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### **Local Government and Primary Education in Nigeria: An Overview**

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#### **Abstract**

Local government in Nigeria has constitutional responsibility in primary education; also, the state and federal government attend to all levels of education, including the primary education. Over the years, local and state governments have constituted the real actors in Nigeria primary education sector through the instrumentality of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). Constitutionally and financially, local governments remain major actors in primary education, but practically, it is SUBEB who manage schools through LGEA with little or no consultation to local government council, regardless of their huge contributions. The paper intends to look at these challenges and reemphasize the contribution of Local government to Primary Education. Using the secondary method of data collection in form of content analysis, the paper revealed that Local government has contributed immensely to the functioning of primary education, both in mandatory and concurrent capacities with the state government especially in payments of teacher's salary and allowances, provision of instructional materials, provision of classrooms and other infrastructures needed for the smooth running of primary education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that local governments remain the major actor and provider of primary education in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Primary Education, Local Government, UBEC, SUBEB, LGEA

#### **Introduction**

In the world over, education has become an essential commodity that determines the level of development or growth of any nation. It has become services that require the involvement of both the private and public sectors. The involvement of governments in education cut across all levels i.e., the primary, secondary and tertiary education. Basically, in Nigeria, local government has constitutional responsibility in primary education, while the state and federal government also has their responsibilities to perform succinctly in all levels of education. The three tiers of governments in Nigeria, needs to adequately address the issue of infrastructure, enrolment, planning and finance of primary education in order to achieve the cardinal objectives of primary education (Igidi, 2009).

Over the years, local and state government has constituted the real actors in Nigeria primary education especially in public service delivery. This is not farfetched from the fact that primary education remains primordial for every citizen, and it must be accessible to every citizens and local government serves as veritable instrument to social and economic development of the people at the grassroots. The 1976 Local Government Reforms in Nigeria gave the three-tier of government the onus for provision and maintenance of primary education. The present 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also stipulated that the Local Government should also embark on the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education in relation with State government. This is one of the cardinal areas where the state governments relate with local governments in the areas of education as service delivery. Lack of coordination among these tiers of government on strategic planning and budgeting has constituted a complication which most of the time resulted to duplication of functions, especially in providing some amenities to primary schools. ESSPIN (2009) similarly reported that duplication of effort and funding, lack of consensus between the different actors in primary education has brought about the inefficiencies experiencing in the sector.

Constitutionally, local government have responsibilities to discharge concerning primary education, but practically, it is State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) who manage schools through Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) with little or no consultation to local government council, regardless of their huge contributions to primary education in Nigeria. The paper intends to look at these challenges and reemphasise the contribution of Local government to Primary Education in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six parts. The first part deals with introduction, methodology is the second part, and the third part discusses essence of primary education, while the fourth part explores the historical perspective of education in Nigeria. The fifth part discusses the correlation between Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC), SUBEB, LGEA and Local Government Council. The sixth part analyses the challenges confronting Local Government on Primary Education in Nigeria. The last part presents recommendation and conclusion.

### **Methodology**

This research is basically on descriptive method. The secondary method of data collection in form of content analysis of documents, articles, records and academic research projects was adopted in this paper.

### **Essence of Primary Education**

Education is expansively considered and accepted as the path to economic prosperity in the world over. Kalusi (2001) also argued that any nation that failed to provide good education for its populace should not expect any rapid growth in their social and economic development, because sound and relevant education is the bedrock for any concrete development. Egberibin (2014) described education as a social service that provide template for development of manpower and enhancing the needed knowledge for economic and social development of a nation. Adesina (2011) saw education as a means of regulating the attitudes, wants, emotions and actions of a person by inculcating the necessary knowledge and understanding into that person. So also, Agbo (2007) opined that education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) and the Child Rights Act also described education as a fundamental human right for any citizens especially the Primary education. Jaiyeoba (2007) perceived education as a priority sector in every well-meaning society.

Education is majorly divided into three levels, globally as well as in Nigeria: the primary; secondary; and the tertiary education. The primary education serves as the foundational level of all other education by providing the basic knowledge and preparatory ground for further education. National Policy on Education (2004) described primary education as the education given to children between age 6 years to 11 plus.” Primary school remained the first institution apart from home that introduces socialization and formal education to the children (Asodike, 2008). In other words, primary school education still remains the bedrock which other level of education lies on. Primary education is very vital and fundamental to all types of education any person can receive in life (Alaba, 2010).

The National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) also established the six cardinal objectives of the Primary education in Nigeria which include;

1. “Inculcate permanent literacy numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively
2. Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking
3. Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity
4. Install social, moral norms and values in the child
5. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment
6. Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capability”.

Famade (2014) was of the opinion that the cardinal intentions of primary education are expected to produce two categories of Nigerians. The first are those who would contribute directly to the social, economy and political development of the nation through the acquiring the needed mentality, morality, and spirituality. The other categories are those who would be admitted to further in their post-primary education. The strength of basic education is folded with sole objectives of inculcating in young people the needed tools for inquiring, investigating, understanding and concluding events around them (Asodike & Ikpitibo, 2014). It is also pertinent to state that the three levels of education in Nigeria play a significant role in the socio-economic and political development of the nation. The tertiary and secondary educations are more peculiar to the State and Federal Governments while the local government participates with other tiers of governments in Primary education, especially with state government. Famade (2014) observes that Local governments in Nigeria are involved in funding education at the primary school level. Primary education as a foundational level of education needs to be well funded, controlled and managed (Olaniyan & Obadara, 2008). Investment in primary or basic education is a means to foster gender equality and sustained economic growth and reduce poverty (UNDP, 2005).

#### **Funding and Administration of Primary Education in Nigeria; Historical Perspective**

Western education came into the Nigeria territory through the European missionaries, in 1840s (Amaele, 2003). These various missionaries were responsible for the funding of these schools through donations and offerings. Between 1842 and 1872, primary education is being purely funded through charity. Subsequent to 1872 public interest in the funding of primary education came in gradually, upon the intervention of colonial government in assisting the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission and Wesleyan Methodist with the grants of thirty pounds being the three leading missions in the territory of Nigeria. This was later increased to three hundred pounds annually in 1874 and six hundred pounds in 1876 (Fafunwa, 1974).

Osokoya (1995) also affirmed that starting from 1882 the interest of colonial government in education began to increase, even beyond funding but, also in policies, which led to various education ordinance in 1882, 1887, 1916 and 1926. The period of 1901 to 1952 witnessed more of educational financing by the missionaries and voluntary agencies than the colonial government (Adesina 1977). Although the colonial administration expended various fund on education in the southern province, but much fund was released by the voluntary agencies. In the Northern Province, due to poor parental socio-economic background and attachment to Islamic culture which negate the western education, free school fees were extended to some pupils in the elementary schools. It took the innovation and diplomacy of Lord Lugard and others to inculcate the northerner to secular education programme.

Therefore, the education was jointly controlled and funded by both the colonial government and the emir at this period (Osokoya 1995). The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 empowered the three regions in Nigeria i.e. the Northern, Eastern and Western region to make laws on education within their jurisdiction. In 1955, the western region launched free and compulsory primary education while the eastern region launched their own free primary education in 1957. Prior to and after independence, funding of primary education became a regional affair.

It is pertinent to state that primary education in Nigeria has witnessed some structural changes. Asodike (2010) asserted that between the years 1926-1930 the duration of primary education was eight years and six years between 1930 and 1947. The 1951 primary education was split into two i.e junior and senior with eight years duration, four years of junior class (Infant 1, & 11; Standard 1 & 11) and four years of senior class (standard 111 & 1V). With the attainment of Nigeria independence in 1960, primary education became regional affairs with Eastern region adopted seven years, the Northern region also had seven with classification, four years of junior and three years of senior class, while the Western region opted for six year. The Federal Capital Territory then (Lagos) was not left out in these structural changes with adoption of eight years duration for primary education.

The clamor for government to take-over the schools from the missionaries and voluntary agencies got increasing day by day after independent so as to be able to revert the old system and to tailor it to meet the needs of the new nation. Adesina (1977) stated that: “absolute take-over of schools would improve their curriculum, teacher quality and centralized provision of instructional resources, minimize inequalities and provide a dynamic center of leadership for educational innovation”. The increment in these clamors, led to the government take-over of the schools both primary and secondary schools immediately after the civil war in 1970. In 1974, the military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon declared his interest in free primary education, but this was ousted by coup-d’état in 1975. His successor Late General Muritala Mohammed, also tried to make this idea a reality but was killed in a coup-d’état of 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo who succeeded Muritala Mohammed transformed the ideas to action in 1976. Afterward, primary education became free and compulsory in principle nationwide. Amaele (2006) stressed that, “history of universal free primary education in Nigeria has witnessed a lot of expansion and numerical growth of schools at the primary level, the quality has always been an issue of concern”. There seem not be a balance between increase and adequate funding to make for the desired quality.

Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was introduced in 1976 with six year of primary education, while Universal Basic Education (UBE) was equally introduced in 1999 and maintained the six years of primary education introduced by the UPE. These steps are being pursued because of the major roles of primary education in the development process of any nation. The UPE scheme radically expanded government involvement in primary education

especially in the areas finance and administration. The military Government of Obasanjo in 1976 took over the management of primary schools while the administration and funding was transferred to the state and Local Governments in 1979. As a result, different management and funding arrangements were made by different states during this period. With the inception of the second republic in 1979, the Federal government withdrew its direct subsidy for primary education and transferred the responsibility to local governments which led to another policy summersault across the states of the federation which was later corrected by Babangida led military administration in 1986, by making direct grants to local government for primary education in their various jurisdiction. Presently, the fear of transferring the responsibility of primary education to local government pervaded the position of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) on granting some additional autonomy agitating for local government in Nigeria. This fear is condensed to the fact that local government might not be financially viable to take care of all responsibilities in the confines of primary education, including teacher's salary and other allowances.

Another innovation of Babangida military administration in primary education was the establishment of the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) in 1988 to manage the affair of primary education. It was later scrapped in 1991, and with these, Local Government continued to enjoy their dominance on primary education. In August, 1993, NPEC was re-established at the national level, with the composition of State Primary Education Board (SPEB) at the state level and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) at the local government levels, and they were once again in control of primary education in Nigeria. The LGEA was in charge of day-to-day administration of primary schools in its area of jurisdiction, while, the SPEB was to oversee the activities of LGEAs in their various state. The NPEC was to coordinate SPEBs in all the states of the Federation.

With the inception of fourth republic in 1999, the federal government introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE) to replace the existing Universal Primary Education (UPE). Though, they are similar in many indications, but in addition it also accommodated children from primary school through junior secondary school. Responsibilities are assigned to all three tiers of government i.e. federal, state and local government. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at the national, the creation of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) at the state level and LGEA at the local government level, retained their nomenclature and their functions.

#### **Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Local Government Council; The Correlation**

UBEC was established by the Federal government in 1999 to coordinate the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme at the states and local government through the SUBEB of each state and LGEAs in various local government of the federation. They also serve as regulatory agency for promotion of uniformity, qualitative and functional basic education across the nation. They are also established to progressively improve capacities of States and Local Governments Agencies and Communities so as to achieve unfettered access to high quality of basic education, particularly on the usage of 2% consolidated revenue. This fund is periodically released to finance primary education in the country, through the appropriate authorities. UBEC deals directly with SUBEB in each state of the federation, and SUBEBs in various states now reallocate to LGEAs in their states. More so, UBEC also distribute educational materials to primary school across the nation, with the coordination of SUBEBs down to LGEAs in various states of the federation which in turn distribute these materials to the schools as final users

### **State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Local Government Council; The Correlation**

Each local government council in the federation contributes a huge percentage of the funding of primary schools in their areas of jurisdiction (Egberibin, 2014). It is estimated that more than 80% of the funds for primary education in Nigeria came from the local government's allocation derived from the federation accounts. The federal government provides about 2% percentage from consolidated funds, while the state government's contributions appeared to have around 10-23%, (World Bank, 2003). The deduction from statutory allocation of local government to State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) account are majorly used for the payment of primary school teachers' salaries, while the state governments take responsibility for salaries of secondary schools. In other words, local government is responsible for the payment of primary school teacher salaries (Olaniyan & Obadara, 2008). They perform these functions under the supervision and coordination of SUBEB in their various states. National Policy on Education (FRN 2004) also welcomes the contribution of voluntary agencies, communities, and private individuals in the establishment and management of primary schools alongside those provided by the state and local governments. Local governments also support SUBEB in renovation of classrooms and provision instructional materials most of the time.

### **Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and Local Government Council: The Correlation**

It is pertinent to state that Local Government Education Authorities came into existence through the military, decree 3 of 1991 to manage and fund primary education in their areas of jurisdiction. (Nwosu, 2005). They are responsible for the day to day administration of primary school education in their areas of jurisdiction. Ogbonnaya (2010) also affirms that, they are responsible for the employment of teaching and non teaching staff on grade levels 01-06, payment of salaries of both teaching and non-teaching staff, distribution of school equipment, furniture, registers, dairies, chalk, and dusters among others to primary schools. They are also responsible for deployment, promotion and transfer of teaching and nonteaching staff, handle disciplinary problems of staff of primary schools within their areas of jurisdiction.

This decree 3 of 1991, authorized every local governments through its Education Authorities to manage and fund primary education particularly in regards to recruitment of teachers and non- teaching staff on grade level 01-06 into the teaching service in their areas of jurisdiction as well as payment of their salaries and allowances (Nwosu, 2005).

The Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) perform some responsibilities under the directive of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) which include: payment of salaries, acquisition and distribution of instructional materials, payment of allowances to both teaching and non-teaching staff, preparation of annual estimates and monthly returns, maintenance of school buildings and promoting and encouraging community participation in its area of jurisdiction (SUBEB 2005). Local government also assists LGEA with funds according to local priorities, being the closest government to the populace. NPE (2008), also believed that LGEAs are expected to oversee basic education on behalf of local government council, although they are under the administrative control of SUBEB. The relationship between the Local Government Council and LGEA imitate that of SUBEB and Local Government Council (ESSPIN, 2009). The LGEA manages schools and teachers in their jurisdictions, and Local Government Council assists with funds according to the needs of the populace at the grassroots level.

### **Challenges of Local Government on Primary Education in Nigeria**

Local governments in Nigeria have their mandatory functions and concurrent functions with other tiers of government particularly with the state government, in the areas of primary education. It was also established that all the three tiers of government in Nigeria including the local government have the responsibilities in primary education. Though, local and state governments are more responsible for primary education and at the same time, still received some 2% of consolidated funds support from the federal government. At the same time, in ascertain the differences between state and local government projects especially in primary education was evident in the areas of financing and inscription on the such project (Odewale, 2018).

Local government has contributed immensely to the functioning of primary education, both in mandatory and concurrent capacities with the state government. The challenge here is that state government had hijacked the primary education from the local government with the instrumentality of UBEC, SUBEB, and LGEA, which are more accountable to the state government, but in the real sense of it local government accommodate the major expenses which include the salaries, allowances and benefits, pension, etc in more of concurrent functions with the state government on platform and template of SUBEB and LGEA (Odewale, 2018). This is also in tandem with the assertion of World Bank (2003) which stated that it is estimated that more than 80% of the funds of primary education in Nigeria came from local governments allocation derived from federation accounts. This is also in confirmation of Olaniyan and Obadara (2008) that the deductions from local government allocation, which is channeled to SUBEB account, are used for primary school teachers' salaries, pensions, training and other expenses. Egberibin (2014) further affirmed this revelation by saying that each local government council in the federation contributes a huge percentage of the funding of primary schools in their areas of jurisdiction. More so, another plight encounter by local government in the area of primary education delivery, were not farfetched from not accord them the necessary accolade. This was evident in the area of improper or inadequate inscriptions or description of such projects, for instance the classrooms built by local government (through the executive or legislature constituency project), state government (through executive or legislature constituency project) or SUBEB are bound to be clearly inscribed so as know the provider of such project. These kinds of projects could be seen in virtually all the schools across the country (Odewale, 2018). Another fear expressed by the primary school teachers across the federation over the years through the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) is the viability of local government to cater for primary school teachers' salaries talk-less of be in-charge of the totality of primary education in the country.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Since primary education has been identified as the foundation in which all other stages of education are built, its funding should be considered as important issue to all the tiers of governments. There is also need for federal government to increase the consolidated funds to primary education through UBEC from 2% to at least 5% so as for primary education to be accessible to all and be free indeed to all and sundry.

Education including primary education should continue to be concurrent functions to all the tiers of government and at the same time, local government should be strengthened in performing their functions due to the fact that they are the closest to the populace.

Relationship between the tiers of government especially state and local government should move away from master/ servant relationship to that of partners in progress in delivery

concurrent functions particularly in primary education delivery. Necessary accolade should be accorded each tier of government proportionally.

Local government should have a way of given subvention to private primary school in their jurisdictions, so as make all pupils to benefit from government intervention in one way or the other.

This study concluded that local government remain the major actor and provider of primary education in Nigeria, and at the same time they deserve the necessary accolade from other tiers of government especially the state government who deprive them of such in the sight of the citizenry.

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