

## PRIMARY EDUCATION: THE LINK TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Paper presented at the Maiden International Conference on education, Science and Technology (ICEST 2021)

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**Abstract:** *The fundamental position of primary tutoring in the educational systems cannot be underrated because it provides the foundation on which the quality of other educational levels is anchored. There is no gainsaying that individuals, society and nations depend on it for national development. On this premise, this paper examined primary education in Nigeria as the link to sustainable development. This paper advocated that primary education is the foundation of all other formal education for sustainable development. That is, primary education is the springboard for sustainable development. As a result, there is a need for robust educational programmes to boost students' accomplishments in better learning and knowledge acquisition, thereby facilitating their overall growth, which is critical for long-term development. The goals of elementary education, the concept of sustainable development and strategies for promoting sustainable development through primary education were emphasized to attain this study's goal.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial education, primary education, Sustainable Development and Curriculum review

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### INTRODUCTION

Primary education as the fulcrum for societal advancement is central to productive child upbringing and enhancing societal development because the future generation's training and upbringing are contingent on her services. This is probably why most countries emphasize the child's education. However, Nigeria cannot be said to have made meaningful achievement in this area because most government programmes and policies aimed at enhancing primary school education have not been achieved. This is so because paper documentation of programmes and policies in Nigeria does not necessarily imply implementation.

Education is generally perceived as a veritable tool for transformation in every nation's political, economic, technological and social spheres. The growth and development of every nation thus hinge on its citizen's education.

Recognizing the relevance of education to individual, social and national development, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the national policy on education (2004), perceives education as an instrument of excellence for effecting national development. Amaele ([2011) opines that education trains people to be useful for themselves and the society they live. He concludes that they have to be productive, discover their creative abilities, and use them to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualization. In corroborating this, Obasanjo (2012) submits that education promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover their creative potentials and apply the same to improve existing skills and techniques for performing specific tasks, thereby increasing their efficiency/ personal and societal efforts. It could be inferred from the above and other definitions by scholars that education is the process through which learners acquire the relevant knowledge, skill, value, and attitude required to ensure an

individual's proper intellectual and character development to become a self-reliant and responsible citizen. Hence, a sine-qua-non for quality workforce development.

It is axiomatic that primary education is the education given to children in their late childhood. It is thus a primary avenue for acquiring essential life skills that will enhance the child's development throughout life. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria's National Policy on Education, primary school, which is delivered in educational institutions for students aged 6 to 11, is the first level of formal education. Every organization's ultimate purpose is to bring about a remarkable change in the attitude of its beneficiaries which may be difficult to achieve if not started from scratch, that is, from the primary educational level. To this end, Arogundade and Belo (2019) believe that the solidity of primary education, to a considerable extent, determines the difference between the success and failure of the subsequent educational system. By implication, the coordination of primary education impacts the quality of her product, which is also the input for secondary and higher education. Instances abound where one finds it difficult to believe whether post-primary and post-secondary school graduates actually pass through the various educational levels. What comes to mind first is what happened to their primary education? The answer to the question could probably hinge on the relevance of primary education as the essential educational background upon which subsequent educational systems are built.

### **OBJECTIVES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Considering the relevance of primary education to other educational systems, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) articulates the objectives of primary education as follows: Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the capacity to communicate effectively; Establish a solid foundation for scientific, critical, and reflective thinking. Encourage patriotism, justice, understanding, and national togetherness. Instill social and moral norms and values in the child;

Develop the ability to adapt to a changing environment in the child; and

Provide an opportunity for the child to develop manipulative life skills that will enable the child to function effectively in society.

A cursory look at the above objectives could lead to the submission that primary education is the key to the success of other educational systems. However, the questions awaiting answers are: Can it be candidly said that primary school graduates have met up to expectations with the objectives spelt out by the federal government? Can a primary school pupil sincerely express himself orally or in writing as proof of gaining the ability to communicate effectively? Are beneficiaries of primary education properly equipped with rudimentary skills that would assist them in developing required skills for enhancing their coping ability with future studies? In tandem with these questions, Oloruntoyin (2011) states that presently in Nigeria, the quality of education provided to students in primary schools falls well short of what is required, thus impacting qualitative human capital development.

### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The term "sustainability" refers to a technique of considering the future in which environmental, social, and economic factors are all considered in the pursuit of development and higher quality of life. These three sectors are intertwined: society, environment, and economy. A wealthy civilization, for example, provides food and resources to its population, as well as safe drinking water and clean air, depending on a healthy ecology (UNESCO, 2012). Sustainable development is neither short-lived nor truncated but instead has a long-lasting effect on the present and future situation. Briggs (2008) contends that sustainable development is a socio-ecological process characterized by fulfilling human needs while conserving the natural environment and indefinitely improving people's quality of life. He concludes that sustainable development considers human welfare and the long-term effect of today's

activities, including global cooperation, to reach viable and long-lasting solutions. UNESCO (2009) sums it up that sustainable development has universally been geared towards addressing global, environmental, social, and economic challenges and persistent patterns of absolute poverty and various forms of social and economic inequality.

As a component of the sustainable development goal, education entails teaching-learning processes that pique students' interests and encourage them to change their current attitudes to enhance their future development and sustain development in all aspects of their lives. Wals and Kieft (2010) point out that the earliest seeds of promoting education for sustainable development were planted in the 1970s at several international conferences on environmental education, among which was the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. Council of the European Union (2010) argues that education for sustainable development is essential for achieving a sustainable society and is desirable at all formal education and training levels and non-formal learning. UNESCO (2014) sum it up that education for sustainable development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitude and values necessary to shape a sustainable future.

### **PRIMARY EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In this era of knowledge explosion and transition to a knowledge-driven society, primary school students are expected to improve in areas such as creativity, resourcefulness, and logical reasoning, among others, to ensure their readiness for secondary school, higher education, and, ultimately, society at large. Primary education, thus, serves as a foundation for high-quality secondary and higher education. The reason is that primary school graduates gain admission into secondary and higher institutions respectively to become future professionals such as medical doctors, pharmacists, engineers, teachers, and

lawyers, among other professions. Qualitative primary education, therefore, becomes imperative.

In conceding the importance of primary education to achieving long-term sustainability, UNESCO (1996) succinctly states that a good primary or basic education is seen as a human right and is necessary to develop a child's understanding of the world and ability to function effectively in it. In a related development, UNESCO (2012) affirms that mobilizing education to transform the lives of children, youths, and adults represents the crux of education for a sustainable development vision. The years of primary and secondary education are considered critical in this regard. As the foundation for adults' contribution to developmental progress, Odigie in Nnamdi (2014) points out that Bloom's taxonomy states the rate of intellectual development in people in the following order: 0-4 years (50%), 4-8 years (30%) and 8-17 years (20%). If Bloom's assertion is true, the implication is that a child who receives a desultory education has lost an abundance of his cognitive development. Similarly, Oyekan (2000) contends that children should be well equipped to discover appropriate solutions to meet tomorrow's requirements and concerns. Thus, qualitative primary education becomes sacrosanct for children to meet future challenges and fit into society.

### **ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PRIMARY EDUCATION**

In a developing nation like Nigeria, primary education is an essential instrument for the attainment of sustainable development, which could be possible through the following:

#### *Improved Funding*

The place of funds in providing functional and qualitative primary education across the nation cannot be overemphasized. This seems to be a significant challenge to the effective delivery of the primary education curriculum. Onwueme (2001) notes that education funding in Nigeria has been problematic over the years and

thus advocated for funding of primary education by the three tiers of government. Relatedly, Fafunwa (2001) argues that the Universal Basic Education covers non-literate Nigerians, which make up 45% of the population and school-age children, who represent 20% of the population. He thus suggests that 70% of the education budget should be allocated to primary education. According to him, a system that ignores primary education, which is the cornerstone of the entire educational system, will not have solid secondary or university education, nor will her economy or people progress, and as a result, they would be wrapped in poverty, ignorance, and disease. It could be inferred from Onwueme's and Fafunwa's submissions that poorly funded primary education stands the chance of towing towards the path of non-attainment of stated objectives which could stampede personal and societal development.

#### *Curriculum Review*

Corruption, youth unrest, political assassinations, rape, kidnapping, drug abuse, and the pursuit of easy money, among other moral issues in Nigeria, have necessitated the inclusion of subjects that will instill discipline and morality in primary school curriculum, which will be built upon at higher levels of education; the reason being that it will not be necessary for them later in life if they do not form the basis for their lives. The curriculum, being a powerful tool used by the school to actualize its educational objectives, needs to be reviewed so that there will not be a disconnect between what the curriculum offer and the needs of society. UNESCO (2008) suggests that in Africa, if young people are to live in a world distinguished by an explosion of new knowledge in science and technology, the curriculum must be updated. Corroborating this assertion, Ogbechie in Gbenu (2012) argues that the current curriculum in the nation's school system cannot produce knowledgeable, skilled, creative and globally competitive pupils that will feed the nation's university system. He thus suggests redesigning education to align with the challenges of the 21st century.

#### *Motivation of Teachers*

Motivation is a vital part of administration. It is one of the several ways people could be coordinated to put in their best efforts efficiently and effectively to achieve the organization's objectives. Nicolson (2009) defines motivation as a process of arousing enthusiasm in an employee to perform his or her duty with pleasure and high interest in pursuance of the organization and personal goals. Ibukun (1990) submits that when an individual feels maximally satisfied, he acts in a planned direction toward goal attainment. Chukwu (2003) equally reports that teachers need to be motivated using democratic leadership skills by the head teacher for a result-oriented school. Similarly, Adegbemile (2010) and Ngoka (2012) note that workers will be more productive if they have the opportunity to meet their needs while working in an organization.

The inference from the submissions of the above and several other scholars is that motivation is concerned with factors or events that move, lead, and drive specific human action towards attaining organizational goals. To this end, teachers should be well motivated to put in their best in imparting knowledge both in content and contexts to the pupils. For example, this could be achieved through prompt payment of their salaries, commending hard-working teachers and encouraging them to update their knowledge by attending conferences, seminars, in-service training, and others to be conversant with the innovative pedagogical approaches.

#### *Entrepreneurship Education*

Entrepreneurship education comprises imparting knowledge to students, learners, and potential entrepreneurs in business, the essential skills needed to start and run a business, and equipping trainees with those skills needed for taking responsibility and developing initiatives for prospective trainees. (Olofintoye & Fatoba, 2017). Abefe-Balogun (2012) believed that entrepreneurship education involves a dynamic process of creating wealth through creating

something new and accepting the risks and rewards that come with it. Observation, however, shows that primary education is so caught up with certification with little or no attention to the acquisition of skills. Entrepreneurial skills such as barbing, baking, tailoring, cake/soap making, shoemaking, weaving, and hat making, among others, equip people with the traits of creativity, innovation, self-reliance, and promotion of local technology; their introduction and practical implementation at the primary school level, therefore, becomes essential in order to overcome the challenge of the deteriorating economic situation and the resulting massive unemployment.

#### *Quality Assurance*

As the foundational level to other education systems, the subject of quality assurance is therefore sacrosanct. Oyewunmi and Fatoke (2015) affirm quality assurance as a total, holistic process concerned with ensuring the integrity of outcomes and which places the responsibility of quality with the factory (education) and thus expressed through its relationship with its customers. Arogundade and Belo (2019) sum it up that for primary education in Nigeria to be qualitative, it must be functional in content and context. Hence, the activities of primary school teachers and pupils should regularly be monitored by internal and external supervising agents.

#### *Change in Parents' Attitude*

There is no gainsaying that parents' involvement, particularly at tender ages, can positively or negatively affect the child's learning outcomes. As a result, if primary education is associated with personal and societal development and sustainability, some parents' unwillingness to cooperate with their children's education must alter. For example, some parents prefer engaging their children in economic ventures to providing them with the required facilities for their studies. Furthermore, some parents are unconcerned about instilling societal standards and values to serve as the foundation for their children's lives.

Attainment of qualitative education may be dicey if parents are unable and unwilling to perform their roles effectively.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has established that primary education is a springboard for sustainable development. There is, therefore, the need for virile educational programmes to enhance pupils' achievement in terms of improved learning and knowledge acquisition which would, in turn, facilitate their all-round development as a pre-requisite for sustainable development. Faulty primary education is therefore capable of frustrating the achievement of results at the primary and tertiary levels of education. It is therefore, time for critical actors in the education of primary school pupils to put up a functional and pragmatic primary education curriculum that will enhance sustainable development.

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**This article should be cited as:**

Belo, F.A.(2022). Primary Education: The Link to Sustainable Development. *Journal of Economic, Social and Educational Issues*, 2(2), 8-13.