

Towards Effective ‘Almajiri’ and Nomadic Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract. Education, as a continuous process of refinement, requires the combined efforts of all the stakeholders in the society to provide the platform that will bring about so much desired value education to minimize the current high spate of tension and violence all over the world. The current ‘Boko Haram’ insurgency and constant attack of the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria which has made the entire country especially the north to be in a terror siege stemmed from the high level of poverty suffered by such groups as ‘Almajiri’ and nomadic children. They constitute 70% street children in Nigeria. For the country to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Education for All (EFA), the Federal Government set up the ministerial committee to find out how these out- of- school children can be properly integrated into the UBE Scheme. Based on their findings, Government has embarked on some laudable efforts. The focus of this paper therefore is to suggest ways to improve on government efforts especially in the areas of teacher preparation, adaptation of curriculum and teaching materials that can enhance the desired effective education needed for sustainable development.

Keywords: Almajiri and Nomadic education, materials adaptation, curriculum adaptation and teacher preparation

1. Introduction

Education as a social process is indispensable in capacity building and maintenance of society. It

is a vital weapon for surviving in the changing world. For the millions of children worldwide who live in the street, education is the most effective method of reintegration into society. UNESCO’s work in this field has the two-fold objective of developing basic education for street children and of preventing children in difficulties from ending up on the streets. Activities are centred on: (i) raising awareness of the general public about street children and the non-enforcement of the right to education for all; In Nigeria however, the integration of the street children which are mainly the Almajiris and the nomads is through the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The UBE act 2004, part 1 Section 2 (1) states that “every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age. Universal Basic Education means the type of education in quality and content, that is given in the first level of education. The construct changes from country to country. In Nigeria, basic education was equated with the first six years of primary schooling in the past. Currently basic education extended to include the three years of junior secondary school.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is now conceived to embrace formal education up to age 15, as well as adult and non-formal education including education of the marginalized group within Nigerian society. It is a policy reforms measure of the Federal Government of Nigeria, that is in line with the state objectives at the 1999 constitution which

state in section 18 that.....Government should eradicate illiteracy; to this end, government shall as when practicable provide a free and compulsory Universal Primary Education, free secondary education, and free adult literacy programme.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a nine year basic programme which was launched and executed by the government and the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration.

UBE programme of nine years can be subdivided into three stages and each stage consisting of 3years each:

- Lower basic (3years) - primary 1-3
- Middle basic (3years) - primary 4-6
- Upper basic (3years) – junior secondary school 1-3

UBE fundamental in Nigeria is that everybody must have access to equivalent education comprehensively and co-educationally. The concept of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) introduced in 1976, (6years education) was to change into Basic Education (9years) twenty three years later. The policy provisions of these documents surpass what was on ground then. Three demographic studies on the existing national situation in the primary education sector revealed that, 12% of primary school pupils sit on the floor, 38% classrooms have no ceilings, 87% classrooms are overcrowded, while 77% pupils lack textbooks. Almost all sampled teachers are poorly motivated coupled with lack of community interest and participation in the management of the schools that was the prelude to the launching of the UBE introduced in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). (Yoloye, 2004). The Federal Government of Nigeria through the Universal Basic Education Commission has made several laudable efforts at tackling majority of the challenges identified above. Consequently, this paper examine the extent to which the educational programme for the nomadic and Almajiris has been integrated into the UBE existing programme, through the adaptation of materials and introduction of some

subjects based on value education that could drastically change the value system of the street children.

2. The History of Nomadic Education in Nigeria

The nomads are a special group of people with significant different way of life which requires special attention on education. They are also referred to as the Fulani with the sole occupation of cattle rearing. They are found in some part of northern state in Nigeria. Such as; Kwara, Kogi, Kano, Sokoto etc. since their only occupation is cattle rearing they move from one place to another in search of suitable weather and greener pasture for the cattle's well-being. Due to the nature of their occupation, they are "always on the move". Therefore, the nature of nomadic education involves taking education to the nomads wherever they may be. This is also in consonant with the national policy on education (1981), which states that education will be provided for those who may not have easy access to regular school. Moreover, the policy went further by recognizing the fact that whenever possible arrangement will be made for such children to assist their parents in the morning and go to school in the evening, special and adequate inducement will be provided to teachers in rural areas to make them stay on the job.

The idea of providing equal educational opportunities for all the Nigerian children was embodied in the Nigeria Constitution of 1979 which stated that "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities for all". Thus, in consonance with the provision of 1979 constitution and National Policy on Education (NPE 1976,1981, 2004) which strongly urge government to provide equal educational opportunity to all Nigerians and in order to ensure that nomads have an unfettered access to basic education, the federal government established the national commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) by Decree number 41 of December, 1989.

Contributing to the peculiar nature of Nomadic Education, Lar (1989) clearly established that

because of their distinctive culture which makes access to the education provided for sedentary people difficult and unacceptable to them, other approaches should be employed in educating them. He then proposed the provision of permanent class-room for the children of nomadic families who are permanently or semi-permanently settled. In essence, the nature of nomadic education ensures that for continuity in their education, teaching and learning must be organized according to the rhythm of the nomads.

Since education is the foundation for a good today and a better tomorrow, nomads too need to be educated despite their consistent mobility. Therefore, nomadic education should be considered as viable, valuable and relevant to the needs and development of this country and should be pursued vigorously. There is no alternative to education. A people that is denied education is denied a significant aspect of life. As laudable as this nomadic education is, many factors are inhibiting its success. Such factors include teacher preparation, text books and other teaching materials preparation and adaptation, curriculum adaptation and quality control strategies that would ensure effective implementation of policies relating to nomadic education in Nigeria.

3. The History of Almajiri

The concept of Almajiri could be traced to ‘Al – Muhajirum’ in Islam – meaning the adherents of Prophet Muhammed (SAW) who followed him from Mecca to medina to evade persecution during ‘Hijrah’. However, in Hausaland (Areas in the Northern part of Nigeria), Almajiri (singular tense) or Almajirai (Plural tense) refers to any person, irrespective of gender that begs for alms assistance on the street or from house – to – house (Adetoro 2010).

The issue of Almajirai has remained worrisome in the minds of northern elites. This is because the practice has been a source of embarrassment to the region In Hausa land the term Almajiri could take any of the following forms; any person irrespective of gender, who begs for assistance on the street or from house to house

as a result of some deformity or disability; children between the age of seven and fifteen who attend informal religious school who equally roam about with the purpose of getting assistance or alms; or even a child who engages in some form of labour to earn a living. (Yusha’u, Tsafe . Babangida, . Lawal (2012)

According to Muhammed (2010) the concept of Almajiri in Nigeria started in the olden days when the quest to acquire knowledge was prevalent, especially the Koranic knowledge by the Muslims. There were no laid down procedures or channels to adopt in obtaining such, except the unconventional way of handing over wards to a supposed teacher, known as Mallam. It was this Mallam that enlist the child and the teaching of religious scriptures and way of life are indoctrinated into the young pupils. It was so perfect and rewarding that it produced highly educated Sheikhs and Mullas who became successful in life by holding positions of judges and teachers that were molding the minds of the young on how to become righteous and exemplary in their future lives. However, when the civilized life styles of the west started encroaching into the big cities of the north, some of these Mallams became allured to the greed for money and started migrating to the cities and towns with their pupils and subjected them to the vagaries of the streets. (Muhammed 2010)

He further explains that one teacher can register up to a hundred and more pupils who he singularly keeps, guides and controll. To keep them fed and accommodated are also part of the teacher's responsibilities. But nowadays even to keep and feed one hundred mouths are not easy, and perhaps impossible. But life must go on, and the pupils have to, as a must, acquire the knowledge their parents sent them to do. The little stipends the parents are able to give their wards for them and the teachers hardly sustain them for a month, so an alternative means of getting more income has to be employed. During the day time, when there are no classes the pupils are allowed to stretch into the town and wander around until when classes were to begin. It is this going about around the town that affords the pupils to engage in menial jobs that fetch them some little amounts. This also was

kind of stopped by the people because they have other means of doing such jobs and so the pupils venture into house to house begging for remnants of food to eat. It is also said that the pupils take back part of this food to the teacher. It is clear from the above, that the teacher himself is gaining from the engagements of the pupils in the town, and can do anything to sustain it.

4. The Almajiri Children Lured into Crime

The system that was hitherto organized and well charted has now been bastardized and abused to the extent of letting the children roam the streets and picking remnants of food leftover from dustbins. One other aspect of the system that has been abused nowadays is the degenerated value of trust and togetherness that the Northern forefathers have lived and died with (Yusha'u et al.2012) This issue of lack of trust is as a result of the changing world in terms of orientation and our rush for acquiring the status of a civilized lot. Couple with this is also the government's nonchalant attitude of fending for the citizenry that result in thousands of our youths daily roaming the streets looking for what to eat (Muhammed, 2010). These youths thus become easy tools for the religious fundamentalist and social miscreants to use to vent their anger on the society for reasons best known to them. They are offered very meager amount to commit so horrendous acts that are being witnessed today in Nigeria. In order to meet the goals of Education For All (EFA) and to eradicate Almajiri method of involving teenage children in street begging, hard labour, unhygienic condition, social vices and also to provide adequate and qualitative instructional materials in both Islamic and secular subjects, there is need for integration. The concept of integration as clearly understood is the introduction of the elements of basic education i.e. the literacy, numeracy and life skills of the western type of education into the traditional Qur'anic school system. In other words, it connotes injecting the essential components of public schools into Qur'anic schools (Mahuta, 2009). This integration thus resulted into the

adaptation of curriculum to suit the needs of the street children

5. Curriculum Development for Universal Basic Education and Curriculum Adaptation for Special Needs Education

The curriculum, as defined by Onwuka (1981), is a structural series of intended learning experiences. It is the means by which educational institutions endeavor to realize the hopes of the society. The curriculum is employed by the schools to determine the set objectives or goals of the society in which the schools are and serve. Thus, the curriculum embraces purposeful experiences provided and directed by educational institutions to achieve pre-determined goals.

Curriculum development is the planning of learning opportunities intended to bring about certain changes in learners and the assessment of the extent to which this changes has taken place. In Nigeria, Educational Research and Development council (NERDC) has the mandate to develop school curricular for all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. In line with the government adaptation of the 9-years Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, NERDC in 2006 developed a 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) to meet the ideals of the UBE programme. The curriculum accommodates the fundamentals of both the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG); the implementation of the curriculum commenced nationwide in primary 1 and jss1 classes in September 2008 respectively the first batch of learners graduated in 2011 after sitting for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

The school curriculum is a dynamic and open document that is consistently changing with the needs, challenges and aspiration of the society. Therefore, the feedback receives on the implementation of BEC called for urgent reviewed of the curriculum which involves consultations with stakeholders to prepare a conceptual framework. The framework identifies

and groups related disciplines thereby achieving a reduction in subject overloads. For instance related UBE subjects curricular like Islamic studies, Christian religious studies, social studies, civic education etc. that focus primarily on the inculcation of values (society moral, interpersonal) now form a new UBE subject called Religious and value education. Thus, the conceptual framework for the review of BEC comprises of a ten (10) subjects namely; English language, Mathematics, Basic Sciences, and technology, Religion and National values, Cultural and Creative arts, Business Studies, Nigerian Languages, Pre-Vocational Studies, French and Arabic.(Obioma 2013).

The revised nine-year BEC addresses among other things, the issues of value re-orientation, poverty eradication, family life/HIV and AIDS Education, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and life skills as well as encourage innovative teaching and learning approaches and techniques. In addition, the curriculum is organized to ensure continuity and flow of themes, topics and experiences from primary school to junior secondary school levels. The contents, performances objectives, activities for both teachers and learners, teaching and learning materials and evaluation guide are provided. Teaching is supposed to enrich the contents with relevant materials and information from their immediate environment, but adapting the curriculum to their needs and aspiration. Thus, as reiterated by Obioma (2013), the curriculum can be adapted for such special needs as Nomadic education or Alma Jiri education. Etc. This paper therefore attempts to adapt the English studies curriculum for lower basic (primary 1-3) to reflect the curriculum content of Religious and Value Education also for primary 1-3. This would enhance their communicative competence and at the same time introduce and inculcate the right moral value into them

6. English Language Curriculum in Nigeria Education System

The English language which as a subject is currently referred to as English Studies, has a unique and elaborate document that contains the topics/skills, objectives, contents, activities (both

for teachers and students), teaching/learning resources and evaluation guide for the subject.

The English Studies curriculum for the lower basic is slightly different in terms of terminology and approach. There is the introduction of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness (phonics instruction) which are closely related to Listening and speaking (aural discrimination between consonant and vowel sounds) in Upper basic and speech work in post basic levels. Olatoye (2012) highlighted the objectives of English Language for post basic as clearly stated in the curriculum to include:

- to tackle the language deficiencies brought in from the lower basic;
- to develop language proficiency for both upper and post basic level of education;
- to develop the language proficiency needed for performing well in other school subjects;
- to build confidence on students' use of the English language as a means of communication with others in the larger society.

The English language curriculum is broken down or filtered down to syllabus (by examination bodies), scheme of work (by school authorities). The curriculum also specified resources to be used. Woko (2013) and Olatoye (2012) affirmed the compulsory status on English language at all levels of education in Nigeria. The English curriculum for all the basic classes runs for 9 years, this is in accordance with the 9 years Basic Education Curriculum which is divided into the following sections:

- Lower Basic Education curriculum for primary 1 – 3
- Middle Basic Education curriculum for primary 4 - 6; and
- Upper Basic Education curriculum for Junior Secondary 1 - 3

It is expected that every student who had gone through the years of basic education is expected to have acquired adequate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for a solid foundation for life-long learning (Olatoye 2012). Such a child will be required to sit for a government regulated

examination. The child will receive a Basic School Certificate (BSC) if he/she is successful. With this new structure, a child in primary 6 automatically transits to Junior Secondary School (JSS) without sitting for the common entrance examination as was the practice the child is assessed and promoted to JSS by his/her performance as documented in his/her continuous Assessment Report right from primary 1 to primary 6 (Olatoye 2012).

7. Recommendations

In order to ensure the full implementation of the above special need education curriculum for desired quality education for these set of deprived Nigerian citizens, the following suggestions are proffered:

- The federal government should intensify more efforts to build better schools with adequate facilities for the Almajiris and the nomads.
- The Almajiri and the nomadic teachers should be well-trained in modern teaching methodologies and technology.
- Value – education subject which should be made a compulsory core programme in the Almajiri and the nomadic schools should be taught through the medium of English language
- Free feeding and uniform should be incorporated into the Almajiri and the nomadic children system of education.
- There should be government law banning street-begging and making Basic Education compulsory for the Almajiri and the nomadic children
- Counseling sessions should be in-built into the value re-orientation sessions for the Almajiri and the nomadic children in the school system.
- English studies should be systematically taught through the adaptation of existing materials in a simple way
- There should be national campaigns and information dissemination to encourage governments and civil society in the provision of educational opportunities for all.
- Adoption of a multisectoral approach to promoting the right to education and strengthening partnerships between Government, UN agencies, civil society, NGOs and the private sector.

-Basic service provision (e.g. literacy courses, medical and psycho-social support, food and clothing) provided at street level to aid children in making informed and positive decisions about their lives, about leaving the streets and becoming integrated in residential centres or reintegrated with their families.

-Organization of street rounds to identify new street children, establish a dialogue based on respect to enable them to decide to leave the streets.

-Inclusion of street children in the mainstream school system from early on and rehabilitation value – based programmes for drop-outs.

-After-school educational activities, personalized educational workshops and functional literacy courses and vocational training to bridge formal and non-formal education and to facilitate street children's enrolment in the public school system.

-Organization of advocacy campaigns and preventive education programmes for street children on HIV and AIDS and development of life skills training programmes about communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, coping and self-management skills.

-Improving pre-service and in-service training where teachers acquire experience in inclusive methods and practices, meeting pupils with different abilities, experiences, social and cultural backgrounds.

8. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there is no doubt that for a proper integration to take place, there is need for curriculum and material adaptation. English language curriculum contents should be adapted to reflect the contents of all the subjects as reflected in the proposed integrated curriculum. The proposed integrated/inclusive education curriculum being suggested to reform the Almajiri and nomadic system of education is like nurturing a good plant to get a better fruit (Adetoro 2012). Indeed, it is necessary to have this type of educational programme so as to save the future generation from a more devastating genocide. Also, if the quality of Almajirai and nomadic education programmes is to be enhanced, then there is need for a serious

commitment on the part of the government to coordinate all aspects of this education. Formal and informal stakeholders need to be involved at every stage to ensure successful value education. Government alone must not be left to the running of these model schools, all the stakeholders must be involved so as to see the end of violence in our society and equal quality education for all for sustainable all – round development in Nigeria.

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