

UDC:373.3.014.2(662.6)

## **BASIC ISSUES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION DELIVERY IN NIGERIA**

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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. This massive expansion has been possible by the infusion of large sums of monetary allocation to primary education. Although the functionality of this level of education is not doubted, in addition to the structural changes made to improve the system, it has been saddled with problems ranging from issues of enrolment, funding, infrastructure, teaching personnel and curriculum provisions. This paper discusses the functionality of primary education and some of the structural changes made to meet the demands of the society. Furthermore, it highlights the earlier identified issues as they affect primary education delivery in Nigeria.

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**Keywords:** Primary education, Nigeria

## 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. As such in September 2000, eight goals known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at meeting the needs of the world's poorest people was reached (UNDP, 2005). The eight goals, which are to be met in partnership with the world's leading development institutions by the target date of 2015, are to:

Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty.

Achieve universal primary education.

Promote gender equality and empower women.

Reduce child mortality.

Improve maternal health.

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Ensure environmental sustainability.

Develop a global partnership for development

The inclusion of universal primary education emphasizes the importance of primary education in the development process of every nation.

There is no doubt that primary education is a panacea for solving problems such as ignorance, illiteracy, religious violence, insecurity and political servitude. An educated Nigerian is capable of making a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous country possible. 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 at different points in a little more than half a century to make primary education free and declare it universal and compulsory. 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 Nigeria. It reflects on its 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 education delivery in Nigeria.

### **Functionality of Primary Education**

Fafunwa (1974, p.187) stated that the aims of primary education in all the states of the federation were to help the child to:

Master the three Rs – Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, this is to develop permanent Literacy.

Develop sound standards of individual conduct and behaviour.

Acquire some skills and appreciate the value of manual work.

The issues of primary education can be considered in terms of its broad based functions to the society (FRN, 1986, p.11). An essential function of primary education is effective communication skills that will enable the pupils to be relevant to the social and economic development of the nation. This important function is aimed at providing a literate population and to lay down the foundation for further education in terms of secondary and higher education.

Similarly, in a world of competition, human beings are constantly in a struggle for scarce resources at every available opportunity. Primary education plays a functional role by laying the academic and moral foundation for creating better opportunities for young people; ensuring that they have necessary reading and writing skills that they will need in the society. Children learn the foundational skills in literacy and mathematics; they also receive instruction in science, social studies, and art, music, physical education, and computer education. These subjects are necessary in other for Nigerian children to be successful at the secondary and higher levels of education.

Primary education is the Nigerian child's stepping-stone to pursue higher academic and social goals. The academic block in Nigeria has a broad base at the primary stage and tapers towards the top at the tertiary stages. Therefore, children that are able to undergo primary education have a better probability of continuing up to secondary school and to tertiary institution if they so desire. In doing so, the child can have an opportunity to find and

secure a better job than a child that fails to attain primary education. This highlights another functional issue of primary education in Nigeria

The primary level of education has the largest enrolment, followed by the secondary level and tertiary level. Primary education is a very vital component of Nigeria education system sector that deserves handling with great care and caution. Any error in the provision, distribution, and utilization of resources at this level of education may reverberate on other levels and thus seriously jeopardizing the growth of the other arms that feed from it. In addition, primary education sets the foundation for tackling more difficult academic task. Illustratively, a child's educational career is like a building. The first six years (primary education) form the foundation on which the whole building stands and each level thereafter that is another addition. The strength and security of the building depends on how strong that foundation is and its size is determined by the level of education attained. Conversely, if the foundation is weak, it will not be able to support the elevating floors. Most teachers would agree that students who have trouble in those first years of primary school have a hard time with educational tasks at other levels of education.

In other to benefit from these functions of primary education, the Federal, State and Local Governments must meet its obligations; the Nigerian government needs to adequately address the issues of finance, enrolment, infrastructure and planning (Igidi, 2009). For this reason there has to be a proper understanding of these identified issues for efficiency and effectiveness of this level of education. Otherwise, the nine years of free and compulsory education provided for in the Universal Basic Education Act could amount to nine years of mere attendance and failure with no concrete achievements.

In view of this functional issue, Asodike (2008) stated that regardless of the failure of the UPE, the Nigerian government still introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which was launched in Sokoto, on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999. The programme was designed in such a way that learners were meant to acquire functional literacy, communication skills and vocational education. UBE programme was structured to be basically free and compulsory to all children between the ages of six to twelve and the provision of free uniforms, books and free lunch. The UBE programme is monitored by Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The law establishing UBEC stipulates a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programmes and the education of the special group such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women,

Almajiri, street children and disabled. Parents were required to avail the children within this age group with the opportunity of free and compulsory education or face penalties.

### **Structural Changes**

In order to meet the societal demands, primary education has witnessed some structural changes. Tracing these changes, Asodike (2010) reports that the duration of primary education during the period 1926-1930 was eight years and six years in 1930-1947. In 1951 constitution, it was split into two- junior and senior, while in 1952, it was eight years duration- four years of junior primary (Infant 1, & 11; Standard 1 & 11) and four years of senior primary ( standard 111 & 1V). With the attainment of independence in 1960, the different Regional governments adopted various systems. While the Eastern region adopted seven years, the Northern region also had seven but with four years of junior and three years of senior primary. The Western region and the Federal capital territory were not left out in these structural changes. The former adopted six years while the later had eight years of primary education. In 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was introduced with six year of primary education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced in 1999 maintained six years of primary education.

These steps are being pursued because of the vital function and importance primary education plays in the development process of the nation. But it is essential to state that in order to ensure that these plans and programmes succeed, there has to be an accurate statistical data on the number of applicants and participant in primary education in the country. Without a precise enrolment figure annually, it will be impossible to accurately determine human and material requirements of the system and consequently planning will be difficult.

### **Enrolment Issues**

About 45% of the population are youths, many of whom are within the primary school age group. This means that over 20 million Nigerian children are within the primary school age. According to the FRN/UNDP (2003), in 1998 there were 41,814 primary schools with an enrolment of 16,348,324 (13.75% of these were females) and 468,770 teachers (26.45% of these were non-qualified teachers). In 2005, the enrolment figure was estimated to be about 24,422,918, out of which 13,302,262 are males and 11,120,649 are females, with the number of primary schools estimated at 87,941. The teacher/pupil ratio (TPR) at the level was 1:38 while the completion rate was 64.1 percent and the transition rate was 39.1 percent

(to Junior Secondary Education). And based on the provisions of National Policy on Education, this is the corresponding age group for primary education. The pattern of enrolment from 1995 to 2004 into the various educational levels is indicated in percentages is shown on table 1.

**Table 1: Pattern of Enrolment Ratios in Public Primary, Secondary and Higher Education**

LEVEL/YEAR	1995 (%)	2000 (%)	2004 (%)
Primary Education	93.3	95.5	99.2
Secondary Education	32.0	24.2	34.6
Higher Education	4.3	6.6	10.2

Source: Survey of ICT and education in Africa.

Table 1 shows that primary education has as expected, consistently had the highest level of enrolment over a period of nine years, from 1995 to 2004. In 1995 the enrolment ratio was 93.3% and it increased to 99.2% in 2004. This shows that the population of entrants into primary education has been on a steady rise. Secondary education only increased from 32% to 34.6% in nine years, while higher education increased from 4.3% to 10.2% within the same period. This is a clear indication of the huge number of children that enrolled into primary schools all over Nigeria annually. Also from the table 1 it is clear that the enrolment ratio into primary education over a period of about a decade is far greater than secondary and higher education levels combined.

Therefore, government's financial contribution to primary education in Nigeria should be extensively considered, since it is the level with the highest enrolment ratio in the country. There is also noticeable huge gender imbalance in terms of female enrolment which is far lower than males. This gap in primary school enrolment is of course not just a matter of access, but parents' demand for education of their daughters is low reflecting both cultural and religious norms as girls work in and around the home. Literate parents are more likely than illiterate ones to enroll their daughters in schools. So States with the highest proportions of illiterate adults are obviously those with the widest gender gaps. Overcoming the gender gap will therefore require not only providing more school places for girls but also overcoming many parents' ignorance of gains that will accrue from enrolling their female children.

## Funding Issues

Ebong (2006) indicated that financial resources are made of monetary inputs into a system such as the education system. They act as a lubricant for the system (primary education) and without these financial resources programmes cannot be properly planned and policies implemented. Hitherto, without availability of funds and proper management to carry out any work at the primary level any plans of transformation are bound to fail. Funding issues in primary education plays a crucial role in determining the level of success, development and change. It also helps to direct attention towards the achievement of set goals at all levels of education. Adequate funding entails a timely supply of funds, qualified teachers, administrators and infrastructural facilities to ensure success in any organization.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) states that education is an industry that attract huge capital outlay. Primary education is a social service that requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of Government for proper execution of educational programmes, schemes and policies. After independence, a system of grants and aids were devised in the financing of primary education, but this method of funding was flawed and bastardized with problems. Therefore, in the early 1970's a method that considered enrolment option was adopted in the funding of primary education in Nigeria, with the aim of improving the quality of education. Unfortunately, it failed to specify the exact amount each tier of government was required to allocate to primary education in the country thereby causing a huge problem in terms of funding. Since each tier wasn't constitutionally required to allocate a fixed amount to primary education they disbursed what they deemed adequate and affordable. Table 2 shows tiers of government funding to the various levels of education.

**Table 2: Estimated allocation of education expenditure across levels of education by each tier of government, 1998 (percentages).**

TIER	Total	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Tertiary (%)
<i>Federal</i>	<b>100</b>	16.9	14.6	68.4
<i>State</i>	<b>100</b>	9	63.9	27.1
<i>Local</i>	<b>100</b>	100	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	35.6	29	35.4

**Source:** Keith Hinchliffe (2002) Public expenditures on education Nigeria; issues, estimates and some implications, Africa Region Human Development Working Paper.

Table 2 shows the Federal Government allocation to the various educational levels. In 1998 was a total of 23.668 million naira out of which 68.4% was allocated to higher education, while primary education received 16.9% and secondary education received 14.6%. While the State Government allocated a total of 23.555 million naira, the highest proportion of this 63.9% was allocated to secondary education, 27.2% was allocated to higher education and 9% was allocated to primary education. Local Governments allocated a total of 16.627 million naira to just primary education in 1998. Thus in 1998, primary education level received the second largest amount of money from the three tiers of government combined.

The federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10% of its overall expenditures. For instance, between 1997 and 2002, the total share to education in federal expenditure budget ranged between 9.8% and 7.5% with the trend showing a downward plunge as shown on table 3 (World Bank, 2002). The current trend of investment within the education sector is such that the tertiary level gets the largest share while the primary level gets the least. This pattern is inversely related to number of institutions, enrolment and teachers at the different educational levels. Table 3 presents the data on the pattern of funding of the educational levels by the Federal government.

**Table 3: Pattern of Federal Government funding of Education at all levels (1996 – 2002).**

Education Levels/Year	1996 %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %	2001 %	2002 %
<i>Tertiary</i>	79.9	78.9	68.4	69.1	75.8	68.1	76.9
<i>Secondary</i>	10.4	11.3	14.6	18.7	15.3	15.5	15.6
<i>Primary</i>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: World Bank (2003); Preparing for UBE.

From the table 3, it is obvious that primary education is significantly underfunded. In fact, the funds allocated to this level has dropped from 16.4% in 2001 to 7.5% in 2002 (over 50% fall), while funds allocated to the tertiary level went up from 68.1% in 2001 to 76.9% in 2002. This shows that the funding issues of primary education is in two-folds; an absence of a precise funding source and poor funds allocation to this level of education. These problems make it impossible to improve on the standard of primary education in the country.



### **Teaching Personnel Issues**

Following the directives by the Federal Government that the minimum teaching qualification shall be the National Certificate in Education (FRN, 2004), teachers have seized the opportunities of part time programmes offered by National Teachers' Institute (NTI), and sandwich or long vacation programmes organized by different Faculties of Education in tertiary institutions to improve on their academic qualifications. Improved qualification notwithstanding teachers still operate under very pathetic conditions such as overcrowded classrooms, wide variations in age and with little or no materials for teaching. Most worry of course is the fact that some of these teachers are still ill equipped to cope with such situations. Teachers need to be empowered with skills which will enable them identify their own problems (administrative or pedagogical) and seek solutions to these problems (Chimombo, 2005).

### **Curriculum Issues**

Education reforms all over the world is increasingly curriculum based, as mounting pressures for education to meet the demands of the society tend to target and focus on content of school curriculum (Moreno, 2006). The objectives of changes are to ensure all round education for learners. The curriculum provisions are immense and profound for school teaching and learning. At primary level ten subjects are taken. Two of these ten subjects- agriculture and home economics are to be deferred to later years of primary schools. Recently, there have been clamour for the inclusion of new subjects that target topical/global issues such as environmental education, civics and moral education, and sexuality education in the primary school curriculum.

### **Infrastructural Issues**

Physical facilities play important role in teaching and learning especially at the primary school age when the sense of imagination is still premature. The availability of adequate school building, classrooms, chairs and other facilities are necessary to the attainment of objectives of an educational system. However the increase in primary school enrolment does not have corresponding increase in infrastructural development in the primary schools. A common scene at the primary school environment is that of half completed or dilapidated and overcrowded classrooms lacking basic equipment and facilities with unsightly and unhygienic toilet. Table 4 shows the available facilities in primary schools in Imo State as reported by Asiabaka and Mbakwem (2008, p.26).

**Table 4: Facilities Available in Primary Schools in Imo State**

Facilities	Number available %	Facilities	Number available %
Computer	None	Electricity	3 (2.2%)
Libraries	2 (1.48%)	Transportation	None
Laboratory	1 (0.7%)	Sanitation	135 (100%)
Music	7 (5.2%)	Refuse disposal	None
Fine arts	1 (0.7%)	Toilet	2 (1.48%)
Communication e.g. telephone	None	First aid	118 (87.4%)
Science resource centre	Uncoordinated	Recreation-football	135 (100%)
Water	4 (2.96%)		

Table 4 depicts the poor state of facilities in primary schools not only in Imo State as shown. The situation is the same across the federation. Pupils and teachers need facilities such as libraries, gender friendly environments and security for effective teaching and learning to take place.

In a swift reaction, in January 2008, the present governor of Rivers State Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi declared an emergency on the education sector and began a radical transformation of primary education in the State. The State government took over the management and administration of an estimated 2,800 primary schools in the State from the various Local Government Councils, including the payment of salaries estimated at N868 million. Also they embarked upon a thorough rebuilding of most of the primary schools in the state and training/retraining of teachers and head-teachers. According to the State Governor, “if primary education failed under the Local Government, then there is something foundationally wrong with that law because you cannot leave the foundation of a house in the hands of a man who does not have money” (CHATHAM HOUSE, London on February 26, 2009).

According to the state Commissioner for Education in the Rivers State, Dame Alice Lawrence Nemi in an interview with the Sunday Trust Newspaper (November 14, 2009), the Rivers State government has embarked upon the building of 750 model schools across the State, with playgrounds, auditoriums, equipped library, computer laboratory with magnetic screen computers, demonstration farm, and administrative office, dining hall, a sick bay with

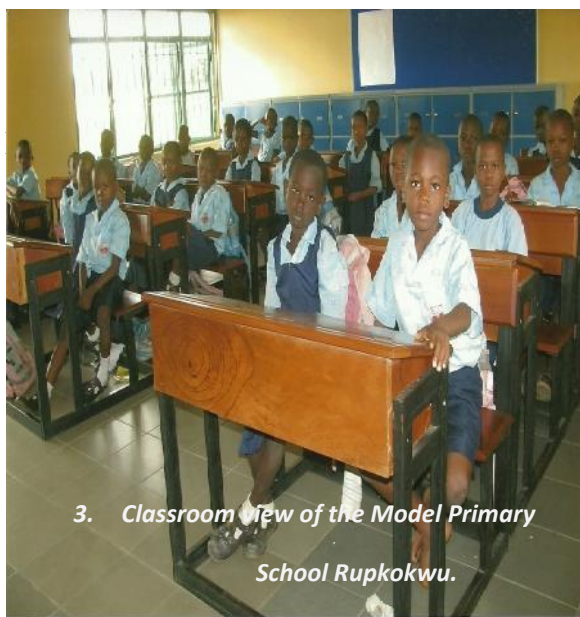
a resident nurse, staff quarters and a dormitory. Presently, 400 of these primary schools have been completed and 4 out of the 24 secondary schools being built have being completed also. Each of these schools cost approximately 12 million naira and a total cost of 84 billion naira or 560 million U.S dollars. The State government is investing so much in building these primary schools in order to address the poor decay and dilapidated infrastructural facilities in various primary schools in the State. The following pictures show some of the efforts of the Rivers State government in the provision of physical facilities and quality learning environment in primary schools in the state.



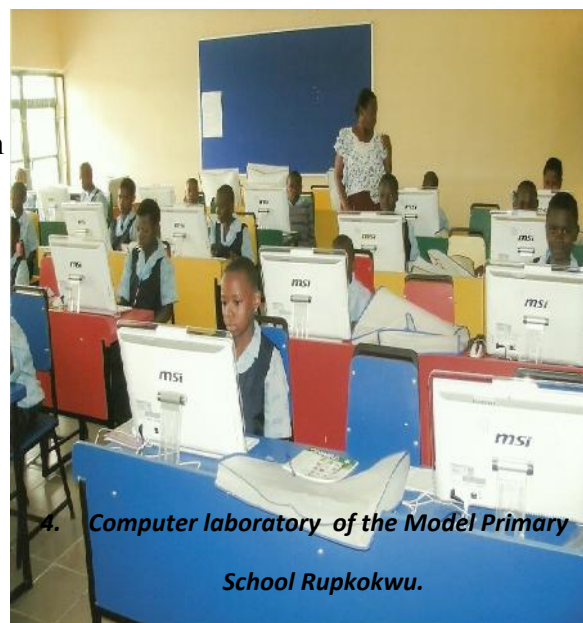
**1. Outside view of the Model Primary School Rupkokwu.**



**2. Library view of the Model Primary School Rupkokwu.**



**3. Classroom view of the Model Primary School Rupkokwu.**



**4. Computer laboratory of the Model Primary School Rupkokwu.**

Provide technical assistance to the State government in its averred efforts to provide quality education in the state. The areas of assistance are to include mechanisms that would ensure that children in the rural communities of the state can access equal educational opportunities with their counter-parts in the urban areas. This will help in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) four and five which included reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health (Winkina, 2011).

### **Other Challenging Issues**

According to Egwu (2009), some challenges facing primary education in Nigeria include the huge disparity between expected school enrolment and the actual enrolment figure. This leads to difficulties in accurately planning and allocating human, material and financial resources adequately to the various primary schools in the country. Poor management of information in terms of gathering accurate data, recording and retrieval of data leads to conflicting statistics about the number of enrolled pupils and new applicants in the system. This means that these vital information are not readily available when needed, thereby creating a vacuum for policy makers, stakeholders and researchers to carry out their functions efficiently.

Similarly, Omotayo, Iheberene and Maduwesi (2008), also indicated that poor implementation strategy, management and lack of assurance as responsible factors that contributed to the failure of the UBE to attain its goals since its inception more than 10 years ago. Other predicaments include financial problems in terms of misappropriation and embezzlement of funds, and financial crimes of all sorts being perpetuated by those in authority. As a result, there is an absence of adequate financial resources to implement programmes and policies that will promote this level of education. Also incompetence on the part of some teachers and head-teachers leads to poor quality assurance, delivery and supervision in the system. Other challenges include educational wastage in form of truancy, high dropout rate, attrition, and repetition.

It is evident that these problems persist in most States of the Federation despite efforts of the government to ameliorate some of these difficulties. However, Alaba (2010) makes the following observations from a research conducted thus - primary schools in the Western part of Nigeria have good conditions for teaching and learning, and there are spacious and conducive classrooms for both teachers and students. Also the teaching standard was of good quality, after the assessment of the lesson notes of teachers in selected primary schools. But unfortunately, the results obtained from classroom test administered to the students revealed

that they were of poor quality and students performed badly. This was because of inappropriate and inadequate test administered and high absenteeism. All these problems prevent the primary education level from attaining the heights that it is required to attain.

### **Conclusion**

This paper highlighted the functional issue of primary education which necessitated its initial introduction in the late 1800's and it's the driving force piloting progress and development of primary education in Nigeria. The nature of its expansion and growth in terms of structural changes and issues bothering on enrolment, funding, teaching personnel, curriculum and infrastructural provisions over the past few decades were considered. Unfortunately, the financial input from both the Federal and some State governments in Nigeria, has failed to meet up with the demands of this level of education as indicated by its increasing population of children that enroll annually and requirements stipulated by the United Nations. It is evident that there are challenging issues plaguing primary education delivery in Nigeria and these issues were considered with corresponding implications to the primary education level. There is a need to address some of these difficulties in order to move the nation's primary education forward on a path to progress and development. Finally, primary education is useful in raising the consciousness and the level of receptivity to innovations and the general way of living of the people. On this basis, it will continue to do the inevitable: producing the basis for the success of the other levels of education and continuously keep aflame the over probing and inquisitive fire of the mind ignited at this stage of education.

### **Recommendations**

Jaiyeoba (2007) stated that there is a need for the government to provide more in terms of library amenities, laboratory facilities, games materials and general funding. It is also very essential that a better monitoring strategy be adopted for the money released to primary education so as to guarantee suitable usage of such funds. It should be noted that a well-planned primary education system, that is well funded may become ineffective through embezzlement, corruption and poor statistical data on enrolment, number of schools and available human and materials resources. Government should ensure that these problems are addressed in order to protect the country's cherished primary education system. If these recommendations are followed judiciously, primary education will still have more in stock to



give to Nigerians in terms of national development as applicable in some other countries such as United States, the U.K, Tanzania and Japan.

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