



Challenges And Realities Of Falling Standard Of Primary Education In Nigeria

Dr. Mani Ahmed

Department Of Education, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina

Abstract:

This paper reviewed the primary school level of education in Nigeria by looking at the trends, efforts and the consequences of such efforts. It exposed fact that the lowering quality of primary education is as a result of the shift from the manpower approach to social demand (SDA). The difference between the two approaches being access to all will school age children qualified for admission. The SDA is acceptable and in tune with internal efforts towards wiping out illiteracy. However, to improve the system for a better tomorrow, there is the need to depoliticize education; improve data supply, teacher supply and funding. Political will is necessary for any policy to succeed.

1.Introduction

Primary Education refers to the type of education given to children from age 4 – 15 years of age and in most cases in our (Nigeria context) to children age 6-15 because pre-primary education is not accessible to most children. It is referred to as Basic Education, Elementary Education or primary Education. These names mean the same thing within the context of this paper. It is on record that the Regional Governments made efforts to expand the primary school level of education due to the realization of the crucial role it would play as a foundation for the social, economic and political developments of the country. As a result of these efforts, the Western Region introduced Universal Basic Education, in 1955, the eastern region in 1957. The Northern Region could not introduce the same due to lack of teachers, funds and reservations among the political and other leaders that the north was not prepared for this expansion. However, there were many problems that stemmed from the introduction of Universal Primary Education in the 1950's. These included among others, lack of qualified teachers, lack of management staff, inadequate teaching materials and lack of funds. These developments led to the establishment of Banjo Commission in the western region (1961). In the Eastern Region, Dike Commission submitted its report (1962). The two Commissions were informed by the problems faced in the course of implementation of these policies. Equally important is the fact that because these regions made these bold attempts, they became more educationally advanced, developed, more politically conscious and the issue of educational gap and others were, and are still as a result of mass education when the "NORTH" was not ready for the project. For this reason, the development of primary education became imbalanced in the country and this has social, economic and political implication on the nation.

2.Trends In Primary Education In Nigeria

The historical realities coupled with our experiences as a nation culminated into the evolution of the National Policy on Education. This was because after the civil-war, the needs to further develop policies and structures that would ensure National Unity, integration and effective citizenship became necessary. The journey towards the evolution of National Policy on Education was therefore kick-started in the country. The political leadership was able to realize that education is the core of development and progress in modern societies because it is one of the most powerful weapons known for reducing poverty, inequality and could therefore be used for laying the foundation for a

sustainable growth and development of any nation (Akinbote, 2007) At the international level, education is considered a fundamental human right and therefore access to education is one of the yardsticks with which the level of development of nations are measured. In fact, most nations are members of the United Nations and are therefore signatories to its charters and other conventions that apply to members nations. For this and many other reasons, Nigeria is a signatory to Education For All Policy and is considered a developing nation. This situation is one of the factors that influenced national leaderships to introduce policies and programmes that were intended to provide access to education for all school age children. The benefits derivable include among others:-

Parents are conscious of the benefits derivable from schooling and have been demanding for educational institutions for their communities.

Education is a campaign issue and a reliable tool of penetration i.e. establishment of educational institution in certain areas to make political gains.

A literate population is politically conscious and participates better in democratic processes.

People learn to discharge maximum civil obligation competently i.e. political orientation, voting and civil rights.

People also learn and function with minimal supervision or guidance.

Human Resources Development in the areas of skilled and semi-skilled manpower is a necessary component of the agenda of government for its obvious short and long-term benefits.

The political class therefore, conscious of the above benefits, made deliberate attempts to provide access to education. It should be clear that apart from making political gains, the citizen benefits, the country gains regional and international recognition. Education promotes self-reliance, productivity and independence. More-so, developed countries, international Donor agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations provide funds to developing and underdeveloped nations with a view to encouraging basic education in these countries. These deliberate attempts to make access to education possible were and are still not without problems. These problems include among others; lack of teachers, infrastructure, funding and lowering standards. The beneficiaries of these programmes are continuously becoming a liability instead of assets that would facilitate the socio-economic and political transformation of the nation. Thus, the stakeholders are getting confused because the educational sectors are not performing, graduate can hardly read or

write. The private sector/employers of labour are not getting the envisaged skilled manpower. All these are because the primary level of education has not been established on a solid foundation to enable other systems perform effectively and efficiently.

3.Theoretical Consideration

For any project to be conceived and implemented there ought to be some theoretical consideration on the nature, type and scope of such projects. For education planners and managers to start any educational program at the state, national or international levels there are three basic approaches that are considered in such attempts. Specifically, nations plan their educational sectors bearing in mind their needs, aspirations, human, material resources and their socio-political circumstances. For purposes of clarification, these approaches are briefly discussed:-

3.1.Social Demand Approach

An approach where government provides education for all school age children willing to attend schools. This approach is popular in most developing nations because it provides for a mass training, reduces illiteracy and provides access to all. However, it has always been characterized by shortage of facilities (teachers, classroom, instructional materials).

3.2.Manpower Approach

This is a situation whereby access to schooling is based on projected manpower needs of a given country. It narrows down the chances of willing applicants and it is accused of being selective and elitist.

3.3.Cost-Benefit Approach

An educational arrangement in which schools and programmes are designed to meet some socio-economic yardsticks in terms of returns that may accrue to the trainee, their parents and their government. In this case, education is planned with the obvious social, economic and other returns in view. It is the approach used to supply manpower needs in difficult and scarce areas such as medicine, nuclear science, etc. for example, foreign scholarship/technical aid, other special training programmes and private schools, colleges or universities. The decision to use any of these approaches rests with the political leadership/government of the day. It is, therefore, at this juncture that politics play a critical role in the sense that the decision will have to be matched with political

will and willingness to invest resources to meet the desired objectives. That is why education is one of the Seven Points Agenda of the Federal Government. By implication, its commitments towards educational development as it affects the entire system are clear. However, there appears to be some issues or impediments. (Ahmed 2008).

4.What Went Wrong?

The ideas and intention to provide education to all citizens were aimed at producing an effective, useful and functional citizen as contained in the National Policy on Education (1977) revised (1981). No sensible citizen would quarrel with national objectives, provisions and the processes outlined in the document. However, there was a gap between the policy document and implementation. This created among others, dramatic increase in enrolments. Lack of classrooms, teachers and inadequate funding become major obstacles. Another serious issue that brought down the quality education in the country was poor planning. It appears that the policy makers do not give serious attention to the training of education managers who are supposed to implement these policies. For example, in all the three cases of the introduction of Universal Primary Education, Western Region (1955), Eastern Region (1957) National level (1976) and the Universal Basic Education (1999), very little time was devoted to teacher supply to man these programmes before their respective take-offs. Hence, all of them were started without an appreciable number of trained teachers. To date the issue of qualified teachers in our schools remain embarrassing. According to 2006 Universal Basic Education (UBEC) report, out of 534,794 primary school teachers in the country, only 246,985 are NCE graduates while less than 40,000 have higher degrees. It is therefore obvious that over 40% of serving teachers are not qualified to teach in our schools (Falola 2009). The above presents a national picture of the teaching personnel. It is therefore expected that the quality of such teachers may vary depending on the efforts of individual states and their individual commitments to the education due to the following problems of implementation which are briefly highlighted as put forward by Bello (1999).

5.Political Constraints

Educational decisions are political. Therefore, irrespective of the recommendations made by commissioners, committees, workshops or seminars, education policy makers respond more quickly and with more rigors, to political demands than true educational needs.

This can be seen in the state policies with regards to citing, funding and modification of program to suit political goals.

6.Misplaced Priorities

This refers to a situation where political leaders make pronouncement on educational matters before policy planning, as was the case with UPE and its plans, in this case(s) planning commenced after implementation.

7.Political Considerations

Another important aspect of educational system that is odiously wrong is the political consideration in the appointment of persons to positions of responsibility. At the operation level, such appointees pay more attention to issues largely on political consideration instead of technical, professional or managerial considerations.

8.Corruption And Greed

The issue of corruption and greed has been a source of concern to many; at primary school level, for example, there are known cases of improper utilization of funds that are meant for building of schools, supply of teaching equipment, materials and most importantly, recruitment of teaching staff. These allegations imply that there are a lot of wastages in the primary school level of education. If avoided, such funds would contribute, in no small measure, towards the implementation of the system.

9.What Is The Difference Between Yesterday And Today In Terms Of Administration Of Primary Schhol Systems?

For purposes of clarity, we need to draw a line between what we call yesterday and today. This would enable us discuss these differences more concisely.

Within the context of this paper, yesterday refers to pre-universal primary education period. This is because during the period, the approach to education was based on man-power needs. The man-power approach was in place before the introduction of UPE in the western region up to 1955, the eastern region up to 1957 and in the northern region up to 1976 when the UPE was introduced at the national level.

9.1.The Man-Power Approach

As earlier mentioned in this approach, the educational system is allowed to train citizens, using manpower requirements. It is based on projected need to train skilled and semi-skilled manpower for the nation. This projection is arrived at using employers' opinion, incrementalism, density ratio and other means to arrive at the desired figure/number. As a result of the above arrangement, schools were also built based on such numbers. The primary schools established were very few. At the completion of primary school level of education, graduates were admitted into secondary, technical, commercial and other training centres based on the projected needs. Those unable to proceed were either dropped or utilized for jobs that require unskilled personnel.

The manpower approach is considered selective and elitist; this is because only a few citizens were allowed to have access to education. The few that were selected were properly trained because they had good teachers, conducive educational facilities and the quality of education cannot be compared to what is obtained now.

The quality of education was carefully guarded because of the fact that the trainees were carefully chosen, trained for a definite purpose, i.e. to fill in existing vacancies that were known to be available due to the projection and manpower planning in place, employment was automatic.

9.2.Primary Schools During The Manpower Approach Policy

During the period under discussion, primary schools were very few (about 10 schools per district). The schools were the most attractive places in the villages. The Headmasters were the most highly educated and respected persons in the village, they were elderly, well composed and conscious of their relevance to the society in which they operate. They had special liking for children, sports and had a responsibility to report and collaborate with the village head or district head on any matter affecting the school. The schools were funded well and the school children were being supplied with uniforms and soap. Some primary schools were boarding. Those were the days when Nigeria relied on revenues accruing from sale of farm produce. Financing of education was being handled by regional governments. The qualification of those dedicated was either Grade III or Grade II. It is important to add that morale and discipline was high, as teachers were recruited based on merit, attitude, physical features and sound character. Teachers then emphasize personal hygiene good character, honesty and competition among pupils.

There were prizes to be won at the end of each term and at the end of the gift and prizes were always awarded to deserving ones.

9.3.Primary Education Of Today

The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1950-79 marked the end of manpower approach to educational planning. The implication of Universal Primary Education Programme is that schools will be accessible to all those who qualify for admission.

9.4.Social Demand Approach (SDA)

The social demand approach is the simplest approach to educational planning. It relies on private demand for education and stipulates that all who demand education should be given the opportunity provided they are qualified. According to Coombs (1974), the social demand approach is used to mean: ‘the aggregate “popular” demand for education, that is, the sum total of individual demands for education at a given place and time under prevailing cultural, political and economic circumstances’

In his own explanation of the social demand approach, Adesina (1981) added that: “Only those who qualify for admission will have their demands met. It simply charges the education authorities with providing schools and facilities for all students who demand admission who are qualified to enter”

Social demand approach is one of the techniques of planning educational development that has been adopted by government of developing countries whenever they plan to provide education for all their citizens such education has tended to be limited to the first and second levels of education.

9.4.1.Application of SDA

In preparing a plan based on SDA the planners need to first forecast the expected enrolment. Secondly, use the available data to estimate the number of teachers, classrooms and other facilities that would be required to accommodate new enrolment. Thirdly, adequate cost data need to be used to estimate the total expenditure and search for a way of finding the plan.

9.4.2. Advantages of SDA

Social demand approach to educational planning encourages mass education or mass literacy. That is, its implementation increases the level of literacy in the society.

It democratizes educational opportunities in the society. Through this approach, education is made available to everyone both rich and poor.

It is less complex to adopt. It is simplest approach to educational planning.

It reduces the level of social tension and as well as income gaps in countries where education acts as a ladder.

It provides educational planners with a precise target of spaces to be provided.

It facilitates the process of income redistribution.

9.5. *Primary Education As Universal Basic Education (UBE)*

Primary Education is now called basic education to differentiate with the UPE due to changes intrinsic in the programmed. The decision to introduce UBE was necessitated by the desire of the political leadership to entrench viable participatory democracy and enhance national socio-economic development as a consequence of a free and compulsory regime of Basic Education. UBE was also intended as evidence of Nigeria's commitment to the world declaration as Education for all, at Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000), as well as to the New Delhi Declaration of (1991). This was follow-up with a conference in Beijing (2001). Other conventions require nation to double up efforts toward primary more access to education among G9 countries (Nine countries with the largest number of illiterate adults and the OAU decade of Education in Nigeria due to the above and many other considerations, many developing countries opted for SDA. Therefore the education system expend beyond imagination.

9.6. *Implications Of Social Demand Approach*

The implications of the this approach are to do with the continuous failing standard of Education and lowering morale of teachers, teacher trainees and the attitudes of the public towards teaching and the teaching profession; Emphasis on the teaching professional are informed by the conviction that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers, The Educational system we are operating is in a state of confusion because there are no teachers (qualified) to operate the system. Those in the field are not willing; those in training are there not because of interest but availability of the training (Akinbote 2007). It was found that students enroll in Colleges of Education to train as

teachers not because they are interested in teaching but because it was the training available. In a study involving 1,200 students in 7 colleges of Education found that 525 (43.75%) found their ways into colleges of Education because there no other institutions that could offer than admission, 150 (12.50%) come in as a result of their personal desire to become teachers. The rest claimed that they were training as teachers to satisfy to wish of their parents 45 (3.75%); encouragement from friends 108 (9.00%) and to use the training as a stepping stone 372 (31.00%)

The above study gives a very relevant picture of the perception of the younger ones toward teaching. Teachers being the foundation an which educational systems are built are lacking in attitude, aptitude and therefore willingness to deliver, one should not expect such potential teacher.

10.How Would Tomorrow Look Like If Todays Methods Are Maintained?

As at today, the Nigeria's educational system is in a state of confusion. All stakeholders is worried that the system is not producing the desired result due to the following;

Products of Basic Education not being above to read, write or speak good English

Teachers not qualified (above 50%)

Teachers un-willing and frustrate

Brain drain and continuous alteration to other services

Presence of frustrated, un-employment graduate

Armed Robbery and relate crime

Examination malpractice

Area Boys, yan-daba, Boko Haram and other groups

Corruption penetrating all spares

Frustrated Inspectors and Supervisory Headmasters

Many others 100 numerous to mention

Granted the circumstances, regret to say that of the situation at our primary school level of Education is not addressed, the problem will continue to confound.

I foresee a situation where drop-out, unemployment, corruption, Armed Robbery, social arrest, examination malpractice and many new social ills will continue to emerge. This is due to poor implementation of Universal Basic Education law as contained in UBE act (2004). The reason is simple – we are “mis-educating the young”, giving wrong orientation on the values, needs and aspiration of the nation i.e. building a house as a Faculty foundation.

11.The Way Forward

These problem being experienced are becoming more complex by the day, due wrong training, by wrong teachers (in most cases) and in wrong environments. To improve and raise the quality of primary Education, we must treat education as a public health issue. This is due to the understanding that the success of any democratic system depends on the ability of the individuals to analyze problems and make thoughtful decisions. Primary education should be given the necessary attention to enable the system train children towards productivity. A productivity fostered by “free, critical, and creative thoughts on issues of common interest”, that is rational, acceptable and in tune with the national needs and aspirations, by taking the following steps.

11.1.De-Politicize Educational Matters

There is no doubts that educational polices are products of political consideration and no educational policy may see the light of the day if it lacks political merit. However, the political leadership should allow educational planners and manners make input to provide for effective and efficient implementation.

11.2.Data For Planning Purposes

All policies and programs are better planned and implementation if accurate data are made available and utilized correctly. We need to develop a cultural of data generation, storage and honest utilization. Planning without reliable data relating to primary education is wrong. We need to know the numbers of pupils, teachers, classrooms, teaching equipment and other materials needed for the system. Unfortunately, most of these things are inflated for political and other reasons.

11.3.Teacher Supply For Primary Level Of Education

Teachers are the pillars on which educational systems are built. It is a fact that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers and therefore, where half of the teachers are not qualified, the productivity will be lower, and this is why we are experiencing dwindling quality. We need to make teaching profession attractive, get the best brains, plan good conditions of service and make their training attractive. There is also the need for re-orientation, sensitization and other deliberate effort to change the public image of teachers and the teaching profession.

11.4.Funding Of Universal Basic Education

The Universal Basic Education is free and compulsory for all school age children. It includes early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling and other aspects of adult, non formal, nomadic and other forms of education for special groups in Nigeria. The scheme is ambitious, laudable and in tune with what is obtained in most countries. Funding of this scheme has some implications on its quality due to the problems of unreliable data, political will, corruption and lack of steady teacher supply in terms of funding for training and recruitment. Due to these, schools are underfunded, teachers in short supply because there was no accurate data on the needs of these schools. Where the funds are available, corruption, political consideration and mis-use becomes the problems. The truth is, government alone cannot at this point in time finance quality primary education because education is competing with other sectors of government. To be realistic, and for a qualitative education of our dream, the political class should consider making U.B.E. PARTIALLY FREE e.g. free tuition, accommodation or uniforms, it may introduce charges that may be called as:-

Education levy

Community involvement in building structures

Household education levy

Individual education tax

Personal effort

Cooperate efforts

Any other source/names

11.5.Political Will In Respect Of UBE

Political class should be willing to support the implementation of educational programmes. This is because education is the key to developments in other areas of the economy, hence, the need to give support to primary education at their respective levels.

12.Conclusion

This paper traces the fact that the problems being encountered regarding the quality of primary education was due to the changes in our approach to primary education. The country has opted for Social Demand Approach (SDA), an approach that allows for mass education. We therefore, have to contain the implications of such decision, recognize the need to depoliticize education, provide accurate data, improve teacher supply

mechanisms and diversify the source of funding primary education. Also, employment, placement and allowing the technocrats (qualified teaching and non-teaching staff) to implement the primary education policies rationally will in my opinion make the difference.

13.Reference

1. Ahmed, M. (2008) Education and Democracy: Challenges Ahead. A paper presented at the six National conference by Federal College of Education, Katsina, 18th July, 2008, College Auditorium
2. Adesina, S. (1998) The development of modern education in Nigeria. Ibadan, Heinemann education books (Nig) Ltd.
3. Akinbote, O. (2007) problems for Teacher Education for Nigerian Primary Schools: Beyond Curriculum design and implementation Essays in Education Volume 22, fall 2007.
4. Bello, S.A (1999) Fundamentals of Educational Planning and Model Building, Vitaman Educational Books, Lagos.
5. Coombs, P.H. (1974) What is educational planning? HEP
6. Dike, V. (2010) The State of Education in Nigeria and the Health of the Nation. www.afbis.com/analysis/education
7. Fafunwa, A.B (1976) History of Education in Nigeria. George Allan and University London.
8. Falola, F. et al (2009) Northern States Harbour Largest Number of Unqualified Teachers- investigation, future education, punch, 17th April, 2009.
9. Federal Republic of Nigeria (1978) National Policy on Education, Lagos NERDC press.
10. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) The compulsory, free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 and other related matters, UBUC, Abuja.