manpower needs of the nation and even export manpower. Education at the primary level helps

the learners' feet to be strong and be to climb the educational ladder to the peak of their academic achievement if a good foundation is laid.

Concept of primary education and its objectives

Primary education is the bedrock of all educational system. According to

Adepoju in Orimidu (2004), primary education is the type of education given to Children in primary institution, where the child acquires fundamental knowledge and skills, through feelings and actions which are considered necessary for all citizens, regardless of social studies, vocation or sex. Primary school is regarded as the most important foundation upon which other levels of education are built. National policy reiterated that it is education given to children from the age of 6 to 12 years (FRN, 2013). Ekpo (1993) reiterated that primary education consist of all the knowledge, skills, facts which are important to children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. It is usually the children's initial point of contact with formal education.

The National Policy on Education (2013) enumerated the objectives of

Primary education thus: to

- i. Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- ii. Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking.
- iii. Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity.
- iv. Instill social, moral norms and values in the child.
- v. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing Environment and
- vi. Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.

From the objectives enumerated above, it is obvious that primary education is indeed a very important level of the educational system.

Concept of sustainable national development

Development entails the full realization of the human potential and a maximum use of the nation's resources for the benefits of all. Sustainable development is that development that meets our frequent needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Sustainable development goal is the education goal. It aims to ensure inclusive and

equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all. The United nation sustainable development goals include;

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and Economic growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, Justice and strong Institution
17. Partnerships

Sustainable development is the idea that human societies must live and meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Generally, sustainable Development is thought to have three components; the environment, society and economy. The well-being of these three areas are interconnected not separated (Omile, 2021). For example, a healthy prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to produce food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for citizens. Shaken (2015) defined sustainable development as the process of sustaining and igniting resources necessary to provide for the future generation of life on the earth. Rodney (1986) defined sustainable development as an increase in skills and capacity to do things, self-confidence, creativity, Self-discipline and responsibility and material well-being. Nigeria is a nation that is blessed with numerous natural resources that when properly harnessed and equitably distributed in a peaceful environment, would ensure sustainable development.

Udo-Etuk (1985) opined that sustainable National Development should be considered in terms of the welfare of the generality of the people. In our society, majority of urban and rural dwellers do not have access to water, electricity and other basic amenities of life. National Development cuts across diverse sections which include education, economy, power, transport, energy of a given country. Age (2005) identified some objective which suitable national development is expected to realize as: increased capital income and employment, Promoting Human welfare, Satisfying basic needs, Protecting the environment. Considering the path of future generation, achieving equity between the rich and poor and participation on a broad basis in development and decision making is important.

Relationship between primary education and sustainable national development

Education is a process that develops the human mind, the personality, the potentials and impart useful and relevant skills to individuals, thereby enhancing growth of the society. Primary education helps to prepare young people for their active participation in the maintenance and development of the society. In essence, primary education prepares human minds and enables them to cope with the future challenges of life. Primary education enhances effective brain development of a child and leads him into maturity and increases his level of achievement in future. Education for sustainable development involves integrating key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning. This may include instruction about climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction and sustainable consumption. All these can be integrated and taught in primary education level to develop the mind of the child at this level and also help him acquire the skills that are necessary to overcome and meet the challenges that will confront him in the future.

In Nigeria today, education remains the instrument for effective national development. Development is associated with a positive change in condition of either individual, groups, communities or even the country as a whole. Education and Sustainable National Development are interwoven, Intertwined and interconnected. Therefore, education at the primary level is very important to achieving the Sustainable National Development since it is the bedrock of other levels of education. If anything goes wrong at this level then the whole of other levels of education will be affected.

The National Policy on Education (2013) recommends that for effective teaching and learning to take place at the primary level, the pupil-teacher ratio shall be 1: 35. In developed countries primary school pupils attend modern and well equipped classrooms. The pupil-teacher ratio is

at the likely less than 1:20 and most of the children are usually well fed. UNESCO recommends that countries should progressively aim for pupils-teacher ratio of not more than 20 children per teacher at the lower level of education. However, the situation in our country is different. there are serious, differences in the qualities of facilities and services provided in developed countries and developing countries (Obasi, 2008).

Challenges of primary education in Nigeria.

There are a lot of challenges associated with the operation of primary education in Nigeria (Isaac, 2000). Much as the government has been trying to see that these challenges are solved yet it looks like they still persist. These challenges include:

i. **Inadequate Teaching Staff:** Teachers are indispensable to the achievement of objectives of education. It is a well-known fact that no educational system in a nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. In other words, the success of the system rests on the availability of good and qualified teachers who are internally motivated. There is dearth of teaching staff in our primary schools.

A visit to our primary schools will reveal that there is inadequacy of teachers and this does not argue well for teaching and learning. This is because this pupil-teacher ratio is over 1:40 which negates the UNESCO recommendation of 1:20 (pupil-teacher ratio).

ii. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** This refers to enablers of learning both physical and spatial. They include classrooms, laboratories, workshops, school farm and garden as well as provision of water and sanitation. These facilities are not readily available in primary schools and where there is provision of workshop, laboratories and classrooms, there may not be desks and chairs for the children to sit on. With this kind of situation, the objectives of education cannot be achieved.

iii. **Lack of Instructional Materials:** Many primary schools lack modern instructional materials like computers, textbooks etc. this has brought a great decline in the quality of education at the primary level. Now that we are in age of the technology, these children are denied access to these things and one wonders how they can cope in our world today.

iv. **Inadequate Funding:** Poor funding of primary schools is the major cause of the other problems observed in these schools. Where enough money is not provided for running primary

schools, a lot of things cannot go well. Abdul (2007) stated that as a result of inadequate funding, most of the schools have no fund to carry out practical. This is detrimental to the primary schools teaching at this level is supposed to be by practical, explanatory and experimental methods. Money is very essential and needed to solve the needs of the schools but when fund is not available to help put in place the facilities and resources that will enhance effective teaching and learning, the objective of the primary education cannot be achieved.

v. Lack of Motivation for Teachers: This problem really affects the quality of primary education. ‘Primary school teachers are passing through situation like low prestige and unconducive working environment, deprivation, non-promotion. These make them dissatisfied with their work’. Situations like these severely dampen their professional pride as a result, teaching at this level is used as a stepping stone to other more lucrative jobs. Those who still remain cannot put in their best in the course of carrying out their duties. This does not argue well for primary education Cornelius (2012) lamented that it is regrettable to note that the neglect and lack of motivation of teachers has had far reaching and negative effects on the Nigerian education system. Cornelius further reported that increase in salary in the most critical issues motivating school teachers in the which must be addressed by various levels for greater improvement in output, teachers will be happy doing their work and educational objectives will be attained.

The way forward

The following have been put forward as recommendations to help alleviate the problems of primary education.

- i. Adequate fund should be provided by government for primary education and all funds mapped out for projects in primary school should be judiciously used. There should be committee for managing and supervising projects to ensure implementation project design for a particular developmental program in schools.
- ii. Government should employ more qualified teachers for teaching in primary education level. The government should employ teachers to try and meet up with international standard and UNESCO recommendation of pupil-teacher ratio of 1:20.
- iii. For the purpose of achieving sustainable national development, there is need for teaching and learning to be done in a conducive environment. Dilapidated structures and facilities in primary schools must be improved by government and even well-meaning individuals in the society.

- iv. Teachers who disseminate knowledge must be properly motivated to give and put in their best. There is need for salary increment better working conditions to be provided for these teachers by the government especially in area of education. The present salary of 30,000.00 minimum wage is grossly inadequate and therefore should be increased to at least hundred thousand naira.
- v. All levels of government- Federal, state and local government must contribute their quota to the development of education. This will help in the achievement of sustainable national development.

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