

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE IRREGULARITY IN THE CURRICULUMS OF LOWER BASICS IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND POLICY

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Abstract

The lower basics is the most critical period of education in a child's life which influences the foundations of learning. The irregularity of the educational system in Nigeria in the last 50 years has brought the system into a state of confusion and this has regressed the quality of education offered in Nigerian schools and further had an adverse psychological effect on children in the lower basics. Using the method of critical evaluation, the current research seeks to examine the psychological effects of the irregularity of the Nigerian educational system and policy in the lower basics. It has been observed however that the changes in the education system in Nigeria has not translated into quality education delivery in schools as it were an indication that operational factors are defective and this in turn affects the pupils psychologically. This paper is anchored on the cognitive developmental theory by Piaget which clearly emphasis a child's mental development. The researcher thus recommends that the education sector must be well-funded by government, and schools especially at the lower basics must be adequately equipped with the requisite quality infrastructure. Also, lower basics teachers need to be well trained in order to impart the right knowledge to the pupils. Only then can the desired change be realized and the goals of education achieved especially in the lower basics.

Key words: Education, Lower Basics, Psychological Effects, Educational System, Educational Policy

Introduction

Education has been identified as a unique instrument for the development of an individual. It is an important instrument of change and development. According to Campbell (1972), "No element of national-life is more worthy of attention, support and concern than education, for no element has greater impact on the careers, the personal growth and the happiness of so many citizens. No element is of greater importance in providing the knowledge and leadership on which the vitality of democracy and the strength of national economy depends." In view of this, government places high premium on education. Besides, the lower basics otherwise known as primary education is the foundation of literacy and numeracy and all other levels of education are built upon it throughout the world. Through education, the child becomes not only useful to him/herself but also to

the society at large. Hence, for the aim of education to be realized, the educational system and policy should be adequately funded and managed delicately in aregular or consistent way.

The foundation for the formulation of educational policies in Nigeria has its roots traceable to the 1925 policy issued by the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical African Dependencies set up by the Colonial Office in London. According to Fafunwa (1974), "The British colonial government issued its first educational policy on education in 1925. It was the first policy paper to be issued on African education by the colonial government since modern education was introduced in Nigeria 83 years earlier". Since this time, the educational structure has changed in the areas of curriculum innovation and policy formulation, some of which were progressive and some retrogressive. The progressive developments witnessed expansion in student enrolment, increase in the number of schools and institutions, establishment of the Teachers Registration Council (TRC), introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Social Studies and Citizenship Education into the school curriculum, and formulation of a clear-cut policy on early childhood/pre-primary education for children between zero and six years as well as the lower basics. The retrogressive aspect was and still is, the irregular system of education that has regressed quality of education offered in Nigerian schools which has an adverse psychological effect on children in the lower basics. Policy actualization rests on the workability of a system; there cannot be a policy in the absence of a system to actualize its objectives. In this paper, the words policy and system, and lower basics and primary education are used interchangeably as the researcher believes they are two sides of the same coin.

It has been observed that the numerous changes to the educational policy/system over the years have not translated into quality education delivery in Nigerian schools as it were, an indication that operational factors for policy implementation are either in shortfall, defective, or unavailable. The system has become rather clumsy and confusing to Nigerians; a situation where Nigerians and particularly teachers and children in the lower basics are unsure of what happens next. As Asaaju (2011) asserted, the Nigerian educational system is in a confused state, an assertion in tandem with Fafunwa (1981) cited in Adeyemi (1995), "Our present system is like Joseph's multi-colour dress with several patches here and there and with threads running in all directions. There are many routes and too many dead ends within the system". Fafunwa's view was aired over 30 years ago and the situation has not improved in any way, if anything, it has worsened. Nigerian teachers, the implementers of a vast majority of educational policies are almost completely oblivious of what happens next in their supposed tool of trade and this in turn affects the pupils being taught. Before they settle down to a particular education system and its intricacies, there is a change they are neither informed about nor prepared for. Aside this, Nigerian teachers are in a precarious situation of non-performance due to lack of basic infrastructure and instructional materials that the teachers need to enhance their competence and enhance the

pupils' performances. There's a fallout from inadequate funding of the education sector.

Thus, the current research seeks to examine the psychological effects of the irregularity of the Nigerian educational system and policy in the lower basics.

Definition of concepts

Education

Etymologically, the word education is derived from two Latin words "educare" and "educere" (Amaele, *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, "educare", means to train, to form or to mould. In other words, it means that the society trains, forms or moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. "Educere", on the other hand means to build, to lead, or to develop. This is mostly favoured by the humanists who argue that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests and needs. This is child-centered orientation. Ordinarily, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho productive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1974), defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live.

From the above, education, according to Amaele et al (2011) is seen as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of the society.

Educational Policy

Akindele and Adegbite (2005) view policy as "the government statement on the planned course of action, contained in national documents such as the Constitution and the National Policy on Education" while the Wikipedia describes educational policy as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. "A nation's policy on education is government's way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). According to Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2005) as cited in Ekundayo (2010), education policy represents definite courses of action proposed by the government in power or an executive authority and adopted as expedient to the issues and problems of education. To Ocho (2003) as cited in Suleiman (2010), "Policies in education represent the thinking of government as to the lines along which the affairs of education should be conducted. Educational policy statements are designed to guide professionals with regard to how the educational system should operate".

Lower Basics or Primary Education

The National Policy on Education deals with primary education which it describes as education given in an educational institution for children aged six to eleven plus. The policy recognizes that since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. By implication, primary education is the foundation of literacy and very important to the life of any nation.

In recognition of this, the policy outlined the following goals (general objectives) for lower basic education in Nigeria:

- inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- the laying of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- citizenship education that makes for effective participation and contribution to the society;
- character and moral development of the child;
- developing in the child the ability to adapt to his environment;
- providing the child with the opportunities to develop manipulative skill; and
- providing the child with basic tools for further educational advancement.

Review of theoretical framework

Cognitive Developmental Theory: Cognitive theory is concerned with the development of a person's thought processes. It also looks at how we understand and interact with the world. Jean Piaget the theorist, proposed an idea that seems obvious now that help revolutionize how we think about child development. "Children think differently than adult". Piaget cognitive theory seeks to describe and explain the development of thought processes and mental states. It also looks at how these thought processes influence the way we understand and interact with the world. Piaget then proposed a theory of cognitive development to account for steps and sequence of children's intellectual development:

1) **The sensor motor stage:** a period of time between birth and age of two during which infant's knowledge of the world is limited to his or her sensory perceptions and motor activities. Behaviours are limited to simple motor responses caused by sensory stimuli

2) **The preoperational stage:** a period between the ages of 2 and 6 during which a child learns to use language. During this stage, children do not yet understand concrete logic, cannot mentally manipulate information and are unable to take the point of view of other people

3) **The concrete operational stage:** a period between the ages of 7 and 11 during which children gain a better understanding of mental operations. Children begin

thinking logically about concrete events, but have difficulty understanding abstract or hypothetical concepts.

4) **The formal operational stage:** a period between the ages of 12 to adulthood when people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts. Skills such as logical thought, deductive reasoning and systematic planning also emerge during this stage (Cherry, 2017).

Piaget (1936) theory of cognitive development explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world which is relevant to this research work on the psychological effects of the irregularity of the Nigerian educational system and policy in the lower basics. He disagreed with the idea that intelligence was a fixed trait and regarded cognitive development as a process which occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment. According to Piaget, children are born with a very basic mental structure (genetically inherited and evolved) on which all subsequent learning and knowledge are based (Wadsworth, 2004). To Piaget, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes as a result of biological maturation and environmental experience. Children construct an understanding of the world around them, then experience disparities between what they already know and what they discover in their environment through education.

Psychological Effects of the Irregularity of the Nigerian Educational System in the Lower Basics

Early years in life are the most important to the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour of a child. The lower basics is the most critical period of education in a child's life which influences the foundations of learning. That is why modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones by providing the needed support to prepare them to succeed later in school. But the education sector today remains the most unpredictable in Nigeria, a situation that has bred poor service delivery, mass failure in examinations, confusion and conflicts of intentions among stakeholders. Alhaji Babs Animashaun, the Coordinator of National Parents Teachers Association of Nigeria (NAPTAN) attributed the declining standards of education in Nigeria to policy irregularity. In his words, "Absence of a coherent set of policies for the nation's education sector has resulted in the absence of qualitative education at all levels.

Inadequate funding and policy irregularity are two major challenges our education is facing" (Daily Trust Online, August 12, 2010), and this has psychologically affected the lower basic education. This irregular educational system affects the intellectual abilities which is responsible for attaining rationality. Also, it affects their social attitudes, emotional stability, reflective thinking, moral and reflective development, and value transmission.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is one casualty that is very fresh. The programme was launched in 1999 during the administration of the Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, but the human resources and materials which were

needed to implement the programme were not put in place; there were no infrastructure in place and teachers to implement the programme, and were taken through a mere five-day training in 2005 six years after launching a programme of such importance. Not long ago, Nigerians woke up to the declaration of Nigeria's former Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufa'I that president Goodluck Jonathan has approved "reverting the 6-3-3-4 to original intentions and adjusting its structure to include one year Early Childhood Education (ECE) for five-year-olds (1-6-3-3-4)". One cannot but ask what the original intentions were and why those intentions were "safely" kept away all these years only to go back to them now. This change is coming after Nigeria had jettisoned the 6-3-3-4 system for the 9-3-4 and now back to 1-6-3-3-4 to accommodate the "original intentions"? There is no doubting the fact that there have been lots of irregularities in the way education policies evolve and dissolve in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Early years in life are the most important to the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour of a child. The lower basics is the most critical period of education in a child's life which influences the foundations of learning. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the irregularity of the Nigerian educational system has adverse psychological effects in the lower basics.

Recommendation

The education sector is an expensive enterprise, therefore it is recommended that it must be well-funded by government, and schools especially at the lower basics must be adequately equipped with the requisite quality infrastructure. Also, lower basics teachers need to be well trained in order to impart the right knowledge to the pupils. Only then can the desired change be realized and the goals of education achieved especially in the lower basics.

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