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PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN BARUTEN LGA OF KWARA STATE: CHALLENGES, IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR REPOSITIONING.

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Abstract

It is no longer news that the future of any country depends on the quality of its education which is a key instrument to civilization and development. Education remains the major tool for individual, national, socio-economic development, and eradication of poverty. Unfortunately, one of the major problems facing education in Nigeria is the issue of underfunding. Others include intimidation, killings, intolerance, bribery and corruption, tribalism, gangsterism, armed robbery, kidnapping, suicide, bombing, drug and human trafficking, militancy, negative influence of politics on education to mention a few. This has led to slow pace in the development of the educational system in the last few decades. In view of this, the paper examines primary school education challenges: implications and strategies for repositioning, in Baruten local government area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Early childhood education, primary education, emergencies, and implications for emergencies and strategies for repositioning were investigated and discussed. The study, concluded that it is imperative for educational policy makers, the government, and the school administrators to intensify efforts and see that these challenges are eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum. This paper recommended for the strengthening of institutional commitment, preparedness in terms of policy, staffing arrangement, training and development and funding to enable repositioning.

Keywords: Primary, Education, Strategies, Repositioning

Introduction

Primary education begins at around age 5 for the majority of Nigerians. Students spend six years in primary school and graduate with a school-leaving certificate. Subjects taught at the primary level include mathematics, English language, Christian religious knowledge, Islamic knowledge studies, agricultural science, home economics and one of the three main indigenous language and cultures: Hausa- Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Private schools also offer computer science, French and fine arts. It is that education or learning process designed for young children who are not yet of primary school age entry of six years. This type of education was given official recognition by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education 1977 revised in 1998, 2004 respectively for better

transformation of the education system. The system was named “pre-primary education”, a good preparatory step to entry into the primary school. The children’s age stipulated in the policy document was two to five years plus (2 to 5 years). The importance of primary education cannot be overemphasized. According to Maduabuchi (2010) primary education has vast potentials for human development which is vital to achieving solid educational career.

Lending credence to this, Ogba and Igu (2010) maintain that it is a vital level of education and hence should be accorded necessary attention to ensure its effective implementation and management because children who attend primary school education tend to be more vibrant and more able to work independently as education being the bedrock of all developments is simply a problem solver. Unfortunately, the problems of the system which or should ordinarily have nipped in the bud according to Ezeaku and Ohamobi (2010) are still jeering at us. Such problems indeed are too numerous to mention such as election rigging, intimidation, killings, intolerance, bribery and corruption, tribalism, gangsterism, armed robbery, kidnapping, suicide, bombing, drug and human trafficking, militancy, etc (Aguokogbuo,2008),

Others include: war, epidemics and natural disasters which spare no child. Most countries are gripped by conflict today than at any time in the past while many of the crises spur entire childhoods. They lose access to safe drinking water, health care and food, safety and routine, without access to education, equally risk losing their futures. Despite the enormous benefits to children, societies and entire countries, education is often the first service suspended and the last to be restored during crisis on average. The education sector receives less than 3 percent humanitarian aid as funding is not the only shortfall which is poor. Teaching and staff shortages prevent education systems from meeting children’s many needs. Data gaps hinder decision makers from assessing the situation and responding effectively and coordination challenges inhibit humanitarian teams from acting as efficiently as needed (Adams, 2019). With the outbreak of the pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools, the country has not only suffered direct losses from its impact but also a worsening spate of insecurity and violence across the country, including attacks on school children, especially girls in the rural areas.

The evidence from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Boko Haram insurgency and several attacks on communities around Kwara State which have all compounded the problems many school children face in consistently accessing schooling. This calls for improved responses for the primary education growth in the local areas as a positive school climate considered as healthy system which could radiates respect, trust, opportunity, cohesiveness, caring, high morale, and school renewals. It is against this background that this paper examined primary education school emergences, its implications and strategies for repositioning in Baruten Local Government Area of Kwara State.

Primary Education

In Nigeria, children start attending primary schools (elementary schools) when they are six years old and spend the next six years there, graduating at the age of 12. However, most children who attended nursery schools prior to primary schools have an edge over those children who didn’t have the privilege to do so or whose challenges never permitted to do that smoothly. Primary education fulfills the requirements of students during their first few years of schooling. Its objective is to promote children’s growth so they can achieve their full potential in terms of social, cognitive, cultural, emotional and physical development.

Nigeria follows the 6+3+3 system of primary secondary education. Six years of primary education are followed by three years of junior secondary education and three years of senior secondary education. The primary aim of primary education is to enable them identify their life as individuals for example the citizen education as one of the main subject that aims at all round education with full and harmonious development of the child. Others include promotion of spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils in the school and society.

The objectives of primary education in Nigeria are not over emphasized which are to provide the learner with opportunities according to (FRN, 2013):

- a. Acquire literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication skills
- b. Enjoy learning and develop desire to continue learning.
- c. Develop ability for critical thinking and logical judgment.
- d. Appreciate and respect the dignity of work
- e. Develop desirable social standards, moral and religious values.
- f. Develop into a self-disciplined, physically fit and healthy person and
- g. Promote social responsibility and make proper use of leisure time, develop awareness and appreciation of the role of technology in national development to mention a few.

Education is an opportunity through which the individual, group or any nation is economically, socially, culturally and technologically empowered. It is the instrument for empowering young people with knowledge and skills which provide them access to productive employment (National Planning Commission, NPC, 2013). In recognition of the need for education, the Nigerian National Policy on education (2013) noted that it is that process concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values, skills and knowledge suitable for developing learner's potentials for national development. The policy statement further emphasized that education is the most important instrument for change (FRN, 2013). Emphasizing on the role of education, Lawal (2011) noted that education is the most important instrument to enhance human capacities and to achieve the desired objectives of social and economic development to prepare its citizens for responsible and productive adult life so as to function as efficiently and effectively in the society in which they live.

Emergencies

Even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, only 61 percent of 6-11 years old regularly attend primary school (UNICEF, 2017). Meanwhile education is acknowledged to be the most powerful and indispensable instrument not only for economic and political advancement but also for progress in all human endeavours. The federal government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument per excellent for affecting national development positively. Despite these interesting and impressive statements, the primary education sector remains relatively unimpressive.

From the colonial era to the point Nigeria gained her independence, primary education had been affected by various changes in events from different policy reforms and their implementation to another. Today in Baruten LGA, of Kwara State schools, primary education is being confronted with many problems. According to (Adams, 2019) such as education policies and their poor implementation, insufficient government funding, lack of competent teachers, lack of interest, inadequate classrooms, poor/polluted learning environment, lack of innovation, inadequate library facilities, case of parental irresponsibility, corruption to mention a few.

Outside these problems, some parents do not see the important of sending their children or wards to school because they are yet to realize the value of education because they assign these children to support them in their daily economic activities. Many hardly send these children to school because such schools belong to religious bodies that are not their own. In addition to this, the Baruden school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism, corruption and poor learning and teaching environment to mention a few. Primary education in Kwara State of Nigeria is beseeched with inadequate infrastructures and facilities such as school building, classroom, library, sporting facilities and equipment which are very important for effective teaching and learning. Others include paucity of quality teachers and poor/polluted learning environment as well, poor funding, inadequate classrooms, and teaching aids like projectors, computers, laboratories

and libraries. Several identified issues with Baruten primary education system are as follows according to Jijjani (2022):

1. Government funding for education
2. School safety
3. Disciplinary policies
4. Technology in education
5. Standardized testing
6. Teacher salaries
7. The teaching of evolution
8. Bullying
9. Poverty
10. Class size
11. Sexual assault
12. Inadequate and irregular supervision of school
13. Poor entry recruitment procedure
14. Mis-appropriation of funds
15. Poor assessment of training needs and training programme.

Implications of Emergences

The standard of education in Kwara State and Nigeria in general is diminishing, hence the increase in the establishment of private schools. Baruten teachers have enjoyed low social status while teaching and learning locked down upon. Teaching is seen as an occupation which many people take as a last resort. Many of the Baruten's public primary schools lack well qualified teachers and this leads to poor performance of the students in their external examinations. Schools with qualified teachers lack financial and non-financial amenities to encourage them to perform their duties. The pupils are not left out; they too lack proper encouragement because of the multiple emergences.

The implications of education emergences cannot be over looked for some reasons which include: the psychosocial needs of children and adolescents affected by trauma and displacement, the need to protect them from harm and the need to maintain and develop study skills and disseminate key messages such as how to avoid HIV/AIDS, environmental education and education for peace and citizenship. A key principle for education in situations of emergency and crisis is rapid response, using a community based approach, capacity building by training teachers, youth leader's movements and school managements.

Pupils are at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, mental health problems, violence, substance abuse and social stigmatization.

It is true that, in some instances schools can be recruiting grounds for force or armed groups. So precautions must be taken as appropriate measures must be taken and pupils educated about their rights including what to do at all times. Rapid intervention of this kind is important for the benefit of effective management. Trauma can have a negative impact on the pupils, as well as course gap in their studies. Malaria is a hazard, sexual and rape activities can lead to HIV/AIDS. There is usually an incipient environmental crisis, with the neighboring and being stripped of trees for firewood Conflicts affected people also need help in discussing the situation they are in and identifying constructive ways to build a better future.

Strategies for Repositioning

Education can be defined as the process of preparing young ones for future endeavour through interactions between a teacher and a student or a crop of students. Before the aim of education can be completely achieved, various inputs are required quantitatively and qualitatively such as: teaching and

non-teaching staff, equipment, facilities, finance and materials must be supplied in the right quantity and quality for effective management of the school and in order to have products who will be able to transform educational aim into reality. Adams (2019) opined that education in Nigeria has experienced many crises such as student's demonstration, brain drain, industrial actions and others as a result of government's lackadaisical attitude to make provision for infrastructure or facilities that are beneficial to the primary education system.

Blessing and Dorathy (2016) stated the indices of quality education to be the following:

1. Proper funding
2. Effective quality control (to enforce standard)
3. Conducive and appropriate teaching and learning environment
4. Sufficient staff quarters and classrooms in schools
5. Adequate and proper equipment and staffing
6. Motivation

If Baruten LGA in Kwara State primary sector must move forward into the age of technology and scientific dependence, government and the contributing private sector must begin to pay full attention to solving the myriads of problems surrounding it. Below are a few strategies to the falling sector standard according to Jijjani (2022);

1. Increase funding to primary education sector
Both the government and the private sector should put in more effort and resources towards developing the education sector. This sector has suffered and continued suffering from decades of underfunding and is therefore necessary for the government to design a workable plan towards funding education for example, UNESCO recommended 26% of a nations' total budget to go to the education sector. Moreover there is need for monitoring how the funds are being managed.
2. Quality and affordable education should be made available
Acquiring quality education is supposed to help in fighting poverty, ignorance and diseases but acquiring this knowledge has become an expensive burden for so many poor people who are in need of this knowledge. This measures cut across all level of education in the country from the Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools to the tertiary institutions. Provision of quality and affordable education can go a long way in improving education in Nigeria.
3. Proper equipping of schools
Primary school system should be equipped and staffed to compete with the global economy.
4. Equal opportunities for all Nigerians
Equal opportunities should be given to learners seeking for different placement regardless of family name, gender and institution attended to mention a few.
5. Regular review of school's curricula to adopt new topics
This is another way to improve education in Nigeria. Subjects that enhance innovativeness and creativity should be introduced across board. Topics about entrepreneurial and computer skill should also be introduced. Curricula and syllabuses that are tested, trusted and found effective should be adopted particularly, the concern will be the primary schools where children learn at their tender age as it is the level of development that attention is given to the lessons the young children will receive. There must be training, development and experiences on the side of the teachers handling them. They must be tolerant and tactful. Be very much at alert to observe the performance and conduct of their pupils.
6. Learning with modern learning aids
Teaching aids like computers, libraries and laboratories should be made available in schools for shaping the learning.

7. Introduction to online registration for national examination
The national examination body should introduce online registration to mitigate the exploitative nature of most school heads.
8. Education conferences.
Stakeholders in the education sector should deliberate and brainstorm in order to find lasting and acceptable solutions to the falling standard in education in Baruten LGA. Advice and consultancy on how to overcome these problems will always be offered by the United Nations Agencies and other voluntary organisations once they are beckoned on.
9. Review of National Policy on Education
The primary sector needs to be restructured and all possibilities involved with taking remedial actions to raise the standard of education should be explored. A learning expedition should be sent to various parts of the world to understudy their working educational system for comparism and learning new methods and principles to solve the challenges.
10. Communication ability and skills in the language of instruction should be given special attention offering explanations in mother tongue, could be a rewarding move there should be rapport and understanding in the learning process with feedbacks and reaction desirable evidences that knowledge has been instilled.
11. Improved welfare package
It is common knowledge that money and a suitable working environment are the major motivating factors for workers. Therefore salaries should be paid as at when due and a good learning environment should also be provided for teaching and learning
12. Free education
Government should take total responsibility of tuition fees for the primary school sector of both in external examinations. Education in emergencies saves lives. Education in emergencies promotes developmental skills when a learner is in a safe learning environment he or she is less likely to be sexually or economically exploited or exposed to other risks. (INEC 2004). It can enhance development and stability (Save the children, 2009).

These are a few ways in which the government can improve the standard of education with Baruten, to adequately prepare the young learners to meeting up with the requirements for 21st century and fight against emergences because every education system has the potential either to exacerbate or mitigate the conditions that contribute to violent conflicts. (Buckland, 2006). Allowing individuals to stay without learning, until a crisis is resolved is not a viable option. As without this element people can quickly lose hope in a brighter future.

Conclusion

The importance of effective primary school educational system cannot be over emphasized but today in Baruten Local Government Area of Kwara State, it has remained unimpressive despite the enormous benefits to its pupils, the society and entire country. Thus the paper concluded that it is imperative for educational policy makers, the government and the school administrators to intensify efforts and see that these challenges are eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum while survival and peace building messages and skills be incorporated in formal and informal education.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations include the strengthening of institutional commitment and preparedness in terms of policy, staffing arrangement, training and development and funding.
2. Provision of adequate funding with good management which would provide high quality education.

3. Funds for renovation of schools and institutions, acquiring quality training and school facilities is vital.
4. Research grants, decent teachers' salaries and welfare and so on are the things that need to be increased, released and spent appropriately.
5. Parents must be fully involved; facilities provided, peace must be made, students attitudes and behaviour checked while school safety must be placed as priority.
6. Support must be given and feeling of isolation reduced among pupils.
7. Proper equipping of schools to prepare the learners for competition in the global economy.

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