

ENHANCING PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM AS A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BABALOLA, Nurudeen¹

BELLO, Mustapha²

SALIHU, Medinat³

AYINLA, Dhikrullah Abdulhakeem⁴

¹ & ³Primary Education Department
Shehu Shagari College Of Education, Sokoto

³ & ⁴Special Education Department
Shehu Shagari College Of Education, Sokoto

Corresponding author's email address:
nurudeenbabalola1960@gmail.com

Abstract

Education serves as the foundation upon which every other sector of the economy depends. This is because no nation can achieve meaningful development without a strong and effective education system, as it equips society with skilled, productive, and knowledgeable citizens. However, in Nigeria, primary or basic education—the bedrock of learning—appears to be neglected despite various government interventions aimed at improving access and quality. The paper emphasized the urgent need to restructure the primary school curriculum to address societal needs and promote quality, sustainable development. It explored key concepts, challenges facing primary education, theoretical perspectives, and strategies for restructuring. Suggested solutions include sensitizing communities, parents, teachers, and learners on issues such as security and poverty; collaborating with organizations like UNICEF and NERDC to develop curriculum documents; promoting vocational education; allocating funds for workshops and seminars; providing teachers with special salary packages; and integrating security, vocational, poverty alleviation, and environmental education into the primary school curriculum.

Keywords: Sustainability, restructuring, curriculum, security, quality

Introduction

Primary education represents the initial stage of formal learning and serves as the entry point to literacy for children. In other words, it forms the foundation upon which all subsequent levels of education are built (Olaniyan & Obadara, 2008:12). This suggests that a strong

educational foundation is a crucial ingredient for achieving sustainable development in any nation. Perhaps this explains the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the 1970s and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in the 1980s. Unfortunately, these initiatives did not achieve the desired outcomes, largely due to challenges such as poor coordination, corruption, and mismanagement (Gado & Alkamawa, 2009).

In Nigeria, both past and present governments have introduced various educational programmes to ensure that every citizen has access to education. For instance, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was launched in the 1970s with the aim of providing free education to every Nigerian child, and it contributed significantly in this regard. Currently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has replaced the UPE. This programme, introduced during the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo and officially launched on 30th September 1999, is designed to provide free, compulsory, and universal basic education for all children between the ages of 6 and 15 years. The initiative is intended for every Nigerian child regardless of socio-economic background, physical condition, or intellectual ability (Babalola & Taiwo, 2019). However, despite these efforts to ensure quality education, many primary school pupils in Nigeria still face significant challenges, particularly in accessing a conducive learning environment.

The primary school is regarded as the foundation where sound education for meaningful learning is established (Sama, 2009). Unfortunately, this is also the level where facilities such as libraries and textbooks are grossly inadequate. Many pupils are forced to learn in unconducive environments—dilapidated buildings, under trees, or in classrooms without adequate learning materials. Demographic studies on the state of primary education further revealed alarming conditions: 21% of pupils sit on the floor, 38% of classrooms lack ceilings, 70% are overcrowded, and 75% do not have textbooks, while teachers remain poorly motivated. These challenges hinder the sustainability of educational development.

Teachers, who are central to curriculum implementation, often lack proper motivation to give their best in teaching. Many have been denied salaries for months, which not only discouraged them but also damaged the image of the teaching profession (Bilyaminu, 1992). As a result, teachers turned to survival strategies such as motorcycle hiring, hawking, and peasant farming, leaving pupils to suffer neglect. Such conditions make it difficult to promote quality education or build a sustainable learning environment, as witnessed in Bendel State in 1982 and 1989, and in Sokoto State in 2003.

Beside the above problems discussed, the primary school curriculum is another area that needs restructuring because; only the following subjects were emphasized much before in their curriculum. Mathematics, English, Religious studies, Creative Arts, Social Studies, Science, Agriculture, Fine Arts, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Arabic neglecting other sensitive trends affecting Nigeria education like Boko Haram i.e security, Chibok Girls issue, poverty etc. In the light of this, this paper felt there is need to address the predicament of Nigeria education and advocate for curriculum restructuring by including peace/security education, environmental education, career counseling education, health education, vocational/technical education, disaster risk reduction education in the primary school curriculum for quality to be

achieved and sustainability. Primary education was focused on in this paper because not every parent that affords the cost of ECCE. Also it is not all parents especially in the rural areas that can release their children to go to school at age 0-4 years.

Definition of Terms

1. Curriculum is a body or field of a given knowledge systematically planned and arranged to provide knowledge towards achieving learning outcome.
2. Curriculum: According to English Dictionary is a race course. It is a fixed course of study.
3. Quality According to Alkanchi & Wasiu (2013) is one of the instruments used for measuring sufficiency, efficiency and inefficiency in institution.
4. Quality education prepares students for constructive thinking.
5. Security: The word security refers to protection talk about protection of a person, building, organization or country against threats like crime.
6. Security is seen by Ebenza and Nwangua (2017) as a state of feeling safe, stable and free from fear or anxiety. It is also the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm.
7. Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals, while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural system providing the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which society depends (en.wikipedia.org).
8. Restructuring: To organize something such as school or a company in a different way so that it will operate better (Macmillan English Dictionary 2007).
9. Primary Education: Is the first level of education to children. It is also a foundation upon which other levels of education are built (Olaniyan and Obadara 2008:12).

Theoretical Framework

There are various forms of educational reforms in Nigeria among which is the UPE of 1976 and 1999 UBE. The 6-3-3-4 system of education which also started well but almost fail because of poor planning and implementation. Another strong problem is the failure to motivate the teachers who are to carry out the plan. As a result, this paper deems it necessary that there is need for curriculum restructure to achieve quality and sustainability. In the United states, as well according to Johnson (1996) there was a reform in public education initiated in the early 1980s with the publication of nation at risk. The imperative of Educational Reforms NCCE, 1983.

A nation at risk outlined the failures of the nation's schools to produce a well-educated citizenry for an even expanding competitive global economy. From the mid-1980s throughout 1990s, commissioned reports have documented education reform initiative by policy makers and educators that aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in the nations' public schools. In the 1990's to the 21st century came the first wave of education reforms which came under many titles like education reforms, systematic reform, school structuring, critics of this reforms said the initial reform efforts consisted of isolated projects focusing on such issues as governance, block rescheduling integrated curriculum and standardized testing. In

line with the above, some reformers like Murphy (1991) called for a complete overhauling or restructuring of the educational system. Amy Klauke (1989) states that restructuring has become the central issue in the school reform movement. Nigeria reform policy or restructuring is in order but irrespective of the reason for it, there will be external pressures and demand coupled with the desire of some policy makers and educators to improve teaching and learning.

According to (UNESCO, 2013) Education for Sustainable Development is seen as a must for Guyana, a country with low population density who chooses a development path which maximizes the return on investment that improves human being. His Excellency President Brigadier David Arthur Granger in his speech to United Nation on September 25, 2015 stressed that the unity of effort is essential but difficult but necessary choice to realize the goal of sustainable development. He stated Guyana is committed to have inclusive and equitable quality education to promote lifelong learning many opportunity for all. He proposed for implementation of policy that guarantee Guyana's achievement of the 2030 sustainable development goal. He said, by 2030, all learners will acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyle, human right, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence global citizenship among other which is in line with restructuring of curriculum which was discussed in this paper.

Problems of Primary Schools

Primary school education is faced by a lot of challenges among which are according to Alkamawa and Gado 2009 the following:

Poor Funding

The local government, state government and federal government need to be awakened to take proper funding and management of primary education for quality to be met and ensure an enabling environment. Most classroom construction suffers because of fund.

Unqualified Teachers

Most of the public primary schools have shortage of teachers. The few qualified ones are overworked and overloaded, because the ratios of teachers are 1:50 or 1:100. In the rural area, SSCE or WASSCE were recruited to teach. Some are not even conversant with the content of the curriculum. All these leads to poor quality, NTI also fail to supply school with quality teachers.

Issues of Planning and Implementation

Both UPE and UBE failed due to lack of planning and implementation. The government fail to estimate number of pupils that will be in school, number of school required in a locality or ward and amount of efforts to renovate etc.

Shaddy Supervision

Non-challant attitude of education supervisors towards monitoring and mentoring of the UBE and UBE programme lead to poor quality. Teachers are left on their own, curriculum and syllabus were not followed accordingly, this lead to poor product production.

Deficits in Curriculum Content

The contents of the curriculum were overlooked by teachers. Health education, sex education, security education among others are neglected. Teachers only focus on numeracy and literacy. This exposed pupils to the danger we are facing today in terms of security, health and environmental problem.

Lack of Accurate and Up-to-Date Data

Most of the time, supervisors or education planners try to inflate the figures which discouraged the government from releasing fund.

In addition, Magawata and Muhammad (2009) enumerated the following challenges of UBE

Teachers' Predicament

Teachers are looked down upon, their own image is low and they are not socially and psychologically motivated and dedicated to teaching profession which made many teachers to pay lip service to their work. They are always looking for more lucrative work and drop teaching anytime they get one. Quality can hardly be achieved here because they are not well motivated.

Introduction of New Courses

New course like entrepreneurship, civic education, basic technology, vocational/technical education among others were introduced to schools without experts to teach them. This is a problem that can make achievement of sustainable to be impossible.

Restructuring Primary Education Curriculum to Promote Sustainability

Globally today, every nation is clamoring to achieve Education for sustainable development. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization is in the forefront in preaching the gospel of Education for Sustainable development. Obi Greg (2017) said the U.N Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), 2005-2014 advocates the integration of principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspect of education and learning. This aspect of education will encourage changes in people's behavior that will create a more quality in terms of environment integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations www.unesco.org/./about-us/.

UNESCO also proposed that, for one to achieve quality or Sustainable Development is to help people develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to make informed decision for the benefit of themselves and others now and for the future, and to act upon those decisions.

Also among the vision and goals which are meant to be achieved through teaching and learning are human rights, poverty alleviation or reduction, peace and human security, environmental protection, democracy, health promotion, disaster risk reduction, climate

change, gender equality etc. Education is a human right and the primary agent of transformation towards quality education by increasing people's capacities to transform their vision for society into reality Unesco:calhome.accueilesd.edd retrieved April 20, 2014.

So for quality to be achieved or promoted in primary education there is need to incorporate the following in primary school curriculum.

Peace and Human Security Education

It is important to note that education is vital in the society and it is equally good to live together peacefully because progress and development cannot take place in a chaotic environment. When people are educated on the importance of living together, they acquire knowledge, values, attitudes for dialogue, cooperation and peace (Obi Greg, 2017). In addition (Joseph, 2017) suggested integrating security in ECCE which should also be applicable in primary school curriculum. Because People spend quality time and money to safeguard their houses and property against unforeseen circumstances. DenGA, (2009) once said the cost of security and protection of a house in Israel is costlier than building itself. Therefore, the issue of security of a child within and outside the school needs to be introduced into the curriculum.

The Boko Haram issue in the North East of Nigeria which claimed several lives of children and teacher is an example. This will have been averted if school pupils have been taught what and how to behave during security risks. In primary school, pupils are not security conscious and therefore vulnerable to Boko Haram attacks, civil and religious roots, civil disobedience, kidnapping and rape. A child training on security risks should be made a priority in the curriculum. As sustainable development starts from home, parents needs to know the person who takes a child to school and after school daily. Security according to Joseph introduced safeguards to lives and property in any society. So, if schools are well protected, secured, fenced, monitored. It will deter possible intruders, thus enduring academic progress without fear. Hence, secure school environment ensures curriculum implementation.

Disaster Risk Education

The primary school curriculum need to incorporate disaster management, disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness as component or disciple of disaster risk reduction (Obi Greg,2017). Disaster Risk reduction aims to reduce the damages caused by natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, cyclones, oil spillage etc, through the community prevention. For example Nigeria witnessed flood disaster in 2012,2017,2018 and 2019 conservatively which claimed many lives and properties. The communities can reduce the disaster if they have knowledge of disaster management. So there is need to incorporate this in the school curriculum so that people will know how to reduce disaster risk through the choice of how and where to build their houses, maintain gutters and drainage. Children would also be taught wise management of land and environment and how to improve preparedness and early warning for adverse events. All these will reduce disaster (Banki Moon, 2013). If children have this knowledge from the primary school, they will be able to manage any risk of disaster occurrence in their community and ensure healthy environment.

Environmental Education

Primary school needs to be also restructured to include curriculum on environmental education. In this education, children should be taught the function of the natural environment, particularly management of human behaviour and ecosystem in order to live sustainably (Obi Greg,2017). Today, there is increase in environmental problems such as global warming, flooding, food and water shortage etc. There is need to include this environmental education into the syllabus to educate or prepare young people to meet these challenges that destabilized our society.

Vocational Technical Education

The formal education introduced by the missionaries purposefully focused on production of literate personnel as interpreters. Later when government established get own schools, it followed the same line with the missionaries emphasizing on our academic or intellectual development, neglecting vocational and technical education. This had been the order from then, till today (Obi Greg 2017). So, this paper is advocating for the inclusion of vocational education into primary school curriculum to catch them young i.e. to introduce them to minor skills that will make children to be self-reliant. Also teachers that will teach these vocational and technical courses should be highly motivated by sending them for pre and in-service training with paid in Colleges of education and Universities of Technologies. The state and federal government should work together for the success of the programme by purchasing relevant equipment and ensure even distribution to schools; monitoring officers should go round to supervise the teachers to ensure success, instead of neglecting it like 6-3-3-4 where students of Junior secondary schools were denied this vocational or technical skill.

Career counseling

In primary School, there is need to manipulate social studies curriculum and use it for career guidance services. The government need to employ those that read guidance and counseling or find teachers who will act as career masters and mistresses who will interact with the pupils both in and outside the class to explore the occupational aspiration of the pupils, relate them to their capacities and guide them along the line (Obi Greg,2017).The essence of these is to make pupils develop positive work attitudes in pupils and make them appreciate the importance of all activities done by people in the community. If counseling education is introduced at primary level, pupils will have less problem in future in career job choice because they have been guided right from the initial stage of they're like and will work tirelessly to build on it to achieve success.

Poverty Alleviation/Reduction in Primary School

This paper is soliciting for inclusion of poverty education in primary school curriculum because the alleviation of poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. So if this education is channeled to sustainable development, it will create self-employment, hence reducing unemployment. The teacher who is the central actor should be trained through in-service to equip the pupils with relevant skills needed to improve their livelihoods.

Health Promotion/Healthy

Though, health education and basic science is in the primary school curriculum. But, there is still need to include knowledge about health tips for example, the knowledge of HIV & AIDS, need for regular physical exercises, how to maintain healthy living and general sanitation should be part of the primary school curriculum (Obi Greg, 2017). The teachers should be sensitized on how to incorporate physical activity into their daily life, eat healthy and nutritious food, reduce stress, and stay connected to friends and family. Resource people like doctors, nurses, sanitary officers etc. can be invited to school to teach pupils and talks on rules of hygiene, hands washing practices etc. All these will make pupils to understand that living a simple lifestyle is better than luxurious life

Way forward

In view of the problems encountered in the implementation of all the education schemes reforms and curriculum restructuring discussed in this paper, the following suggestions were made:

1. The government, stakeholders in education, NGOs and relevant security agencies should organize workshops, seminars, health talk on primary school security to sensitized parents, teachers and learners on security matters.
2. Teachers and parents should include their observation on sensitive issues like: peace and security, disaster, risk reduction, poverty alleviation, vocational and technical issues etc. for future curriculum development.
3. Parents and teachers should work closely with respective school authorities towards upgrade or restructuring the contents of primary school curriculum.
4. Nigerian Educational Research and development Council (NERDC) should partner with UNICEF and Millennium Development agencies to deliberate on primary school children health, security among other with a view to produce a binding document for primary school curriculum in Nigeria.
5. The government should de-emphasize the importance placed on acquisition of certificate and encourage a practical oriented study that leads to production of goods and service delivery as in technical/vocational education.
6. There is need for a career counselors in each primary school who will guide both parents and guardians in eventual choice of vocation
7. There should be massive training and re-orientation of professionals who will embark on training the children on the new education courses introduced. The proper used of ICT in the classrooms should be encouraged.
8. For restructuring of curriculum to be successful, there should be provision of both human, capital and materials resources. So, the government must make adequate provision of all materials needed for sustainable development.
9. Teachers should also be motivated by sending them on in-service with pay. Primary school teachers should also be given special salary package because, they are been over loaded, because is always one teacher per class teaching all subjects

10. Monitoring officers should always go round to supervise the teachers, to ensure success in curriculum restructuring.

Conclusion

As already noted that primary education is the foundation of education which other level built on. The paper after examining the predicament of this level of education and felt that the primary school curriculum should be restructured for sustainable development and for quality to be attained. In conclusion, the paper explained that primary school children should be taught technical/vocational education to make themselves reliant and self-employed, poverty alleviation education to raise their living standard, peace and security education where happiness of various forms are achieved and where crime or violence in various forms become things of the past or drastically reduced.

References

- Adepoju A., Fabiyi A. (2008) Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospect, Culled from [http://www. Wikipedia](http://www.Wikipedia), the free encyclopedia Accessed : 15/7/2009.
- Alkamawa H L & Gado M.A (2009) Primary Education as Means of Achieving Sustainable Development: An Assessment of Universal Basic Education UBE Programme in Nigeria in Farafaru Journal ISSN 0795-4597 Vol. 4 July 2009.
- Babalola T & Taiwo B (2019) Examination of Parental Attitude towards the Physically Challenge Pupils in Wamakko Local Government of Sokoto State: A project Submitted to
Primary Education department, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto.
- Bilyamin A. 1992 in Babalola & Taiwo (2019) Examination of Parental Attitude towards the physically Challenge Pupils in Wamakko Local Government of Sokoto State: A project Submitted to Primary Education department, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto
- Ebeniza A.N & Nwanguma VC (2017) Security; A tool for Achieving Harmonious Primary School Environment for Sustainable Development in Journal of Omep World Organisation for Early Childhood. (13) 1& 2 Pg 106-115
- <Http://www.guyana.org/Handbook?IOCsize.htm>. The Excellency President Brigadier David Arthur Granger, Speech to the United Nations on September 25, 2015.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/education_for_sustainable_development.

- Johnson, R.M.S (1996) School Restructuring Imperative in IDRA Newsletter August 1996 pg 1-4
- Joseph, E.I (2017) Early Childhood Curriculum and Sustainable Development: The integrated Approach in Journal of Omep World Organisation for Early Childhood Education 13 1&2. Pg 34-40.
- Macmillan English Dictionary 2007
- Magawata, D & Muhammad A (2009) "The Challenges of UBE in Achieving Sustainable Development in Nigeria in *Farfaru Journal ISSN 0795-4597 Vol. 4 July 2009*.
- Murphy, J. (1991) "Restructuring Schools: Capturing and Assess the Phenomena" New York NY. Teachers College Press, Colombia University. A 37.
- NERDC/UNICEF (2013) "Global Approach to Early Childhood Curriculum Towards Care Protection and Knowledge Initiative". A Technical Committee Report on Early Childhood Curricular held at Ortaris, Canada
- Obi, K (2017) "Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Development": A Lead Paper Presented in *Journal of Omep World Organisation for Early Childhood Education Vol (13), 1& 2. pp 1-8*.
- Obinaju, Q.I (2013) "Early Childhood Education: Theory and Practice", Calabar: BON Universal Ltd.
- Obioma G.O (1997) "Preparing for Tomorrow Mathematics the Vision 2019 Connection" Presidential address at the 34th Annual Conference of Mathematics Association of Nigeria NUC 2nd September.
- Olaniyan, D.A and Obadara, O.E (2008) "A Critical Review of Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: *International Journal of Africa and African American Studies*: Vol VII, No. 1 pp 12
- Salihu, T.U (2009) "The Challenges of Mathematics Education for Sustainable Development" in *Farfaru Journal of Education ISSN 07954597 Vol. (4) pp. 47-53*.

Sama, K.M (2009) “English Language Teaching and the Challenges of Education for Sustainable Development” in *Farfuru Journal ISSN 0795-4597* Vol. (4)July 2009 pp 213-222 unesco.ca/home.Accueilesd.edd (retrieved April, 20, 2014).

Wikipedia.org/wiki/sustainable

www.unescobb/education/esd.