

## Basic Challenges of Quality Public Primary Education in Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria, 1999-2015

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### ABSTRACT

Education is widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, and the foundation of social equity. Based on this fact, the Federal Government of Nigeria like other developing countries has at different times made frantic efforts in increasing the number of children enrolled in primary schools though there are still many more who are not enrolled and who do not complete the programme. In Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria, the system has been saddled with problems ranging from issues of enrolment, funding, infrastructure, teaching personnel and curriculum provisions. This basic sector of education has been and still being largely neglected due to poor government policies. For the past two years, for instance, the personnel of this critical sector have been placed on what is now popularly called SALARY PERCENTAGE in the state. This has compounded the problems of public primary education in the State. For quality education assurance these issues need to be properly addressed. This paper argues that quality indicators should move beyond inputs governments provide in terms of infrastructure, and also pay serious attention to teachers, materials and what goes on in the classroom with special reference to teaching and learning time utilization. The paper, using both empirical and secondary data, is designed to showcase how quality public primary education has been maligned in Nasarawa State as a result of governance crisis.

**Keywords:** Basic, Challenge, Nasarawa State, Public Primary, Teacher

### INTRODUCTION

Primary education is the foundation of formal education. It is an essential component in the echelon of educational system of every nation. In order to qualify for other levels of education one must first pass through primary schools, as such it is an institution upon which all other levels of education and educational achievements are built. It prepares the mind and trains the child for

higher and tougher academic pursuits. It provides young learners with the fundamentals of reading, writing, skill acquisition, information and attitudes necessary for proper adjustment into the society. Unfortunately, though not all recipients of primary education get to other levels.

Investment in primary or basic education is considered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a means to foster gender equality and sustained economic growth and reduce poverty. In fact education is universally regarded as the key that unlocks the socio-political and moral potentials of individuals and nations. It is not an exaggeration to state that no known country in the world has attained its present standard without first of all attaining quality education base. Plausibly, the Nigerian government has for long known the importance of primary education to national development. The realization of this, among other facts, motivated different governments, right from colonial period to date, to make primary education a necessity. However, the strength of primary education lies essentially on what is usually termed basic education with the sole objectives of equipping young people with the tools needed to investigate and inquire, to think, conclude and understand events around them. Therefore, understanding some basic issues in primary education delivery in Nigeria is essential and of great importance to stakeholders. This paper extensively considers issues concerning primary education delivery in Nasarawa state, North Central Nigeria. The paper reflects on the functional importance, structural changes, enrolment, funding, infrastructure, teaching personnel and curriculum issues. In sum, the aim of the paper is to expand the depth of our understanding of the impact of these issues on primary educational delivery in Nasarawa State and by extension, Nigeria.

### **The Problem**

Education is recognized by government as pivotal in the pursuit of development and social transformation. In recent times there has been public outcry on the dwindling quality of education offered in Nigeria Public Schools. World Bank report on Africa in Okute (2013) indicated that teachers recruited into the teaching positions do not meet the quality required for effective teaching in public primary schools. This scenario has led to the falling standard of education, resulting in poor quality of pupils that pass out. Consequently, Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are

committed to the maxima reduction of illiteracy. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in collaboration with Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) are to serve as regulatory agencies for basic education delivery in Nigeria and to coordinate free, compulsory and universal basic education for all children of school age irrespective of their physical, social and religious status. The Universal Basic Education Programme was established in 1999 as Nigeria is committed to achieving universal access to free, qualitative and compulsory primary education as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Adeyemi, 2011). The snag is what is the *mondus operandi* of the system in Nasarawa State? How many schools and the enrolment ratio *versa viz* the number of teachers and what go in the classrooms? These among other questions attract the attention of these researchers.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In the opinion of UNESCO-LLEP (2006), quality refers to proper performance according to standard of intentions that are known to be safe, affordable to the society in question and has the ability to produce an impact. In the context of primary education, quality is the substance of research output from primary schools, teaching and learning experience provided and received, quality of pupils who turned out from the normal school system, as well as meeting knowledge standard that is acceptable anywhere else in Nigeria community and the world at large (Okute and Chukwurah, 2011).

Quality cannot be attained on platter of gold but must be doggedly pursued, maintained and sustained. For the educational goals of any nation to be realized the quality of education provided for its citizenry over time counts significantly. Many a times, it has been seen that progress in terms of growth and global competitiveness is being determined by the operations and outputs of the educational system and this has been traced to the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools (UBEC, 2015).

### **Concept of Teacher**

The quality of education cannot be separated from the quality of teachers. A teacher is defined by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) as a person who possesses the capability to impact the acquired competency to learners in a given subject area (Okute (2013). The teacher guides the pupils and

advises them about different matters in relation to their studies. By the Nigeria national policy on education, teacher ratio to pupils is pegged at between 1:30 and 1:40. Today, due to inadequacy of teachers in public primary schools, teachers' ratio to pupils has doubled ratio this indices.

It is a cinch that no matter how clear the guideline orders are, if the personnel responsible for carrying out the implementation orders lack the resources to do effective job, the whole guidelines will definitely capsize. A big challenge of the 6-3-3-4 system of education according to Ortyoyande (1988) is the recruitment, selection and the retention of the right caliber and quality of teachers needed for the operation of the system. Based on several national seminars which were held, it is clear that the supply of instructional staff is grossly inadequate both in quantity and quality. Staffing problems are especially acute in new programmes. Some teachers teach subjects other than the ones they specialized in. some of them still do not know what the new system of primary education is all about. As implementers of the primary education system, teachers ought not only to know what to do and have the capacity to do it but also deserve to carry out the policy if implementation is to proceed effectively.

### **BASIC PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Unarguably, there is a relationship between good governance and education. In recent years, the discourse on this relationship has attracted huge academic interest. Many of the discussions on good governance are not new. The most prevalent aspect of good governance debate is on anti-corruption which often assesses the capacity of government to be accountable, just, fair, effective, efficient, participatory, transparent, responsive, consensus-oriented, and equitable. These are the baselines of good governance as outlined by the United Nations.

The concept of good governance indicates the effort the government has made or is making to turn around the standard of living of the masses; the empowerment of the citizens to be able to cater for themselves through their knowledge and skills acquired at school or after school, the involvement of all citizens in decision making concerning education of the people. Quality education can be viewed from different angles to bring out the meaning to the reader; it revolves around three key features namely: Content relevance; access

and outcome; and observance of individual rights. Quality education is a prerequisite for good governance and in turn good governance enhances quality education. The hope of every seasoned parent is that the school system will help the child develop his/her potentialities in life. This can only be achieved if the type of education given to the child is of high quality.

The United Nations International Children and Educational Fund (UNICEF) did not mix words in recognizing the five dimensions of quality education as; the learners, the environments, content, processes and outcomes, founded on the rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation (UNICEF 2000, in UNESCO, 2005). In similar light, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) expects quality education to encourage the learners' creative and emotional development, support objectives of peace, citizenship and security, promote equality and seek to pass global and local cultural values down to future generations. Delors (1996) expressed that underpinning UNESCO's quality education frame work is a fourfold principle of learning which are stated as: Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to live together; and Learning to develop skills. The concept quality education had been tackled at the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) at the Jomtien Conference in 1990. The Conference declares quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. Emphasis on assuring an increase in children's cognitive development by improving the quality of their education is paramount since these children are the future leaders of the nation. In the same vein the Dakar forum noted the need to improve all aspects of quality education to achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes for all especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (Dakar Frame Work for Action, Article 7, World Education Forum, 2000).

We made bold to say here that quality education enhances good governance in any nation. The desire for access to school education in other to acquire knowledge and skills, apply them, is one thing and to actually succeed in acquiring them and showing evidence in having acquired them in concrete terms is another thing. The quality of the products of an institution, no doubt, is evidenced in the quality of performance of the products (Amanchukwu, 2005) Barrow; Boyle; Ginsburg; Levi; Pier; Price – Rom and Rocha (2006) in their

findings developed what is called “black box”, that is, the space in which educators and others think and act in relation to project inputs and consequences for project outputs. These authors analyzed four USAID educational projects in the developing world in relation to the ways in which teachers conceived the concept of quality education. In their comparative analysis of the studies, Barrow and his team concluded that teachers do tend to articulate their conceptions of quality education with terms normally associated with student -centered and actively learning approaches to teaching and learning. Successive National and State Governments in Nigeria have had to come up with one policy after another to improve on the education of the young ones in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The results of these policies have led to the creation of Universal free Primary Education (UPE), 6-3-3-4 system of education, UBE, 9-3-4 system of education etc.

One of the cardinal objectives of this paper is to examine the relationship between quality education and good governance in Nasarawa State. The contention that quality education could usher in good governance needs be seriously looked into because a knowledgeable, skilled, well articulated man, has more to offer to the nation than half baked individuals who do not have much to offer to the nation other than to satisfy their selfish egos. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) came as a replacement of the UPE scheme of 6-3-3-4 system (six years of primary education, three years of Junior Secondary; three years of Senior Secondary and four years of Tertiary Education. It involves six years of tuition free primary education and three years of free Junior Secondary Education. This entails 9 years of free uninterrupted schooling for every Nigerian child of school age. The UBE is free, compulsory and a right for all Nigerian children and it has the following as its specific objectives:

1. To provide free, compulsory Universal Basic Education for all Nigeria children of school age, including children of pastoral normal and migrant fisher men.
2. To develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
3. To reduce dropout rates from the formal education system, through improved relevance and efficiency.

4. To sure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning (FGN 2004).

The above objectives formed the basis on which the Nigerian government established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) with the responsibility of ensuring:

1. Recruitment, training and re-training of teachers.
2. Provision of relevant curricula and adequate infrastructural facilities.
3. Effective planning, monitoring and evaluation.
4. Proper data collection and accurate statistical analysis.
5. Prudent management of funds.
6. Procurement of text books and other infrastructural materials
7. Public enlightenment and social mobilization for all community involvement (FME 2004).

These laudable federal government objectives have not received the impetus needed towards the realization of the UBE objectives or targets. This is evident in the nonchalance exhibited on the issues of education nationwide.

### **NASARAWA STATE EXPERIENCE**

Nasarawa State public primary education is bedeviled by numerous problems. What is discussed here is by no means exhaustive but just the tip of the iceberg. Monitoring and evaluation is one vital area that has not been given deserved attention in the implementation of primary education programmes in Nasarawa State. The relevant primary education organs in-charge of this has hugely abdicated this vital responsibility. It is a known fact that the relevance of monitoring and evaluation of primary education system cannot be over emphasized because a sound monitoring and evaluation framework would have its checks and balances that could enhance capacity building in the educational sector. Monitoring and evaluation is very weak in primary schools due to the fact that financial support to enable supervisors to go out and carry the assignment is not forthcoming from the government.

Time management is essential aspect of quality education. The ability to make good use of time allocated to certain tasks to achieve results should not be

overlooked. Quality time spent in the classroom will result to achieving success. Ensuring quality in fundamental education (primary education) is critical because the quality of foundations laid at the basic education level influences the quality of pupils' learning at the secondary and tertiary education levels. Certainly, activities carried out in the classroom under the supervision and directives of the quality teacher are a surer evidence of quality education. Owusu-Ansah (2005) averred that time management in basic schools in Kumasi also indicated that, while there was considerable wastage of instructional time in both private and public schools, this problem was compounded within publicly funded sector. Educate the educator so as to instill quality education in children.

Moreover, the teachers have crucial role to play towards successful delivery of the education process. According to Babalola (2003), teachers are the center for quality improvement in education and upgrading the capacity of teachers would help in giving quality education to primary school children, since they are the foundation upon which a country builds its sustainability. Nasarawa state has largely negated this sound doctrine and continues to gamble on the future generations of the state. Although there has been tremendous increase in the net enrolment of primary school children, the question is whether this increase has translated to qualitative education in the state. In an earlier study Obanya, (2001) posited that the mass schooling as envisaged by the UBE programme will not yield any benefit to the nation, unless the issues of quality, efficiency and relevance are addressed. It is therefore important that the management of UBE should pay attention not only to increases in enrolment but also to issues of relevance, quality, efficiency and equity, such that the educational system transforms the increases into critical mass of educated persons needed for national development. The table below indicates this fact of mass enrolment without commensurate quality personnel.



### Nasarawa State Public Primary Schools Teachers and Pupils' Enrolment

S/N	LGA	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	Pupils Enrolment
1	Akwanga	75	828	36671
2	Awe	85	831	19567
3	Doma	79	1038	27213
4	Karu	160	1223	31556
5	Keana	74	522	10179
6	Keffi	33	622	17463
7	Kokona	100	880	19427
8	Lafia	176	2351	51847
9	Nasarawa	154	2729	37188
10	N/Eggon	113	1260	25744
11	Obi	89	988	21762
12	Toto	100	1031	14955
13	Wamba	72	713	9590
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1310</b>	<b>15016</b>	<b>323162</b>

**Source:** Nasarawa State Universal Basic Education Board Office of Statistics, Lafia, May 2016

**Note:**

The number of unqualified teachers and religious instructors were included in the grand total of 15016 of teachers given in the table above.

Now the question of relevance comes into focus. This is because relevance in any educational system is occupied with the issue of whether the educational system has produced and/or is producing manpower with skills necessary for economic growth. In this regard, the importance of relevant curriculum that responds to the needs and priorities of the learners, Nasarawa State and indeed the nation at large cannot be over emphasized. Relevant curriculum is vital to educational success. It outlines what outline to be learned in school in order to achieve the educational objectives of a nation. The current Basic Education Curriculum for primary and Junior Secondary Schools was launched in 2007 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) was accorded the responsibility of formulating and implementing the new Curriculum (FGN, 2007). Although the new Curriculum was introduced three years after the introduction of UBE, the Executive Secretary of NERDC gave the assurance that the Curriculum would

correct the abnormalities of the former one which he said was lacking in the provision of relevant basic education for the Nigerian child. The new basic education curriculum recommends among others, training of teachers and learner-centered approach to teaching that will engage students in high level cognitive activities, which involves critical thinking and reflection. It also recommends the introduction of entrepreneurial skills. This is to ensure quality in teaching and also ensure relevance in the UBE programme. Up to now no single public primary School has embarked on entrepreneurial skill acquisition activity in Nasarawa State nor is there any primary school teacher that is trained in any entrepreneurial skill acquisition by the Nasarawa State government.

The capacity building programmes of the Federal government and Millennium Development Goals end as jamborees at the workshops and no follow up implementation and funding of its objectives by the Federal and State governments. The importance of the teacher in the implementation of the programmes is viewed with levity as evident in the poor remuneration policy of the State. With the current TAAL policy of PERCENTAGE and erratic payment of the primary school teachers in the state; the work ethics and ego are brought to the lowest ebb. The gusto to do the teaching diligent and effective has been dashed by this government policy. This has resulted in incessant industrial action in the sector and thereby wasting precious time for teaching and learning. While the politicians and their appointees are swimming in opulence the ordinary teachers in the state have abject poverty and want to contend with. Obanya (2000) noted that no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers. In addition, Babalola, (2003) emphasized that for teachers to be effective, they need quality training and support such as teaching materials, quality teaching environment and proper remuneration. The result of the current Al-Makura government policy on the primary school teachers has been that teaching and learning are grinding to a halt day by day. This definitely portends danger for the future governance of the state. Again, the state government laxed interest in the sector has made it difficult for the teachers to apply the basic skills of teaching and learning due insufficient supply of infrastructural materials, and large classroom size, (Yahaya Yimaba: Oral interview).

Although the new Basic Education Curriculum was designed to reflect relevance, as it encouraged the acquisition of craft production skills and a culture of entrepreneurship among primary school children to address the issues of street begging and hawking, yet there is little or no progress in this regard, in the state. On the Issue of Quality, the realization of Vision 2020 will largely depend on the quality of the product of educational institutions. If Nasarawa state should join the race the state has to brace up to its responsibilities. Besides, the achievement of the Universal Basic Education will depend on the quality of education received by the school children. The Universal Basic Education aims at helping primary school children to acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for active and productive life. These can only be achieved through quality education (Jonitien Declaration, (1990), the Dakar Framework for Action, (2000), UNICEF, (2000), and UNESCO, (2003). Although it is difficult to define educational quality, quality in education may be seen in the context to which quality is perceived. In this paper, however, quality education has been defined in the context of the five dimensions recognized by UNICEF (2005). These are: learners, environment, content, process and outcomes. An understanding of these dimensions will form the basis for assessing the quality of the Universal Basic Education in Nasarawa state and indeed Nigeria. A brief excursion into these concepts will subsist here.

### **Learners**

This is characterized by healthy and ready-to-learn children. Good nutrition is critical to proper development of children. Basically, children who are well nourished are always healthy and healthy children learn better in school. To ensure quality learners, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) during the regime of Alhaji (Dr.) Abdullahi Adamu (1999-2007) introduced free lunch for primary school children across the state. This lofty idea was however short-lived as it immediately crumbled when Adamu left office and with the lame excuse by the succeeding administration of Alhaji Aliyu Akwe Doma that there is no money to sustain the programme. And because of the monumental poverty of most parents in the state children come to school hungry, leading to increased drop-out rates with the consequent increase in the number of street hawkers, child labour and early marriages.

### **Environment**

Quality learning environment is crucial to quality learning. The provision of school facilities such as school buildings, instructional materials and moderate class size can enhance quality learning. Although there were provision of new classroom buildings by the TA'AL administration in almost all the LGAs in the state, and occasionally text books and instructional materials, empirical studies revealed that most schools are still in dilapidating stages, with inadequate textbooks and other instructional materials (Field work by authors).

### **Content**

Quality content is reflected in relevant curriculum and materials for acquisition of basic skills. The Nigerian UBE is characterized by over- crowded curriculum with about 16 subjects at the Junior Secondary School level. This could pose challenges for teachers especially in teaching the curriculum content. This is obviously a threat to quality learning.

### **Quality Process**

Teachers are crucial in learning process. Teachers' competencies play great role in the quality of teaching especially in the use of appropriate teaching methods. Evidence has shown that teachers in the state have not been able to practice what they learnt during the training programmes in their various tertiary institutions (field study by the authors). This has created huge problem for the educational development of Nasarawa state. It is not unusual to come across a primary school teacher in Nasarawa state who may not be able to make a single correct sentence. Check out the impact of this on the future of children entrusted under his/her care.

### **Outcomes**

Quality outcomes encompass knowledge, skill and attitudes that are linked to positive participation in the society. Quality outcomes in the UBE programme should show gradual increase in the number of children who completed primary six and also a clear reduction in the number of children who engage in street begging, hawking, and other forms of child abuse, which are by-products of school drop-outs. Since there is no evidence showing a reduction in this regard, this puts a burning question on the relevance and quality of the Universal Basic Education programme in the state. The internal efficiency of an

educational system can be seen on how well the educational system is doing in terms of quality outcomes. An efficient educational system will have less wastage in terms of dropout rates.

### **WAY FORWARD**

To address the issues of relevance, quality and efficiency in the public primary schools in Nasarawa State and indeed, Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The state government in collaboration with SUBEB and LGEAs are to recruit more qualified and committed teachers and management staff.
2. There should be regular capacity building of existing teachers and management staff in the various and diverse disciplines such that no area is found wanting or deficient in supply of their services to the educational sector. The capacity building programme for primary school teachers should be continuous on yearly basis so as to ensure the competency of the teachers in the teaching-learning process. Teachers should be trained and at the same time, they should be encouraged to put what they learnt into practice, by providing necessary facilities that will enhance teaching and learning.
3. Statutory allocation of teachers' salary should come directly from the federal government. Teachers welfare including regular promotion and full payment of salary should be done as and when due. Provision of special incentives to attract and retain competent teachers in rural areas and difficult terrains should be made.
4. There is need for construction of adequate number of classrooms with quality furniture and other items necessary for strengthening teaching and learning processes. Government should therefore intensified effort in renovation and construction of dilapidated structures and purchasing of instructional materials.
5. The performance of the Board and LGEAs are to be evaluated yearly. Primary education is an enterprise that requires huge financial investment. Funds should be made available for schools administration and maintenance services and facilities in the schools and this should be monitored.
6. Apart from this, the school environment should be friendly and every child should have access to all learning materials. Community

participation and involvement should be stimulated. In particular, parents should participate fully in school activities and this can improve attendance and retention of the pupils.

7. Measures should be taken to enhance the completion rate of primary school children, by reducing dropout rates. It is therefore suggested that the issue of free lunch initiated by the government of Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu be revisited. Primary school pupils should be given free lunch to enable them concentrate in learning activities.
8. Politicians should not be allowed to toy with this crucial sector of education. There should be a deliberate policy of all policy-makers in education to have their children and ward in public primary schools.
9. Besides, effective and efficient implementation culture should be adopted with adequate quality assurance measure in all policies on education.
10. Finally, efforts should be made by the management of UBE to ensure transparency and accountability, especially in ensuring that the funds allocated to UBE programmes are judiciously used. It is therefore recommended that increased effort should be made in monitoring and supervision of UBE in the state especially in the area of teaching and learning achievements.

## CONCLUSION

We dare to conclude here that the Nasarawa State government in collaboration with SUBEB and LGEAs need to not only recruit more teachers, but qualify teachers, as well as provide on the job training for teacher trainers so as to upgrade their educational qualifications and other forms of teaching skills. There should be regular capacity building of staff in the various and diverse disciplines such that no area is found wanting or deficient in supply and its services to the state. Primary education as an enterprise requires heavy financial investment. Funds should be made available to cater for the purchasing of school necessary facilities and judicious use of these facilities should be strictly adhered to. Primary education is important as the sector is not only universally regarded as a pivotal in the pursuit of development and social transformation but because it is a relevant stage in education that everyone needs to eradicate illiteracy and spurt up with the ever-changing living standard in the fast developing world of technology and digitalization. In this vein therefore, it is

high time governments at all levels adequately fund primary education, if really Nigeria and Nigerians are to be in the wheel of progress of the world Vision 2020.

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