Re-thinking the Philosophy of Primary Education for Its Sustainability

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Abstract:  
The National Policy on Education enunciates the guidelines, objectives, standards, structures, strategies and management for achieving the national education goals in Nigeria. The policy must be operated within the framework of the overall philosophy of the nation. The philosophy of Nigerian basic education is based on the development of the individuals into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic level. The system of education in Nigeria was blessed with meaningful policies before and after the Nigerian independence but recorded failure of implementation as a result of many factors responsible. The paper focused on re-thinking the philosophy of primary education in Nigeria for its sustainable development and also highlighted avenues to put in place as guided by the objectives of basic education in order to produce what is meant for at the end of six years of basic education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Re-thinking, philosophy, primary education, sustainability

1. Introduction  
Educational policy is an aspect of Public Policy. A policy is a statement of action to be taken by government in order to achieve some goals. The goals may be educational, economic, political or religious. Since educational policy is part of public policy, the national Policy on education is therefore, the Nigeria’s guideline for managing the educational institutions right from primary schools to tertiary institutions. Philosophy is very valuable in identifying our needs as people. When these have been identified, we set goals that have to be met in order to satisfy the needs. After these, policies are then formulated in order to achieve the goals. In Nigeria philosophers have come out to participate in policy formulation and implementation at different level. Therefore, Philosophy is derived from two Greek words philo means wisdom Sophia means love literary means love of wisdom. But love wisdom does not necessarily make one a philosopher. Philosophy is the most original intellectual discipline. It is one of the oldest and most respected provinces of knowledge. The early Greek philosopher viewed philosophy as the consortium of knowledge, that is knowledge in all the sciences and all the arts. All discipline was seen and understood from philosophical perspective. Philosophy was therefore as the mother of all arts and science Iheanacho1. Thus, philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems such as those connected with existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and language Iheanacho2.

According to Jimba3, stressed that philosophy helps man to understand how events and things are related to perceive orderliness in the midst of disorder and to admire coherence in the universe. Philosophy is a method of reflective thinking and reasoned inquiry. It embraces an all careful and accurate thinking. It involves the attempt to think through one’s challenges, the good, the bad and ugly and faces all the realities of the facts. It involves reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles which we use to organize our experiences in morals, in religion, in social and political life, in law, in history and in the natural sciences Sodipo, in Jimba4.

The diverse ways this attribute of philosophy relates to humans and society makes it amenable in other fields Jimba5. In view Wirendu6 declares that the function of philosophy everywhere is to examine the intellectual foundations of life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human wellbeing. Like pragmatic philosophy, it uses the modern scientific method as the basis of a philosophy. Consequently, it uses scientific spirit and scientific knowledge to deal with all human challenges of some sorts. This connection explains the embrace of ‘reflective and reason inquiry’ by other discipline Wirendu, in Jimba7.

Jimba and Okpanachi12 define philosophy of education as a discipline that concern ‘application of the knowledge of philosophy to solution of problems, clarification of concepts and theories’. In this direction, philosophy of education draws on all established tools, namely, argument, justification and clarification; (as indicated earlier) as well as philosophical principles such as relevance, rationality, objectivity and so forth to accomplish these tasks in education.
Similarly, Enoh in Jimba\textsuperscript{13} stressed that, philosophical tools and principles can be used to examine trickyly issues in education, concepts like equality, freedom, autonomy, life-long education draws the attention of philosophical consideration in order to create room for harmony in application. Describing how philosophy can be applied to education, say that ‘the general idea is that the institution of education and its manifold problems are at one end and philosophy and its tools at the other. He buttresses this relationship by pointing out that between these stands, the philosophers of education utilize the tools of philosophy to clarify the problems in education and so helps towards their final solutions.

2. The Evolution of Universal Education in Nigeria

Under the supervision of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, universalization of Nigerian primary education began in the 1955. The chief introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) which is free, universal and compulsory. This initiative changed the whole Nigeria. Government started providing training to teachers\textsuperscript{Oni14}. Huge amount of budget like 90\% of the budget had been spent on primary education Taiwo in Popoola\textsuperscript{15}. 8 years free education scheme had gone on board in the Western Region in terms of the UPE. Eastern Region started the universal primary education scheme in February 1957 but it faced problem due to lack of fund and planning Oni\textsuperscript{16}. It faces loss within just one year of its implementation Oni in Popoola\textsuperscript{17}. The Lagos Colony, a Federal Territory also took initiative in 1957 Faunwa\textsuperscript{18}. Islamic form of education had been practiced by Oghuvbu\textsuperscript{19} in the northern region. Many churches utilized its vicinity for teaching and paid salary from its fund. But Muslim parents do not like it from the fear that their children may be converted to Christianity. Three tiers of government, i.e., federal, state and local governments started dividing educations in 1979. Between 1983 and 1999, a military era, decrees such as decree No. 16 of 1985, decree 26 of 1988 and decree 36 of 1990 were broadcasted in Nigeria. The federal government implemented major policy in 1977. The primary objective was to increase inclusion for children to school in Nigeria as much as possible. West region had achieved much success but eastern had not received so much success.

The government mainly used UPE as a tool to provide education for the Nigerian citizens. Eddy and Akpan\textsuperscript{20} mentioned it somehow similar concept with National Policy on Education. This philosophy helped development and integration of all people present in community to ensure that they are receiving equal opportunity.

Federal Government of Nigeria, since 1977 always focused on right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities through the National Policy. Vocational training and preparation for later professional specialization aimed to be provided by the schools. With lots of activities and engagement program the main objective of the school to provide manpower development.

3. The Universal Basic Education: Its Nature and Objectives and Features in Nigeria

Universal basic education has become a widespread concept. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme, launched in the country in 1976 had become a pioneer in this area(Aluede\textsuperscript{21}). The UBE has three main components- universal, basic and education. Universal here means the programme is for everyone irrespective of tribe, culture or race and class (Aluede\textsuperscript{22}). UBE always places main emphasis on a type of education individual should possess. This education should be treated as privilege rather than right.

The mission of Universal Basic Education is to keep running the movement for actualization of the nation's UBE's vision. It also works for all stakeholders and has become a responsibility for all UBEC\textsuperscript{23}. The annual report of 2005 focuses on free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child. Enforcement of ethical, moral and civic values is also a part of this. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) had been set up to provide provides three sources of funding for the implementation of the UBE on the guidelines of UBE Act, enforced on the 26th May, 2004:

- Federal Government Grant of not less 2\% of its consolidated revenue fund;
- Funds or contributions in the form of federal guaranteed credits and local or international donor grants.

For implementing the UBE, the state government can get benefits from the Federal Government it can utilize a minimum of 50\% for its project which shows the true commitment of the state. UBE project gives grants for parents who did not able to send their child to schools. To promote and make it feel that poverty can't block the teaching process, free textbooks in core subjects had been provided to students of primary school. UBE Act had made it free and compulsory 6 years of primary education and the first 3 years of secondary education. Non-formal skills and training for youths had also been provided to youth generation under this scheme(Dare et al., 2008). This scheme is for children in the primary school to the junior secondary school. This initiative followed the policies stated in section 2 of the Act, which also talked about free compulsory education.

4. The Conceptual Definition of Primary Education

The concept primary education is commonly observed to be an education given to children within the late childhood. This view may justify why the Federal Republic of Nigeria\textsuperscript{24} in her National Policy on Education defined primary Education is for mainly child with age of 6 to 11 years. It went further to explain that the rest of the education system is built upon it and is the key to the success or failure of the whole system Anero\textsuperscript{25}.

Primary education is the education one receives before entering secondary school or reaching early adolescents. The Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 articulates the goals of primary education to include the following:

- The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively; that is, the end of a child's primary education, he must be able demonstrate the above capabilities if translated into specific objectives.
The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking, primary education should equip the pupils with the above objectives through different school subjects, that is, the school subjects may contribute to this development in different ways hence the need for a more specific statement of this objective.

- Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society. Like other objectives: this very objective is too general and could only be achieved when translated into a more realistic or specific outcomes. This objective could be achieved through different subjects in the school system such as civics, political sciences, history and social studies etc.

- Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes. That is through exposure to different subjects in the primary school education pupils should exhibit sound moral character and healthy attitudes.

- Developing in the child the ability to adopt to his changing environment, that is whatsoever a child learns at the primary school, he should be able to develop ability to adopt to his societal changes but no subjects that would alienate him from his environment. This is why social studies is included in order to achieve this objective.

- Giving the child opportunities for development manipulative skill that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity. The primary education should provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills which would enable him to function effectively in the society as his capacity allows him.

- Providing basic tool for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and craft of the locality. Pupils at the end of their primary education should be able to further their higher education with the provision of basic tools. It also implies that they would be well prepared for trades and crafts in the local community. Adiele

Olanayan & Folorunso. The National Policy on Education stated its objectives. But it has failed in achieving the intended objectives. As good as primary education is in providing the basic skills needed to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy as well as to gain admission into secondary schools. Categorically, to me Nigerian primary schools are not fulfilling the central purpose of primary education. Before Nigeria’s attainment of independence, primary schools were effectively managed by the Missionaries and voluntary agencies with grant-in-aid from the colonial government. The inability of the government to effectively run primary schools has made people to agitate for the return of schools to the missionaries and other voluntary agencies.

Also, it brought the emergence of many private primary schools presently experienced in Nigeria. Experience has shown that public primary schools tend to perform more poorly than private primary schools in Nigeria. It appears as if the private primary schools usually produce more sound products than public primary schools. In other words, the public primary schools cannot boast of literacy and numeracy competences. Despite the fact that there is increasing provision of teachers at public primary schools yet there is constant problem of over-crowded classroom. The parents are also with the opinion that the teachers in public primary schools are no longer committed in discharging their duties due to one reason or the other. So, a large number of parents prefer private primary schools for their wards.

The public perception is that the quality of education offered is low and that standards have dropped. The infrastructure and facilities remain inadequate for coping with a system that is growing at a rapid pace. The school environment is therefore generally not conducive to learning due to the physical condition of most schools and lack of teaching and learning resources. The financial crisis left existing facilities inadequately maintained and has retarded progress in building new facilities. The National Policy on Education prescribes that the teacher-pupil ratio should be 1:40. The classrooms are overcrowded and in some instances schools have operated with teacher-pupil ratios of 1:76. A programme for classroom building to support the implementation of a scheme for universal primary education was either never developed or if it was, it was not successfully implemented. Due to shortages of classroom space, classes are offered in the open air and are subjected to all problems associated with outdoor teaching such as weather fluctuation leading to class cancellations and lack of quality instruction with all the above mentioned constraints it is hardly for Nigeria to realize the objectives of primary education, if necessary measures are not taken.

5. Policy Implementation for Primary Education

The 1970s witnessed the Federal Government keen interest in education at the primary level. This was demonstrated by organizing the 1970 National Curriculum Conference to review the primary school curriculum and made recommendation to the government. This conference led to the development of curriculum guides in different subjects such as social studies and integrated science and their subsequent introduction in our primary schools and as well introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1976. This was for the whole country and it was an attempt to provide equal educational opportunities for the masses. However, the scheme has its own problems of implementation, one of the major problems it was introduced regionally. What would happen if it was introduced nationally? In 1981 the period witnessed a revised National Policy on Education. The policy guide ensured that all educational practices in the country especially in terms of content selection. Consequent development of primary education is based on the National Policy on Education which also spelt out the types of teachers to teach at this level, what should guide teaching at this level and how to administer the primary schools in terms of counseling services, as emphasized by the new 6-3-3-4 system of education Adiele.

The new UBE Scheme started on study in 1999, it did not take off at the same time in various states of the Federation. There are some challenges facing, both the Federal and State levels. The inability to allocate enough funds for a programme remains the greatest challenge that the programme has.

Olanrewaju and Folorunso. This position has been well captured by Dike when the government is in the habit of allocating less money to the education. In case of implementation of UBE programme, shortage of fund is a major problem.
Nigerian officials working in SUBEB offices across the country made it available when allocated fund is not available. Huge gap in the educational development had been highlighted by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the southern and northern Nigeria.

Another major challenge to successful implementation of the UBE scheme is lack of proper planning on the part of the government UNESCO31. One of the factors responsible for the improper planning is faulty census exercises. Almost all the census exercises carried out so far in Nigeria, either before independence or after have been marred with massive irregularities Oni32. The resultant unreliable statistics has led to poor projections. Since, the available data do not allow for proper projections, there is no way that the facilities on ground will be adequate for the number of children in school. This poor projection is a factor that has affected the universality of primary education in Nigeria. This problem has been reflected in the provision of structures such as classrooms, laboratories and even quality teachers since 1976, when UPE Scheme was introduced Oni33 and indeed the situation is the same with the present UBE scheme.

Another challenge of the UBE scheme is the drop-out rate in primary schools considering the aims and objectives of the scheme, which is education for all school age children. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2003 revealed that only 60.1% of all the children of primary school age were attending primary school at the time of the survey. From the foregoing, it can be seen that the dropout rate depicts the level of access to education by the Nigerian children, which by implication betrays the universalization of education in Nigeria. Many reasons have been adduced for inadequate access to education, which includes costs of schooling (cost of books, equipment, uniform, tuition and examination fees), illness, poverty and economic benefits of education (Igbuzor24). Obasola25 observed that presently public primary schools are in crisis situation, they are characterized by dilapidated buildings, poor infrastructure, absence of instructional materials, nonpayment of teachers’ salaries, security problems, classes are conducted under shade of trees, learning activities are not available, teachers are no longer committed to their jobs as a result of nonpayment of salaries.

Primary schools in the rural areas were no access to health facilities, hospitals, health centres, there are no first aid boxes, unequal access to education opportunities. Competence in teaching is intimately connected with the type of teacher education programme available for preparing primary teachers, the major problem of primary schools is the poor quality of teachers produced from teachers’ colleges the poor quality of products of colleges of education. According Ala20 the lowering of the admission requirement for whatever reasons has not only affected the quality of the products of the colleges but also the images. The student teachers do not find prestige in the teaching profession thereby hindering the effective primary school education thereby lack of qualify teachers is the major of the poor turn out of primary school pupils. The national Policy on Education prescribed that the teacher-pupil ration should be 1:35 but in Nigeria classrooms were over crowded and operate on the teacher-pupil ration of 1:120, poor funding, inequality of boys and girls access basic education etc.

Anero36 stated that from the ongoing no one can argue that primary education is not relevant to the overall development of the child and the society. Accounts rendered so far indicate that primary education greatly contributes to national development. Ideally one expects that since it is a viable tool for societal growth and development it would have faced minimal problems. Unfortunately, the problems appear to be many thereby obstructing its chances to fully contribute to the betterment of the society. The problems emerge from many sources. The route of such problems can be traced to the teachers, school managers, families, government among others. Considering these sources, the government and the family seem to be responsible to almost all the problems that devastate the primary school system. On this note therefore, government and family contribute towards the problems of primary education in Nigeria. With the above present and bottle neck challenges on Basic Education in Nigeria what would be status of our education in the next generations to come?

6. Rethinking of Philosophy of Primary Education/Suggestions

As earlier stated that the goals of primary education as guided by FGN25, and to realize these objectives of primary education in Nigeria all the stated goals must be implemented starting with a clear policy guidelines on the issues of responsibility and control of primary education between Federal, State and LGA should have a join session and explicitly specify the roles to be taken by each of the tiers of government towards the development and realization of primary education (Karima26).

Funds are indispensable in running any kind of organisation be it private or public. Funds should be made available right from budgetary allocation and overhead cost, primary schools should be allocated with funds, this will enable the schools to man the daily activities smoothly as well carry out minor repairs of roofing, floor, desks and benches, working materials, purchase of gifts materials to excel pupils for encouragement etc.

Consistent/stable National Policy on primary education should be established, this will stop politics and politicians from continue rampant, selfish and unnecessary tempering on basic education policies in Nigeria.

Good salary package should be implemented to primary school teachers, this will enable the teachers to be committed and put their best in delivering the primary assignment without negligence as a result of poor salary package. Supervision is one of the key factors of monitoring our primary schools. Therefore, intensity on school’s supervision should be emphasized to ensure teachers are committed to their duties and channel it accordingly through adequate preparation of lessons, delivering the lessons by using appropriate teaching materials

Modern educational technology equipments should be provided to schools, this will help the teachers to facilitate the lessons easily as well enable the pupils to grasps the required content effectively. And refresher course for primary schools’ teachers should be organized to enable them up date and acquire the new strategies of teaching

Curriculum should also be re-designed to capture the needs and aspirations of Nigerian community. it should contain all the aspects of the goals of primary education as specified in the National Policy on Education, this will enable
our primary six to be what they are meant for. Parents should also realize their duties and the responsibility of their children vested on their shoulders to send children to primary schools, by allowing their children to acquire basic education and by achieving this both in rural and urban cities would adversely help in developing the system and uplifting Nigeria in general. Teacher-student ratio should be maintained in our primary, this will enable primary schools’ classroom to be moderate and teachers to teach effectively as well monitor the abilities of the students and to ensure proper assessment. Quality classroom input and output may be recorded. So also, our overcrowded classes will be reduced to enable government established new ones as well give room for recruiting more teachers.

Infrastructural facilities should also be provided, this may involve construction of more new blocks of classrooms, desks and benches, VIP toilets, safe drinking water etc. to ensure our children live and learn in conducive atmosphere and at the same time improve their morale as well help them in maintaining their academic performances

More Teacher Training Colleges should also be established and maintain properly, it may result in producing qualified teachers from the grass root and in turn produce qualified students to our tertiary institutions as well produce good teachers in the Nigerian community in years to come. Emphasis on teaching practice should be place and to be supervise effectively.

Concentrating on the above stated suggestions may help in reviving the philosophy of primary schools in Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

Based on the discussion the philosophy of Nigerian education cannot be attained without proper realization of objectives of primary education. Different educational policies were introduced in Nigeria at different time by different administration but associated with some prevalent problems that hindered the achievement of the implementation of the proposed educational policies and likely affected the goals of primary education and in turn affected the national development. It is hope that policies on primary education if successfully implemented in Nigeria will accelerated National Development in all aspects of development.

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