

**ISSUES IN
EDUCATIONAL
MEASUREMENT
AND EVALUATION
IN NIGERIA**

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22

APPRAISING SURVIVAL OF PRIMARY EDUCATION – A TASK FOR ALL

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Introduction

It seems to be inevitable that our discussion should start on a philosophical note. This is because three of the words in the title, more than others raise some epistemological issues. It may therefore be in place to at least indicate from the onset that we are not unaware of the philosophical undertone of the words, which are namely ; "survival" "education" and "task".

With respect to the first word we may ask two questions what is "survival"? And why does primary education need survival? To the first question, according to the 20th century chambers dictionary, to survive is to live beyond, to outlive; to remain after. Survival, which derives from the word "survive" is defined as existing, after others of its kind have disappeared, or after the time for which a thing naturally belongs.

Need for Survival

To the second question: "why does primary education need survival?" A number of reasons could be advanced for why primary education needs survival. A consideration of the estimated illiterate population in 1995 by UNESCO is rather frightening .As shown in Table 1,for the world in perspective ,estimated illiterate for both sexes are 884.7million, and of this figure sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is a component account for 140.5million .fifty-three point four(53.4)million are males while 87.1

million are female. When it is remembered that eradication of illiteracy will begin from the primary level, then we can begin to appreciate the need for survival of primary education.

The frightening case of Nigeria will be better appreciated when it is noted that as at 1997, illiteracy rate is 37.4% in a population of over a 100 million people (National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education) and as at 1999, gross primary enrolment is 14.1M (Federal Ministry of Education). The above data are contained in the FGN/UNICEF/UNESCO/UNDP document (2000).

A look at the status of primary schools in terms of the pupils, the building, books, etc. point to the need for a critical appraisal of survival of primary education. With regard to the pupils, it is noted that the goal of the world summit for children held in 1992 which include: a major reduction in child death, a halving of child malnutrition, an end to Iodine deficiency which causes most cases of preventable mental retardation, a drastic reduction in number of children who go blind, and an effective primary education for at least 80% of girls as well as boys are being achieved steadily in most developing countries, Nigeria inclusive.

Infact, UNICEF in its 1995 "State of the World Children" report, confirmed that more than 100 of the developing nations, with more than 90% of the developing world's children – are making significant progress towards the goal set four years ago. However, the rather an aspect is that though the achievements of the earlier goals mentioned are gradually making possible the achievement of primary schooling for at least 80% of Nigerian primary age school children, but the schooling is not effective as is the intent of the goal.

Table 1: Estimated Illiterate Population age 15 and Over, by Sex and by Region, 1995

	Estimated number of illiterates			% Female (4)	Absolute Gap (F-M) (Millions) (5)	Gender Ratio M/F (6)
	Both Sexes (1)	Male (Millions) (2)	Female (3)			
World Total	884.7	320.0	564.7	63.8	244.7	0.57
Developing countries	871.8	315.0	556.7	63.9	241.7	0.57
Sub-Saharan Africa	140.5	53.4	87.1	62.0	33.7	0.61
Arab States	65.5	24.3	41.2	62.9	16.8	0.59
Latin America/Caribbean	42.9	19.4	23.4	54.7	4.0	0.83
Eastern Asia/Oceania	209.9	60.4	149.5	71.2	89.0	0.40
Southern Asia	415.5	159.4	256.1	61.6	96.7	0.62
Developed countries	12.9	5.0	7.9	61.6	3.0	0.62

Source: Compendium of Statistics of Illiteracy, SRS, No. 35, 1995.

Education is not being given the priority it deserves in Nigeria. Whenever a sector of the economy is to suffer economic depression; the first and the worst hit is the educational sector. It is only in the educational sector that it has been known in Nigeria that industrial strike has been allowed to last as long as nine months as a result of conditions of service, not being attractive and adequately put in place. Infact, UNESCO report in 1990 has it that while 20 developed countries for which data were available, increased the average remuneration of their primary school personnel's in the period 1990-1997 by 11%, in the 31 Sub-Saharan African countries, of which Nigeria was one, the corresponding figure over the same period was a decrease of 13%. In other words, while developed countries constantly took care almost every year to improve remuneration and other conditions of service of their primary school teachers, Nigeria and other developing countries made poorer their own teachers, since the teachers' salaries were static while inflation galloped.

The picture has not changed much for Nigerian primary school teachers since the period quoted. To further aggravate the already bad situation, it is only teachers whom it appears government can afford to pay the poor salary to at odd times, and never as at when due. Though since the Obasanjo regime (1999 to date), the situation of abysmally poor salary has improved, but it has improved only a little since inflation rate is quite high and many pockets of States (e.g. Anambra state) do not pay their teachers' salary on time. It is only in our educational sector that dilapidated buildings and blown off roof tops are allowed to keep the appearance of status-quo-ante for a long time. It is only in the educational sector that pupils are packed in a classroom like "tinned fish", with little or no consideration for health issues that may therefore arise, with the children sitting either on dusty dirty floors or rickety benches and desks. Conditions and situations that are not found in other sectors of the polity appear to be rules rather than the exception in the Nigerian educational sector. Much as the term "educational sector" has been used in its general form in the scenarios painted above, the primary school level is infact at the center of these sorry-conditions. The primary school level is the worst hit among the components of the educational sector. There is a struggle for existence and thus for survival of primary education in this nation.

Before leaving the issue of survival, it becomes pertinent that we take a look at Charles Darwin who came up with the terminology "survival of the fittest..." By this terminology, Darwin referred to the longer average life of the fit in the struggle for existence and the consequent transmission of favourable variations in greater proportions to later generations.

There is no doubt that there is a struggle for existence presently in primary education. The high drop-out rate testifies to this struggle. In 1986, the survival rate at primary school level as stated by UNESCO (1990) for Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan African Countries averaged at 72%. In 1996, the same source averaged Nigeria's Survival Rate at less than 60%. (Please note that Survival Rate represent the percentage of children starting primary school who eventually attain primary 5). The higher Survival Rate in 1986 could be attributed to the lingering impact of the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the impact which by 1996 could be said to have dwindled considerably.

The progenitors of the UPE were definitely out with good intentions, but were probably not aware that they were attempting a Utopia, a dimension which down the pages of history has always been difficult to achieve and/or

maintain. Otherwise, why need we talk about survival of primary education? Survival by its very essence connotes that some form of death has occurred or is fast occurring, and there is a need to do something if total extinction or at least large scale deterioration should not be the end result. The UPE has turned out to have made "schooling" compulsory (and in fact only for a short while for that matter) and not necessarily "education". The current Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme does not yet give the appearance of being any better than the UPE. However, some more time can be allowed the evaluation of the UBE if only out of fairness to give it time for gestation.

Education and Schooling

We now turn attention to the identified second word in our title that may have a philosophical connection – the word "Education". Education should be distinguished from "schooling". "Schooling" deals simply with going to school, without much emphasis on content of learning and "education" on the other hand aims to fit persons to take their places in many systems of society (Emeke, 1962). Education is concerned with equipping the individuals with the skills, knowledge and attitudes he/she needs to perform satisfactorily on a job or to progress to the next stage of training. Education may or may not take place in a school, and it is precisely this fact that makes the survival of primary education a task for all. Let it be noted that our topic may not narrow itself to simply primary school education, but to primary education generally. In this regard, primary education is therefore that education where teaching and learning takes place at the lowest level with the aim of building on it. The teaching and learning that takes place in the homes regarding morals, virtues and manners all relate to primary education, which does not necessarily have to take place in a school building. It must be noted very seriously that the fabrics of our society need very much this primary education. It is the very foundation that can make the expenditure on formal primary education not a waste. Primary education in the sense of formal education needs survival as well. Although, we had made more than passing reference to this aspect, we shall still say a little more in the rest of this paper

In revisiting the issue of high drop-out rate, a question that readily comes to mind is could the increase in drop-out rate not be an indication of the lack of usefulness and/or relevance of education to the life of the average Nigerian? This question though may look elementary is nevertheless fundamental. Status and economic wherewithal, can now more than before be

easily attained without diplomas and degrees. A silent reform pointing to the uselessness and irrelevance of education is fast spreading as can further be exemplified by the high drop-out rate among boys in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The UNICEF Representative in Nigeria once called the attention of the Nigerian Government to the fact that less than 40% of boys proceed to post-primary school in Eastern Nigeria. He warned:

unless the problem is tackled at the national level, the goal of education for all (EFA) by the year 2000 would remain an illusion.

The Guardian, December, 1996

The warning is either yet to be taken seriously or the late efforts being made are yet to yield visible fruits for the high drop out rate of these Eastern boys as still going on unabated and infact increasing yearly.

The Task for all

Who will stem the tide of the scenarios painted above, if primary education, and indeed, education in general is to survive?

This brings us to the third word in our consideration of the title of this paper-task- the piece or amount of work set or undertaken as a result of duty or necessity. The obvious answer to the rather rhetoric question raised above is "All", "Everyone". It is a task for all, for education is a natural community function which occurs inevitably, since the young grow up on the old, towards their activities and into their institutions, while the old foster, touch, train and even atimes exploit the young.

The task for the survival of primary education must be taken up by teachers, parents, government, the pupils themselves and the civil society at large. Much of our attention on this task for all will be focused on the teacher, for a simple salient reason: (i) he is the single most important agent of change in the focus of formal education, and?

The Teacher in the Task of Survival

In this task of survival, the teacher who is a facilitator and dispenser of knowledge to the students plays a very important role in ensuring effective teaching and learning. Ale (1989) found that 67% of students attributed failure to poor teaching. The picture did not change much in the studies of Onocha (1995)/and Ogunniyi (2004). Also, Morgan (1990) emphasized that

contrary to teachers' beliefs and expectations, students "are not learning what they (teachers) think they are being taught". Thus, the teacher should always seek ways in which to create a conducive classroom environment in order to enhance healthy cognitive and affective development in his students. The teacher must ensure that he has adequate knowledge of what he has to teach, knowing that he is directly responsible for imparting knowledge and skills to his students. This calls for adequate lesson preparation by him. It is an undebatable fact that logical and critical thinking are vital ingredients for technological, scientific and economic developments, and that these vital ingredients must be developed in our leaders of tomorrow right from the primary school.

The empirical evidence provided by Adedayo (1996) supported the fact that teachers need to motivate the love for learning in the pupils at the primary school level if primary education is to survive. This can be done by the creation of a little bit of humour. A large number of our primary school teachers, especially in the public schools are far too serious-looking and stern with the primary school pupils. Humour, it must be noted, promotes comprehension and retention especially when humorous illustrative examples are used (Colwell, 1981). Through humour, students' attention will be enhanced, and a conducive atmosphere for the promotion of a healthy cognitive and affective outcome will be fostered.

Survival of intellectual work, and by extension survival of primary education, can be promoted by equipping the pupils with necessary competencies which they need for life. The giving of constant home work and assignment which could be marked with the help of the pupils in the class is one way of ensuring this development. Also, the use of short tests with corrective feedback will ensure students work throughout the year, and not a few days to the commencement of examinations.

The Government

The government has a lot to do in the survival of primary education. Teachers have to be adequately taken care of in terms of commensurate remunerations, promptness of payment of benefits and emoluments, a positive regard for teachers in the government line up of policies and activities and so on. School facilities in terms of buildings, furniture and educational resource materials should be in adequate quantity and quality. Education should be highly remunerated so as to drive people back to the field of formal education. For example, the high drop-out of boys in the Eastern part, is not

due to lack of awareness of the value of education, but the knowledge that some more profitable money bringing ventures abound in the society than a certificate at the end of so many years of study. If Government does not take a positive and decisive step in this regard, the result will be a large scale decline in quality of life of the nation, signs of which are very glaring in the society. There will not be enough talented crops of people to go into the different disciplines. Competition may no longer be keen, with the result that we may just have mediocre entering into the more intellectual tasking and needed professions for the good of the society. New set of principles of get-rich quick will lead to disintegration of all that is good in society. Individualism, large scale fraud, extortion and embezzlement are some of the problems that may arise and have in fact arisen.

Conclusion

As was the slogan after the Nigerian Civil War that "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done", so it is that to make primary education survive is a task that must not just be done, but be done by all. Primary education must be made to survive. And it may be that it is a case of survival of the fittest. The consoling thing about survival of the fittest is the consequent transmission of favourable variations in greater proportions to later generations. It is hoped that when primary education must have survived its present scourge, favourable variations in terms of logical and critical thinking as well as keen intellectual minds, ready for a launch beyond vision 2015 or 2020 would have been transmitted in greater proportion to the surviving later generations.

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