

Education

Demand and Supply of Teachers for Primary Schools in the 21st Century Nigeria

M.O. Omo-Ojugo, Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria

Abstract

How to ensure Nigerians have access to Universal Basic Education has often attracted the attention of some States and Federal Government of Nigeria since 1955. Several factors, bordering on supply of teachers, facilities, finance have constrained implementation of well fashioned policies. Demand and supply of teachers for primary schools have serious consequences on the implementation of primary school education in Nigeria.

This paper explores the demand and supply of teachers for primary schools in the 21st century in Nigeria especially with the introduction of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria and attempts to ensure the attainment of United Nations Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015.

Introduction

Several World bodies', organizations and agencies, to which Nigeria belongs, have had course to set targets at one time or the other for the development of Primary education. The United Nations Organization and its agencies such as the UNESCO, UNICEF have set targets for countries of UNO, to democratize and universalize primary education. Nigeria is also a member of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Council for Africa (ECA). All of these bodies including the Commonwealth of Nations have aimed at achieving universal primary education for their citizens. For instance, UNESCO (1995) had set 2000 as the year for achieving Education for All (EFA), which was a major focus on primary and basic education. Also, UNICEF has set Millennium Goals for members of the UNO to achieve Education for All by the year 2015 – with emphasis on the compulsory provision of primary school education for both boys and girls.

Various governments at all levels and at different times in Nigeria, have shown very keen interest in education. It is relevant to state that the following have been attempts at both State and Federal levels in Nigeria to introduce universal primary education:

- (i) Introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Western Region in 1955;
- (ii) Introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Eastern Region in 1957;
- (iii) Introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Lagos (former Federal Territory) in 1957;

- (iv) A National Policy on Education blue-print, produced in 1977, aimed at Universal and qualitative education;
- (v) Introduction of Universal free primary Education (UPE) in 1976; and
- (vi) Introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) aims at achieving the following specific objectives:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropouts from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency).
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision of basic education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The universalisation of basic education is in keeping with the requirements of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the educational objectives of which are as follows:

...“Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate opportunities at all levels”.

...“Government shall eradicate illiteracy and to this end, Government shall as when practicable provide: Free, compulsory and universal primary education; Free secondary education; Free University education; and Free adult literacy programme;

Implications of Universal Basic Education for Teachers Education:

According to Obanya (2000) the UBE programme is intended to be “universal, free and compulsory”. This means that appropriate types of opportunities have to be provided for the basic education of every Nigerian child of school – going age. Parents/guardians are to ensure that children in their care go to school. Appropriate sanctions are also to be imposed on persons, societies, or institutions that prevent children/adolescents and youths from benefiting from UBE.

The UBE has the implication to encourage the provision of facilities for early childhood care and socialization, with due attention given to the needs of specific social groups and geographical zones of the country, bearing in mind the need to lay a solid foundation of life-long learning right from early childhood.

In seeking to achieve the objectives of the UBE, Government says, rigorous efforts will be made to counter the factors which are known to have hindered the achievement of the goals of the UPE programme put in place two decades ago. Among the strategies envisaged is, teachers, their recruitment, education, training, retraining and motivation”. In other words, the “teacher factor” has always been a major issue in

whether an educational programme is successful or not.

Demands of Teachers for Primary Education:

UNICEF (2005) reports that about 7.3 million Nigerian children are out of school. The report indicates that disproportionate percentages of the children are girls who constitute about 60% due largely to traditional practices and prejudices ranged against girl child education in a “patriarchal milieu”

Dike (2002) has noted that the Federal Government reported that the falling standard of education in Nigeria is caused by “acute shortage of qualified teachers in the primary school level.” It is reported, according to the same author, that about 23 percent of the over 400,000 teachers employed in the nation’s primary school do not possess the Teachers’ Grade Two Certificate, even when the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) is the minimum educational requirement one should possess to teach in the nation’s primary schools.

Also, UNICEF report on “state of the world’s children” (1999) states that about four million Nigerian children have no access to basic education. Akhaine in Dike (2002) has also noted that the majority of children who are ‘lucky’ to enter schools are given sub-standard education by ‘half-baked’ teachers employed to teach at the primary schools in Nigeria.

From available statistics, (see Table I below), it is obvious that many teachers are needed for the nation’s primary schools if any meaning would be made of the UBE programme. The teacher factor, thus, becomes a very critical one. It is on record that many educational programmes and projects have failed mainly because they did not take the “teacher factor” into account. Although the Government says it is committed to ensuring the success of UBE and the teachers will therefore always be an integral part of the process of its conceptualization, planning and execution, it is generally known that many schools do not have the required number of qualified teachers. Moreover, such factors like poverty, distance from school location, lack of infrastructural development, child abuse, funding and insufficient number of schools have created obvious obstacles in denying children access to education.

Table I: Public Primary School Teachers By Zones And States In Nigeria (2006/2007)

S/N	Zone	Public Primary Schools	Teachers	Qualified Teachers	Unqualified Teachers	% Qualified Teachers
	North Central					
1	Mina					
	Fct	301	5825	5252	573	90.2%
	Kogi	1613	10574	10501	73	99.3%
	Kwara	1288	5349	3335	2014	62.3%
	Niger	1512	16,717	11,084	5633	66.3%
	Total	4714	38,465	30,172	8293	78.4%
2	Jos Zone					
	Benue	2363	23148	21111	2037	91.2%
	Nasarawa	981	6943	3424	3519	49.3%
	Plateau	1534	7963	6123	1840	76.9%
	Total	4878	38054	30658	7396	80.6%
	North East					
3	Yola Zone					
	Adamawa	1315	21762	14741	7021	67.7%
	Gombe	942	9428	6551	2877	69.5%
	Taraba	1425	18739	13097	5651	69.9%
	Total	3,683	49,929	34,389	15,540	68.9%
4	Maiduguri					
	Bauchi	1145	21172	17783	3389	84.0%
	Borno	1215	7172	5727	1445	79.9%
	Yobe	777	11401	8400	3001	73.7%
	Total	3137	39,745	31918	7835	80.3%
	North West					
5	Kaduna					
	Jigawa	1489	12683	7015	5668	55.3%
	Kaduna	1682	20303	11416	8887	56.2%
	Kano	2270	16865	11215	5650	66.5%
	Katsina	1813	14,045	8,694	5351	61.7%
	Total	7254	63896	38340	25556	61.5%

6	Sokoto					
	Kebbi	992	10946	5763	5183	52.6%
	Sokoto	2088	9662	5713	3949	59.1%
	Zamfara	831	7099	4882	2217	68.8%
	Total	4589	27,707	16,358	11,349	59.1%
	South-East					
7	Owerri					
	Abia	1114	14273	12119	2154	84.9%
	Imo	1220	13271	13041	230	98.3%
	Total	2,334	27544	25,160	2384	91.3%
8	Enugu					
	Anambra	1501	12956	12796	160	98.8%
	Ebonyi	754	5914	3964	1950	67.0%
	Enugu	1015	12733	12511	222	98.3%
	Total	3,270	31,603	29,271	2,332	92.6%
	South-South					
9	Uyo					
	Akwa Ibom	1092	14543	14376	167	98.9%
	Cross-River	807	14260	11264	2996	79.0%
	Rivers	1027	21000	17100	3900	81.3%
	Total	2,926	49,803	42,740	7,063	85.8%
10	Benin					
	Bayelsa	496	6311	4647	1664	73.6%
	Delta	1015	20795	20795	-	100.0%
	Edo	1034	1499	1436	63	95.8%
	Total	2545	28,605	26,878	1727	94.0%
	South West					
11	Akure					
	Ekiti	631	10794	10545	249	97.7%
	Ondo	1129	13905	13811	94	99.3%
	Osun	1348	13323	13323	-	100.0%
	Total	3108	38022	37679	343	99.1%
12	Lagos					
	Lagos					
	Ogun	2210	35983	34399	1584	95.6%
	Oyo	1309	16627	16430	197	98.8%
		1849	28405	27992	413	98.5%
	Total	5365	81015	78821	2194	97.8%
	Grand Total	47,803	514,388	422,384	92,012	82.1%

Source: Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria Vol. 1., No 3 (2007).

Supply of Teachers for Primary Education

Having established the fact that teachers are demanded for primary education in Nigeria, the next question one would like to ask, is, what type of teachers should be supplied for the system. In order to have well-trained, responsible citizens who shall be able to face the modern socio-economic and technological challenges of life, one should have in place good quality trained teachers, especially as it is often acknowledged that “no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers”

The need to raise the present level of general education of teachers and the level of their initial professional preparation, broadened and intensified in the 21st century, becomes relevant and of utmost importance, because it is now a common knowledge among academics, parents, government and the general public, that the quality and standard of education in Nigeria, has fallen. This is mainly evident from the products of Nigerian Universities.

In 2001, the World Bank and the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) Ibadan, produced a grim report on the Nigerian graduate which has confirmed the fears of educators, parents, employers of labour and the general public about the degeneration of the country's education. The report revealed that the average graduate who leaves a University or Polytechnic with a degree or certificate is not worth the qualification, which he is supposed to have. The report concluded by saying that the average Nigerian graduate lacks technical skills, has a poor command of English language, the principal mode of communication in the country and that the Nigerian graduate is largely unemployable. In other words, such half-baked products, notes the report, are unfit for the labour market and, by extension, the society at large.

Omo-Ojugo (2005) has also noted the general concern in developing countries, like Nigeria, that students at all levels lack the basic reading skills in order to properly function in a world where information is rapidly increasing and knowledge becoming much more complex. For instance, while much attention is given to the teaching of reading in literate countries such as the United States of America, Canada and Britain, etc, little, or no importance is attached to the teaching of Reading in Nigeria.

It is no wonder then that Nigerian students do not generally perform well in most public examinations. Almost every year, Chief Examiners Reports for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) highlight the abysmal poor performance of students at the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations. Added to this poor performance at these public examinations, is the widespread vice of examination malpractice – which is indicative of poor and inadequate preparation for examination. When students have not read widely and thoroughly and have not been well-prepared for examination, the tendency would be to turn to short-cuts and sharp practices in order to pass examinations, Omo-Ojugo (2005). A major fall out of this phenomenon is that many students who find their ways to Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc are unable to function academically and properly in such tertiary institutions.

If the consequence of the above scenario is to be reversed, in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century, Nigeria must therefore, begin by giving greater attention to our pre-school, primary, secondary and vocational schools. These areas constitute the building blocks of any society's educational foundation. We need to supply both enough quantity and quality teachers for primary school education in Nigeria. Once the desired foundation has been laid by a well-trained quality teacher, the Nigerian child will certainly aspire to other levels equipped with a capacity to meet and deal with 'life challenges.

In the 21st century, education is sure to be the key to new global knowledge and technology – driven – economy. It is only education that can provide us with the opportunity to overcome many of the obstacles, which impede our social and economic transformation.

Attention should, therefore, be focused on the supply of quality teachers for primary school education who will be able to teach and equip our children with the opportunities they need to optimize their potentials and contribute to the growth and development of the society and humanity.'

Teachers for the 21st Century: The Way Forward:

Virtually all countries of the world are bracing up for the challenges of modern life. Nigeria should not be an exception. Highly effective schools and improved student/pupil outcomes should be key objectives of Government. This is because education of the highest quality is the foundation for the future of the country. Education, is it, that empowers any nation to rise to the challenges of social, cultural, economic and technological change. If improving pupils outcomes is the desired focus, then efforts should be geared at improving also the quality of teachers so that they can be much more effective in their work.

Education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality. Research has shown that a highly skilled and professional teaching force does, and will continue, to make a difference. Teachers have the vital role to impart knowledge and skills to young children.

There is, thus, the need for the Government to review and overhaul the curriculum for Teacher education at the primary and other levels of education in order to meet the expectations of 21st century Nigerians. There is the urgent need to lift the skills of practicing teachers in literacy, numeracy, mathematics, science, information technology and vocational education in schools.

Nigeria, is at the present, in a complex and professionally demanding environment for teachers' work. This is mainly because of the revolution in information and communication technologies for which the majority of Nigerian teachers have not been adequately prepared.

Attainment of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) goals requires a high quality teaching workforce. Research supports the common sense view that high quality teachers are the foundation of highly effective schools. Confirming this view, in its report

What Matters Most: Teaching For America's Future, the US National Commission on Teaching and America's Future states clearly that "In terms of student achievement, the teacher is a more significant factor than any other kind of school resource," (1996). It has also been discovered that "teacher quality variables appear to be more strongly related to student achievement" Darling – Hammond (1999).

Professor Peter Hill who led an Australian Research Project (A Study of School and Teacher Effectiveness: Results from the first phase of the Victorian Quality Schools Project, 1993) found that teacher effectiveness was the key to improve educational outcomes and suggested that it was "primarily through the quality of teaching that effective schools make a difference"

In order to have quality teachers for the school system both the Federal and State Governments should embark on Quality Teacher Programmes as a matter of urgency. Active participation in high quality teacher professional development is a key element in improving pupil outcomes. If the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) is to be the minimum qualification for teaching in the nation's primary school system, all efforts must therefore be put in place to raise the quality of products from the various Colleges of Education. Programmes in these Colleges should be revamped to ensure skilled teacher production.

Student teachers in these Colleges should have access to the latest research in teaching methods. As part of Quality Teacher Programme, continuous professional development of teachers should be put in place. Such a programme will afford teachers in our school system to participate in refresher courses during the holidays. This will enable teachers to be equipped to respond to changes in teaching methods. Teachers need to update and improve their knowledge and skills.

The development of professional standards and certification of teachers are means of improving the quality of teaching and enhancing the professional standing of teachers. It is a good thing that the Federal Government has in place a Teacher's Registration Council. The Council has the power to sanction all unqualified teachers. It is only hoped that with adequate funding and committal, the Council will professionalise teaching in Nigeria and ensure required standards in terms of skills and intellectual capacity are maintained. The long awaited Teachers Salary Scale should be implemented to attract intelligent people into the profession and encourage those who are already teaching to raise up their heads anywhere with pride.

We have stated the all important prominence of the teacher-factor in any meaningful educational programme. Teachers serve as catalysts for the intellectual, socio-economic, scientific, technological, cultural, etc growth and development of any society. There is a high demand of teachers in the nation's primary school system. This demand can only be met if the Government is willing to live up to the challenges and ready to move the country along the right path of development in the 21st century. All of this requires funding, committal, focus and constant evaluation so that Nigerian children should be well equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Only recently, Thursday 8th September, 2005, the Vanguard Newspaper, reported that the United Nations has ranked Nigeria the 20th poorest nation in the world. Of the 177 nations ranked according to levels of prosperity, 20 were all in the sub-Saharan Africa – evidence of the grim plight of the continent. Specifically, Nigeria occupies the 158th position among the 177 ranked nations. Continuing the paper reported that AIDS had hit Africa hard: "In 2004, an estimated three million people died from the virus world wide With 70 per cent of them in Africa. On current indicators a child born in Zambia today has less chance of surviving past 30 than a child born in 1840 in England".

Exposure of young children to primary education will certainly wipe out the prevailing ignorance, which endangers the health-care delivery systems in Nigeria and Africa. With dedication and good utilization of Nigeria's endowed natural resources, the Government should be able to cope without strains the education for all citizens, which will demand for and supply of more teachers. Corruption, which is the bane of this nation, should be wiped out to ensure the necessary funds for educational growth are more available in the 21st century. We commend the Federal Government for embarking on a Universal Basic Education (UBE). It should be vigorously pursued and actualized in order to make primary school education worthwhile in the 21st century.

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