

## ***Functionality of Basic Education for a Life-Long Education in Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*Basic Education is designed to prepare Nigerians to acquire the basic skills and knowledge that will enable them to become useful to themselves and the society. Basic Education is the foundation upon which all other levels of education are built upon. It is designed to provide fundamental skills and knowledge to all Nigerians of school-going age irrespective of their culture and background. It is the type of education that prepares citizens to contribute to self-development and the development of their immediate society. This paper examined the concept of basic education, the requirements of basic education, challenges and some strategies for ensuring a functional Basic Education beyond literacy and numeracy in Nigeria. The main thrust of this paper examined the functionality of basic education for a life-long education in Nigeria. Conclusion and recommendation were drawn that all education stakeholders' hands must be on deck and government's commitments to the provision of necessary funds and facilities for the operationalization of functional basic education in Nigeria must be total in order to actualize the dream of a functional education to Nigerians.*

**Keywords:** basic, education, life-long, literacy, numeracy, functional

### **Introduction**

Basic Education, according to the Jomtien Declaration and Framework of Action on Education for All (EFA) (World Education Forum, 1990), is education in its broadest sense; it is a close articulation of the formal and non-formal approaches to and mechanisms for awakening an all-round development of the human potentials. The broad aim is to lay the foundation for life-long learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning, self-awareness, citizenship and life skills that build individuals or learners to become functional to themselves and the society at large.

Ejue, Ugbong and Promise-Adele (2009) described basic education as that level, type and form of learning needed to build firm roots for literacy and numeracy to inculcate basic life skills and more importantly, to consolidate the skills of learning how to learn. In a similar vein, Garuba (1995) (in Ugbong, Udey & Promise-Adele, 2011) defined basic education as a base level education that is designed to satisfy at least minimum learning needs of people in general. Ejue, Ugbong and Promise-Adele (2009) affirmed that basic education possesses the features of development oriented strategy and as such its focus is on elimination of dependency and betterment of the living conditions of people especially

as such conditions affect the under-privileged. This feature makes basic education fundamental to the existence of the individual in the society and existence of his society in the committee of nations. Equally, all the members of the society, children, young people and adults form the target of basic education, and finally, Basic Education covers all forms of primary learning that takes place in formal and non-formal settings. Thus, it encompasses all the in-school and out-of-school learning.

This paper considered Basic Education to be a type of education that should prepare individuals (young or old) not only to have the basic knowledge of literacy, numeracy, communicative and manipulative skills, but also to be self-reliant, self-employed and independent.

Basic Education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2008), is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the early childhood education (0-5), and 9-years of formal schooling. Basic Education, according to Ocho (2005), is that education that makes one a properly adapted member of a society. This means that the requirements of basic education will differ from society to society and from one period to another in the same society. The concept of basic education is therefore dynamic.

Basic education is that minimum requirement for proper adaptation to one's society. For Nigeria of today, Ocho (2005) advanced the following minimum requirements that basic education should provide. They include:

- i) Acceptance and internalization of the moral imperatives of society that will enable the society to grow, develop and live in peace.
  - ii) Ability to fend for one's self through gainful employment.
  - iii) Ability to read, write and calculate.
  - iv) Ability to communicate effectively with others.
  - v) Ability to profit from modern technological information system.
  - vi) Ability to appreciate clean environment and understand basic health requirements.
- The above requirements if inculcated into the learners that receive Basic Education will help them become functional to themselves and the society at large.

Education generally is viewed as a way of inculcating sound values which involves the understanding of one's physical and social milieu. Education gets its inspiration from the society and in turn, contributes to the growth, renewal and development of the society. Education helps in exposing the young to different values, beliefs, aspiration and norms of the society; this is to enable these young people to be useful to themselves and the society at large (Ugbong et al., 2011). Ocho (2005) considered education as a vehicle for social change and powerful tool for social, economic, political and technological development of any country. It is also viewed as a life-long process though it is not limited to formal schooling instruction; it also involves all life experiences. Esu (2003) described education as the all-round development of a person physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. This implies that education encourages a wholesome development of the individual through participation in the activities of the social group.

In Nigerian society, the purpose of education is that of “functionalism”. It is regarded as a means to an end and not an end itself. Ugbono et al. (2011) affirmed that Education plays an important role in the well-being of any society that wants to sustain its prominence in the global scene. It is broadly viewed as a life-long process spanning the years from infancy to adulthood. Education does not only liberate the minds of those who receive it, it is also a vital tool for empowerment that allows meaningful contributions to society (Ugbono et al., 2011). As a result, each nation has a policy on education which provides guidance on the type and quality of education that citizens should acquire. The bedrock of education in Nigeria is the pre-primary and primary levels which other levels are built upon. This level of education is very crucial and imperative for the development of future adult citizens and the nation. Just as a child cannot stand up and walk from birth, so someone cannot develop intellectually, socially and otherwise without a functional primary (Basic) education. Also, just as a house cannot stand without a solid foundation, an individual cannot be properly educated, developed and integrated into the society without basic education which is the foundation upon which the rest of the educational system is built.

Ugbono et al. (2011) maintained that the significant role of Basic Education in Nigeria necessitated the Federal Government to launch Universal Primary Education in 1976 and Universal Basic Education in 1999. Both programmes were launched to promote literacy and functionalism amongst citizens in relation to the type of Basic Education to be provided.

### **Objectives of basic education**

Based on the relevance of Basic Education in Nigeria, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2008) outlined the following objectives:

- a) developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- b) the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- c) reducing the incidence of pupils leaving school early from formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- d) catering through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education, for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling.
- e) ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for life-long learning.

It is no doubt that achievement of the above enunciated objectives will definitely bring about functional citizens and education which will be beyond literacy, numeracy and communicative skills. The goals of Basic Education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2008) include:

- a) provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement.
- b) develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and in the performance of their civic responsibilities.
- c) inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour.
- d) inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, ethnic and socio-economic background.
- e) Provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.

The well-articulated goals highlighted above are put in place to ensure the provision of functional education at the basic level and to prepare citizens to become functional to themselves after receiving or gaining from the education.

### **Challenges of basic education**

It is worthy to note that prior to the inauguration of Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria in September 1999, many issues were raised regarding the provision of Basic Education. Many children that were supposed to be in school then could not gain access. In support of this, Alabi (2005) revealed that out of 21 million children of school-age in Nigeria as at 1996, only 14.1 million children were in schools. The basic education completion rate was then 64 percent, while transition to secondary school rate was 43.5 percent. It was also reported by Okoro (1998) that there was disparity in the provision of basic education on gender and geographical location basis. Infrastructural facilities were also not only inadequate but in a decayed state (Okoro, 1998). The poor state of education then, prompted the Federal Government to introduce Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, to strengthen the nation's basic education, remove the distortions and inconsistencies in its delivery, as well as reinforce the implementation of the National Policy on Education. The programme was meant to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty among the citizenry. It is also expected that the introduction of UBE will accelerate national development, ensure political consciousness and national integration, as well as provide free and compulsory basic education for all school-aged children irrespective of their physical and gender status. It was launched as an evidence of Nigeria's commitment to increase the access of the citizens to basic education in line with the global crusade of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Some of the major challenges hindering effective operationalization of functional Basic Education are briefly discussed below:

#### **a) Lack of instructional facilities**

Basic course books for teachers and pupils are lacking in schools. Most parents send their wards to school on the expectations that Government would provide textbooks and instructional materials as declared in the Policy; yet there are not. Basic school facilities

such as classrooms, libraries, playgrounds, basic science laboratory, and so on, are critically in short supply. Classrooms are over-crowded and critically inadequate such that many classes are held under trees and in open grounds. Desks are grossly inadequate for pupils and a large number of them sit on bare floor to study. This situation does not promote effective teaching and learning, thus it is a limitation to the achievement of both the goals and objectives of basic education.

**b) Poor curriculum implementation**

As indicated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2008), the curriculum of Basic Education is both pre-vocational and academic in scope. The subjects offered include English Studies, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Social Studies, Cultural and Creative Arts, Physical and Health Education, Computer Studies, Christian Religious Studies, Agricultural Science and Civic Education. Ordinarily, apart from theoretical lesson, practical lessons are supposed to be conducted for pupils in some subjects such as Basic Science and Technology, Cultural and Creative Arts, Computer Studies, Physical and Health Education and Agricultural Science, to enable them acquire the basic skills that will prepare them for self-reliance, independence and acquisition of functional skills as stipulated in the Policy. Unfortunately, these skills are less acquired because of lack of exposure/inadequate exposure to practical training (Emonfonwan, 2000). Consequently, the products of UBE at this level only possess the theoretical and non-practical skill which is contrary to the policy thrust of Basic Education.

**c) Teachers' issues as a challenge**

Teachers constitute the principal stakeholders in education sub-sector, particularly in the move to implement Basic Education successfully. Teacher variables such as quantity, quality and commitment are very vital to the functionality of Basic Education in Nigeria. In spite of the role of teachers in the educational system, issues of inadequacy and low quality teachers are prevalent in Nigerian basic education level (Ige, 2014). Inadequacy of teachers is most noticeable in the core subjects as English Studies, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, and some pre-vocational subjects. This impediment constitutes a serious challenge to the implementation of Basic Education in Nigeria.

**d) Quality of outputs**

It is observed with dismay that greater number of the products that are turned out from Basic Education are performing below expectations in terms of skills, reading and writing and even effective communication. Most of them are not useful to themselves and the community. This therefore, means that the goals and objectives of basic education stipulated in National Policy on Education are not achieved. This has made Basic Education in Nigeria to be viewed as non-functional and her products un-productive.

**Strategies to enhance basic education in Nigeria**

It needs not be overstressed that all hands must be on deck, to achieve the functionality of Basic Education in Nigeria. Government, parents and guardians, schools' administrators and other stakeholders in education have roles to play to achieve this feat.

Ige (2014) suggested the following strategies:

- **Adequate funding of Basic Education:** Money is widely regarded as the vehicle for solving financial challenges. Adequate funding of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is very imperative if the goals are to be achieved. Government needs to allocate more funds to UBE which can guarantee increased allocation to Basic Education level. With improved financial allocation, more infrastructural facilities and instructional materials can be procured for effective teaching and training of the learners.

- **Increased orientation/sensitization of the public:** Having been established that the access to basic education is still very low in many parts of the country, which could be as a result of inadequate advocacy, there is need for massive enlightenment and orientation of the public towards enrolling their children in primary schools.

- **Provision of infrastructure and facilities for schools:** Government should provide additional infrastructure and facilities for the primary schools. It needs not be overstressed that acquiring pre-vocational skills in the basic education level depends on the availability of the required technical and vocational equipment for schools that are deficient in these. Private sectors should however complement government's efforts in this regards.

- **Recruitment, training and motivation of teachers:** Government should recruit more teachers for the basic education sector. It is very worrisome to state here that many primary schools in Nigeria are completely in dearth of teachers. The teacher – pupil ratio is negatively skewed; that is 1:50 pupils in a class. A very unhealthy situation indeed. In many schools, only the headteacher and a nanny are found as teachers with the six arms of enrolment (Primary 1 – 6). Government should also organise regular workshops and seminars for teachers to update their teaching skills and knowledge in order to enhance their teaching performance. Motivation is also one of the areas government should consider as very paramount for teachers in order to keep them on the job.

- **Commitment of teachers:** The objectives and goals of basic education cannot be effectively achieved if the teachers who are central to teaching/learning process in schools are not committed to their daily responsibilities. Quality basic education can only be guaranteed through the conscious commitment of the teachers. Therefore, teachers at this level of education should exhibit great commitment to their teaching career bearing in mind that they are the educational system's foundation builders.

Ejue et al. (2009) advanced the following roles of education stakeholders to bring about functionality of Basic Education in Nigeria; they include:

A. Family should:

- demonstrate favourable attitudes to education and schooling.
- be actively involved in Parents Teachers Association (PTA).
- make sacrifices to fill the gaps left by government's funding.

B. Communities should:

- act as frontline mobilizers for Basic Education.
- actively participate in the provision of facilities in schools.
- Participate in school-based management committees.
- Protect the school's properties against thieves and vandals.

C. PTA should:

- complement the efforts of government.
- demonstrate a commitment to sending all children of school-going age to school.
- assist the Head Teachers in the management of school.

D. Teachers should:

- be more committed to their jobs.
- be willing to understand the goals of Basic Education and be ready to implement them effectively.
- stop shifting the burden or blame and take responsibility for the success or failure of Basic Education.

E. The Private Sector should:

- conscientiously contribute to Education Trust Fund (ETF) as required by law.
- be alive to community service by embracing the adopt-a-Public-School Policy.
- provide opportunities for learners to acquire practical vocational experience through attachment programmes.

### **Conclusion**

The goals and objectives of basic education in Nigeria are very laudable. It is therefore imperative that all hands have to be on deck to ensure a functional basic education in Nigeria. Basic Education in Nigeria is structured to provide six life basic roles such as role as an individual, as a producer, citizen, national consumer, adaptability and as family member. For these roles to be achieved, adequate provision should be made for sufficient qualified teachers in relevant areas of specialization. Salaries need to be paid as and when due as this will serve as motivation towards productivity. All education stakeholders and teachers in the service are charged to be committed to their roles to bring about functional basic education in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

This paper extensively addressed the relevance of basic education in Nigeria and the need for its functionality in terms of its provision and the products therein. Based on this, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government at all levels should appreciate the relevance of Basic Education in Nigeria as the foundation of the other levels of education and contribute substantially towards its functionality.
2. All education stakeholders' hands must be on deck for the provision of basic functional education which should be beyond literacy and numeracy.
3. Teachers at the basic education level should exhibit strong commitment to the profession to bring about quality Basic Education in Nigeria.
4. Federal Government's yearly budget allocation should consider Basic Education as a major priority in its budgetary allocation.
5. Parents should ensure that they send their children and wards of school-going age to school.
6. All education stakeholders should as a matter of priority provide required teaching and learning facilities to schools to complement government's efforts.

7. More qualified teachers should be employed to fill the gap of shortage in schools.
8. Training and re-training of teachers in the service is strongly recommended.

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