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# The Historical and Relevance of Primary Education Reform Policy in Promoting Efficiency, Security and National Development

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of primary education in promoting efficiency, security and national development in Nigeria cannot be underrated. This cannot be overstressed because this level of education is the basic foundation to other levels of education. This paper examines scope of primary education in Nigeria, its objectives and various reforms in the education sector as it relates to the effectiveness of primary education. This paper explains the concept of national security and national development as it relates to primary education. This paper further discusses the relevance of primary education in promoting national security and development as well as efficiency. It concludes by proffering possible solutions on how to improve on the primary education system in Nigeria.

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### Introduction

Primary education according to the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004:14) is referred to as education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus. Since the rest of all levels of education is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. To support the above statement, ESU (1990) commented that primary education is the backbone of educational systems, it is indeed the strong pillar that holds all other educational system. The solidness of this pillar determines how strong or weak the entire system will be, considering the importance of primary education to the other levels of educational system.

There is a popular saying that no nation can grow beyond her system of education. One can therefore say that no nation can develop beyond her system of education. This is because education has been known as the key to national development and modernization of a country. Based on this fact most countries all over the world spend chunks of money annually on educating their citizens. Thus, primary education is the most important of all levels of education.

The future of Nigeria as a country is in serious question, this is because education by the leaders is not regarded as a serious issue. There are a lot of issues that will continue to throw the viability of the Nigerian states into doubt. First Nigeria has failed to create a national identity after over hundred years of co-existence, that is fifty years of independence.

Security is a state of being secured. To be secured means to be free from danger and damages. It equally means to be free from fear. It means to be in safe custody. When one is secured the person is not likely to fail or not likely to become loose. The person is confident and feel worthy to be relied upon.

There is a universal agreement as regards the roles played by education in the development of individuals and the society at large. It is an essential factor in human life and virtually all aspects of human endeavour. All over the world, education is regarded as an important tool for achieving

national objectives. It is a venture that every individual and every society needs. It is a veritable instrument for both human and national development. Education improves the quality of human life and empowers people to solve all kinds of social and environmental problems. Education is the pivot on which the survival, growth and development of any nation rest. According to Kosemani and Orubite (1999) "education is the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it. A training that involves the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, development of character, mental power and a continuous process in which one, step prepares the way to the next." Where education, occurs there must always be a change of behavior due to what is acquired. Education however is a venture that every individual and every society needs. It has both intrinsic and extrinsic values. Education is synonymous with development and also one of the most important instrument of change. According to Maduawesi (2005) "Education is a universal aspiration and also an instrument of development and social integration." Therefore, the seriousness of this assertion was clearly stated in the national policy on education (2004, FRN). "The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par-excellence for affecting national development."

Education therefore is a great necessity for human existence as it helps to prepare, equip and secure the learner. For all aspects of his functional life.

The Nigeria security is faced with mirage of problems regarding inability to maintain peace and security in the nation, but also to create a conducive environment in which the political class, educationist, politicians and Nigerians in general can maintain national unity. National security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power. This concept was developed in the United States of America (USA) after the second world war. At first, the focus was on military might, but the concept has been broadened to include non military or economic security of the

nation and the values acquired by the society. In a bid to progress, the nation needs to have national security and needs a sound and a functional educational system, environmental security, a strong and viable economic system as well as operate effectively.

Primary education is the bedrock of the society. In the case of where the educational system of a country is weak, the country cannot build a strong educational foundation like the primary school.

#### **Primary Education in Nigeria**

The primary education is the very foundation of education. According to Oni (2008) defined primary education as the education for children between 6-11 years of age. This is what constitute the bedrock upon which the entire education system is determined by primary education. Primary level of education is the key of the success or failure of the whole system. According to Asemah (2010) the implication of this statement is that, if primary education which is the foundation is not adequately and properly laid, it is more likely that the remaining or subsequent levels of education will be shaking and unbalanced.

#### **Goals of Primary Education**

1. To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
2. To mould the character and development of sound attitude and morals in the child.
3. To lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
4. To develop in the child, the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment.
5. To give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.
6. To provide the child with basic tool for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

#### **Strategies in (NPE 2004) Pursuance of the Goals**

- i. Primary education shall be tuition free, universal and compulsory.
- ii. Teaching shall be by practical exploratory and experimental methods.
- iii. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be in the language of the environment for the first three years, during this period, English language shall be taught as a subject.
- iv. Everything possible shall be done to discourage the incidence of dropping out at the primary level of education. However, if this occur, provision shall be made in the context of adult and non-formal education to enable such early leavers to continue with the education. Government shall welcome the contributions of voluntary agencies

Communities and private individual in the establishment and management of primary schools alongside those provided by the state and local government as long as they meet the minimum standards laid down by the federal government. Government shall therefore provide basic infrastructure and training ground for the realization of this goal at the primary school level.

#### **A Historical Antecedents of the Development of Primary Education in Nigeria**

The first pre-primary schools were initiated by Mr. and Mrs. William De Graft and Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman. This team established the first school in Badagry called the "Nursery of the Infant Church" in 1842 which bloomed into a

primary school." From Badagry Christian and missionary activities moved up to Abeokuta and other parts of Nigeria.

The introduction of Christianity and Western education into the Eastern Niger Delta interior which was exclusively a missionary initiative. According to Kosemani and Orubite (2002: 28) in 1857 another expedition to the Niger was fitted out and Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was on the 1841 expedition was present with J.C. Taylor, son of an Ibo receptive slave, who had volunteered for the CMS Niger Mission and twenty-five immigrants. That same year, the team arrived Onitsha and Rev. J.C. Taylor immediately established a mission. But the first school according to Ajayi (1965:135-6) was opened by Crowther in December, 1858 with fourteen regular students "all girls about 6-10 years of age" later a few of the roving boys did settle down to learn in the school "but farm work, particularly in the dry season, made their attendance very irregular." From Onitsha Christianity and Western education spread to Bonny Kalabari, Brass, Okrika and other parts of the Eastern Niger Delta. Bishop Ajayi Crowther also took educational activities to Bida, Lokoja and other non-Muslim areas of the Northern Nigeria. Other Christian missions like Roman Catholic, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Qua Iboe, etc. followed the trail already blazed by the Methodist, Presbyterian and C.M.S mission.

As these missions moved, primary schools were established alongside. The curriculum of the early Christian schools in Nigeria included mostly the 4Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. The Bible was the basic text and primary education was seen basically as an aid to Christian evangelization. The main method of learning was by rote, repetition and memorization.

The primary objective was to convert the children to Christianity, and it was further hoped that the new Christians could be trained to assist the missionaries in their work as catechist, lay readers and teachers – most of the pupils were children of ages 6-11 years. There were however variation in the curriculum content, mode of administration, finding, control and type of teachers in these various missionary primary schools. Between 1887 and 1953, there was a dual control of education between the government and the missions. This brought a wide-scale expansion of not just primary education but also other sectors of the educational system.

On attaining political independence in 1960, the federal government focused on charting an educational course that will be capable of fulfilling the needs and aspiration of the Nigerian people. These efforts were however stopped by the post-independence civil war. After the war the federal government took another step to universalize educational opportunities for all school aged children with the introduction of the Universal Primary Education in 1976.

#### **The Introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE)**

The historical development of Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria could be traced to the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in January 1955 and 1957 by the Western regional government and the Eastern regional government respectively. In 1957, the scheme was introduced in the federal territory which was then Lagos. In 1976, the federal education scheme nationwide. According to Harry (2012:3) this scheme led to upsurge in primary school enrolments. It failed because of lack of funds and this led to faulty implementation strategies with the introduction of the national policy on education system

(7.5.2.3) system which our colonial masters imposed on Nigeria was replaced with the American system (6.3.3.4) system.

### **Importance of Primary Education**

In view of the importance attached to primary education in the country, federal, and state governments have made primary education the centre piece of their educational policies. From colonial era till now, government has witnessed one form of educational reform or the other. This is to improve on the existing policy for efficiency especially in the primary level. In Kosemani and Orubite (2002), the colonial masters administered education through the use of educational ordinance laws. These include the 1882, 1887, 1916, 1926, 1948 and 1952 educational ordinances and regional laws. In 1954, due to the adoption of 1954 constitution the East, West and Northern region and federal capital had their own education laws. Taiwo (1980) stated that in 1955 the Western region under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced free universal and compulsory primary education popularly known as Universal Primary Education (UPE). The Eastern region by Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe followed and adopted the same scheme.

The UPE programme is a policy reform measure by federal government to make citizens embrace formal education upto age fifteen. This programme was for everybody irrespective of religion, tribe, culture or class.

### **The UBE Programme**

In Section 18 of the 1999 Nigeria constitution, it supports the universal basic education programme. It states that “government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, government shall as when due practically provide free compulsory and universal, primary education, free universal education and free adult illiteracy programme. In order to actualize this aim and objectives as a way forward towards widening access to basic primary education in Nigeria. The programme was officially launched by President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo former Nigeria Head of State on September 30, 1999 in Sokoto. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000) the launching was aimed at eradicating illiteracy ignorance and poverty as well as stimulating and accelerating national development, political consciousness and national integration. While launching the UBE programme, he stated that “the Universal Basic Education programme is almost the same as the old UPE scheme”. The Universal Basic Education bill was signed into law on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 following its passage by the National Assembly. This law which is titled “UBE 2004 Act” made primary and junior secondary education free and compulsory as it was declared. This according to Harry (2012) is an expression of the strong desire of the federal government to fight poverty and reinforce participatory democracy in Nigeria by raising the level of awareness and general educational levels of the entire citizenry.” It is also a visible evidence of Nigeria’s response and commitment to Jomtiem Declaration (1990) as well as the Delhi Declaration (1993) which requires stringent efforts by the countries to drastically reduce illiteracy within the shortest possible time frame and the Durban Statement of Commitment (1998) and the OAU Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006) requiring African states to generalize access to quality basic education as a foundation stone for sustainable socio-economic development of the continent. The first batch of UBE, primary one pupils for the programme was enrolled nationwide in the 2000/2001 academic session.

### **The Major Objectives of UBE Programme in Nigeria**

The UBE programme is the responsibility of the state and local governments to manage basic education in their domain and the federal government is to assist for the purpose of uniformity and qualitative basic education in the country. These roles are backed up. UBEC, SUBEB and LGFA are the major state holders in basic education, which constitute the structure for the implementation of the programme in Nigeria.

### **Main Objectives**

**The following are the objective of UBE programme:**

1. Catering for the needs of young children or persons, who for one reasons or the other have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education.
2. To develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
3. The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian of school going age.
4. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundations for life-long learning.
6. Programme initiatives for early childhood care and socialization.
7. Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life-skills especially for adults (persons 15 years and above).
8. Special programmes for nomadic population.
9. Out of school, non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic, needed for life-long learning.
10. Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education.
11. The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school (National Policy of Education, 1999).

### **Primary Education and National Development**

Primary education plays very important roles in national development especially in the eradication of illiteracy, poverty reduction and character molding. The strength of a building depends on its good foundation, so also is the strength and durability of a nation’s economic, social and political development depends on the strength of her primary education system. Primary education is very important and essential for moulding a sustainable future for its citizens.

Primary education serves as the foundation in the formal processes of ensuring changes in behavior of the growing populace in the society especially the primary education.

According to Ojokheta and Aderinoye (2004) United Nations Development program describes development as a process that goes beyond the improvement of quality of life. It encompasses better education, high standard of health and nutrition, opportunity, greater individual freedom and the facilitation of a richer cultural life which are all truly desirable ends in themselves.

It has been stated that education is one of the best solution to poverty in the society, if citizens receive the basic education, they can try to build themselves up from there.

If they acquire skills in different fields and trades, through this, they will become functional in the society. They can even be self employed.

One of the ways to solve the problem of insecurity in the country is through effective information system. People can be informed if they are educated. They can decode any information they receive, but if children are uneducated they can easily fall prey to fraudsters. If government assist schools with good teachers and infrastructure, this primary school children can be well taught so that, they can contribute to national security.

### **Education for National Development**

Development is a process that affects all aspects of the society. According to Ololobou (2003), development is “the transformation of the social, cultural, political and economic life of society to bring about an improvement in the quality of life of the people.”

Todaro (1977) saw development as “a multidimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire social and economic system.” He further explained that in addition to improvement in income and output, development involves radical changes in institutions, social and administrative, structures as well as in popular attitudes and sometimes customs and beliefs.

To Inyamah (2010), “For any nation to be termed developed, a high percentage of her citizenry must have been educated. That is transformed in every aspect of life.”

To Krishna (1997) “there will not be a fundamental transformation in a society unless the individual is transformed and this comes through education. Education as pointed out earlier is one of the most dynamic instruments of change both for the individual and the society at large. A nation’s overall development is inextricably tied to its education system. The federal government of Nigeria believes in the indispensable power of education towards the overall development of the Nigeria society hence in its national policy on education as cited.

In Abolade 2003 as quoted by Etesike (2011), it states that

- a) Education is an instrument for national development, to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, on the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education.
- b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual for each individuals sake and for the general development of the society.
- c) There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria, to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive while interest and ability should determine individual’s direction in education.
- d) There is need for equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his/her ability (FRN, 2004:4).

Newsam (2002) in trying to highlight the relationship between education and national development postulated, thus, “for the purpose of considering the relationship between the state of development of a nation and its educational performance, UNESCO in its 1995 World Education Report uses the level of literacy as a key indicator? He further stated that there is a connection between the level of literacy a country achieves and its level of economic development. Illiteracy can hold back a nation’s economic development especially in developing world.

Every country in the world both individuals and nations are investing on education. This is because education is perceived as a tool for national development and a solution to problems facing humanities. Krishna 1997 observed that “in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, human society world over was best with the momentum of a revolution.”

### **Conclusion**

With Decree No. 96 of 1993, the Chief of Army Staff then, President Ibrahim Babangida did a lot to improve the condition of primary schools in Nigeria, he recognized primary school to be the foundation as the rest of the education system built on it (primary education). According to the former Minister of Education, Chief Awokoya as quoted in Tseagh (1992) clearly stated that “educational development is imperative and urgent. It must be treated as a national emergency second only to war.

### **Recommendations**

1. Adequate books are needed in libraries with relevant reading materials and popularize its use to both pupils and teachers.
2. Primary education should be properly funded by all tiers of the government to meet the huge financial demands of this essential level of education.
3. Policies and programmes on primary education and their implementation should be research – based to avoid jumping into hasty conclusions.
4. That all teachers must be certified and registered nationally.
5. Community and societal sensitization and mobilization of the importance and roles of teachers to eradicate the low public image teachers at the primary school level have.
6. Adequate facilities, instructional materials must be procured to aid the teacher for effective teaching and learning.
7. Teachers must be abreast of modern pedagogies and innovations in the teaching and learning process.
8. Supervision of instruction should be effectively planned and coordinated to monitor the quality of teaching as well as upgrade the quality of the teachers where need be.
9. Overcrowded classrooms must be decongested by adhering strictly to standard 1:35 teachers/pupils ratio in the primary schools.
10. There is a need for a recertification exercise for teachers, every five to ten years.
11. That the Parent’s Teachers Association of every school be institutionalized and made to play well defined roles in the area of school infrastructure and curriculum interpretation.
12. Promotion of teachers should be based on the pupils performance in the last examinations.

Tremendous problems of natural disaster, famine, epidemics, primitive transportation, inefficient communication, lack of good health care, poor agriculture, etc.” Education has helped to drastically reduce these, through the development of knowledge and man-power development. Therefore, educating our young from the primary school level will produce human beings that are intelligent knowledgeable and hopefully, leaders of tomorrow. These qualities will promote national development.

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