Primary Education: A Vital Factor in Improving Synergy between Informal and Formal Education to Meet the Challenges of 21st Century Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This paper brings out the synergy between informal and formal education before relating it to primary education which is the pillar, the bedrock, the cornerstone and foundation of formal education. Primary education is the fundamental of formal education. If the foundation is destroyed, other educational system will collapse. The solidity of other educational system depends on how solidified primary education is. Primary education is the bridge between informal and formal education. The writer brings out some challenges facing primary education and conclusion and recommendation drawn.

Keywords: **Synergy, Informal and Formal Education, Education andPrimary Education.**

Introduction

The process of education is one that involves a number of activities on the part of several people, including the teachers, the pupils, parents, the government and every citizens of the country. They all participate in the process in one way or the other. Teaching is a key factor in education and learning is another. The first teacher a child ever has is his parents, and the learning process starts as soon as he

enters the world. Education begins at home with parents leading the way and the teacher continues the process of educating the child at the school. The teacher and the child's parents are partners in progress as far as the child's education are concerned. The educated person is one who can apply his knowledge and skills in such a way as to find solution to whatever problems that may confront him. Education indeed, is the practical way of attaining individual and social fulfillment (Ivowi, 2000).

Education could be understood to mean the total development of the individual child, through acceptable methods and technique, according to his abilities and interests, as well as the needs of the society to take his rightful place and contribute adequately to the advancement of his society (Amaele, 2006).

Formal education is often associated with structured learning environment like school or universities, where children are taught by teachers and follow a curriculum. It tends to be more rigid and rule based. Informal education, on the other hand, takes place outside of formal institutions. It can be self-directed, and it often happens through everyday experiences and interaction with others (Peter, 2006). There are a number of challenges facing primary education in the 21st century. One challenge that the world is changing rapidly, and the skills needed to succeed in life are changing as well. This means that primary education must adapt to keep up with the Changing world and prepare pupils for the future.

Another challenge is that primary education often focuses on rote learning and memorization, rather than on developing critical thinking skills. This can make it difficult for pupils to apply what they've learned in the real world. Finally, there is a growing gap between the rich and poor when it comes to access to quality primary education. This can lead to inequality (Peter, 2006). Therefore, primary education is to improve synergy between informal and formal education to meet the challenges of 21st Century, Nigeria.

The Concept of Primary Education

According to National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) primary education is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 6 to 11 years plus. The rest of the education system is built upon it, so it is the key to the success or

failure of the whole system. Primary education is very vital and fundamental to all types of education any person can receive in life.

Primary education is the formal education given to children in their formative years aimed at preparing then for solid and sound educational development full of acceptable national values, attitudes as well as character and moral training. Unfortunately, primary education is faced with a lot of challenges.

Primary education is the education given to children in the first six years of school. It is for children between age 6 and 11. Formal education begins with primary education, which is the foundation of all the education systems. As a foundation, its equality will determine the quality of the rest of it. Infact, primary education is the substructure upon which other education levels are created. Primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system, the duration shall be six years. Primary education is the foundation of the educational system, it should therefore be strong since all the educational systems rest on it.

Objectives of Primary Education

The goals of primary education are to:

- Inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively
- Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child
- Develop in children the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment
- Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within these limits of the child's capacity
- Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

These goals will form the basis of primary education in all the states of the federation (NPE, 2014).

Link between the Objectives of Primary Education, Formal and Informal Education

To link the objectives of both formal and informal education, the features of both formal and informal education must be defined. Formal education is typically characterized by structure, hierarchy, and rules while informal education is typically more flexible, unstructured and children driven.

Literacy and numeracy are foundational skills that will serve pupils well throughout their lives. And effective communication is key to success in any setting, from school to the workplace. Meanwhile, if social-emotional learning is added as a key objective of primary education, then some of the specific features that could be incorporated into the curriculum might include: self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills and social awareness. These skills can be taught through a variety of methods, such as role playing, discussion groups, cooperative learning activities and explicit instruction. The features of formal education that could support the teaching of social-emotional learning skill includes, structure, teacher-directed instruction and clear learning objectives. The features of informal education that could support the teaching of social-emotional learning skills include flexibility craft-driven learning and opportunity for real world application. So, when these features are combined, it could create a robust learning environment for social-emotional learning.

Moreover, as responsible decision making, in a formal education setting, this skill could be taught through direct instruction, where the teacher explicitly teaches the process of making responsible decision. Then, in an informal education setting, the skill could be reinforced through role-playing where children are given scenarios and have to make responsible decisions in those scenarios (Ebo, 2023).

In social awareness, in a formal education setting, this objective could be taught through group work and collaboration, where children learn to recognize and understand the perspective of others. Then, in an informal education setting, this objective could be reinforced through service learning, where children participate in real world activities that benefit the community. Tis could help them to become more aware of the needs of others and importance of contributing to society (Ebo, 2023).

To link the objective of laying a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking to the features of both formal and informal education, in a formal education setting, this objective could be supported through experiments and other hands-on activities, where pupils learn to use critical thinking and problem solving skill to investigate the world around them. In an informal education setting, this objective could be re-inforced through open-ended exploration where children are given the freedom to explore topics that interest them and to ask questions about the world around them.

In the other hand, formal education setting, the character building and moral development of pupils could be supported through a structured code of conduct, such as a school' honor code whereas in an informal education setting, this objective could be reinforced through character-building activities such as community service project or mentorship programs.

Adaptability is an important skill for children to develop and both formal and informal education can play a role in fostering this ability. In a formal education setting, adaptability could be taught through the use of new technologies, such as blended learning environment that combines online and face-to-face instruction while in an informal education setting, adaptability could be developed through exposure to a variety of experiences, such as visiting new places or meeting new people.

Manipulative skills, such as fine motor skills and hand-eye co-ordination, are important for children to develop. In a formal education setting, these skills could be taught through activities like arts and craft, music and sports. In an informal education setting, , these skills could be developed through activities like playing with building blocks, playing musical instruments and other, hands-on activities.

In a formal education setting, general knowledge and intellectual capacities could be developed through traditional methods like lectures based learning and textbook-based instruction. In an informal education setting, these skills could be developed through less traditional methods, like museum visits, documentary films and reading for pleasure (Epstein, 2019).

In order hand, in a formal education setting, citizenship education could be provided through lessons on history, politics and cultures of the child's home country. In an informal education setting, citizenship education could be provided through community services projects such as helping in kitchen or a local library.

In a formal education setting, aesthetic development could be encouraged through art classes, music classes and other creative activities whereas in an informal education setting, aesthetic development could be encouraged through exposure to nature, art, museums and other beautiful things in the world.

Lastly, in a formal education setting, a child's sense of personal worth could be promoted through positive reinforcement, such as praise and encouragement from teachers and peers while in an informal education setting, a child's sense of personal worth could be promoted through positive interactions with family members, friends and other members of the community (Epstein, 2019).

Challenges of Primary Education in the 21st Century Nigeria

i. **Lack of good structures**: Many of the state primary schools, lack structures. Dilapidated school structures are common sights in our community primary schools.
ii. **Indiscipline**: indiscipline is now very rampant in schools. Primary school pupils have started joining cults. Almost every day there is a record of cult killing in schools, which has made the educational sector in Nigeria lose its academic excellence (Nelson, 2019).
iii. **Unqualified teachers:** many of the primary school teachers are not qualified to teach in the primary school.
iv. **Poor welfare packages for teachers**: due to poor welfare packages for teachers, a lot of them have sought other means to augment their income, which ultimately affects their performance in class. Some don't show up regularly to teach their pupils.
v. **Inadequate teaching aids**: the lack of teaching aids such as books, audios, videos, projectors, computer etc used to improve the quality of instructions to pupils in schools affects or hampers teaching.
vi. **Poor funding**: the most prominent problem facing the educational sector in Nigeria is that of funding. Nigeria's educational budget is far away from

the 26% budgetary allocation of education recommended by UNESCO for developing countries.

vii. **Unwillingness to study education in schools**: Unlike many other disciplines in tertiary institutions, very few people apply for educational courses. Many of the teachers we have in the education sector nowadays are not professional in the field; as teaching is seen as a job of last resort in the country, most of them are quacks, hence those teachers do not understand the significance of teaching and some others have problem of communicating with pupils thus affecting the education sector negatively (Oni, 2006).

viii. **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Brain drain**: information and communication technology (ICT) is a big part of 21st century education. Its important to teach children how to use technology, but it's also important to teach them how to use it responsibly. Brain drain is another challenge that many countries are facing in the 21st century. This is when educated and skilled people leave their home countries to find better opportunities elsewhere. This can be a problem for developing countries, as they lose some of their most talented peopled.

To address brain drain, some countries are working to create better opportunities for educated people within their borders. This can include investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare (Jami, 2019).

The Concept of Formal Education

This is a process of education backed by law, with definite places of learning, goals and method of learning. Formal education has well determined setting where well trained and equipped personnel interact, on regular basis with the learners on planned educative process. The curriculum, the learning environment, instructional materials, testing and evaluation, human resources and others are planned ahead of time to achieve specific objectives within the time frame. Everything is patterned from the entry point to the exist point. The books, the classroom, the pupils, teachers, curriculum etc are selected and formalized (Ebo, 2014).

Objectives of Formal Education

The objectives of formal education are:

1. **Knowledge acquisition:** one of the primary objectives of formal education is to impact knowledge to children; this includes providing foundational knowledge in subjects like mathematics, science, history etc. as well as advanced knowledge in specialized field in higher education.
2. **Skill development**: formal education aims to develop various skills and competencies in children. These skills can be academic, such as critical thinking, problem-solving and research abilities or practical skills relevant to their chosen career paths.
3. **Personal growth**: formal education seeks to foster personal growth and development in children. This includes promoting self-discipline, responsibility, time management, communication skills and emotional intelligence.
4. **Socialization**: educational institutions provide a platform for children to interact with their peers, teachers and other members of the community. Socialization helps children learn how to collaborate, communicate effectively and develop interpersonal skills.
5. **Citizenship and civic education**: education aims to instill a sense of civic responsibility, ethical values and awareness of societal issues. It fosters good citizenship and encourages children to contribute positively to their communities and society as a whole.
6. **Promotion of diversity and inclusion**: formal education endeavors to promote diversity, inclusivity and tolerance. It helps people appreciate and respect differences in cultures, religion, ethnicity and background.
7. **Lifelong learning**: formal education aims to instill a love for learning and a curiosity to explore new idea even beyond the classroom setting. The objectives are to foster lifelong learning habits, as continuous learning is essential in a rapidly changing world.
8. **Personal fulfillment**: lastly, formal education aims to bring personal fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment to children. It provides opportunities for self-discovery, pursuing passion and achieving individual goals (Peter, 2006).

Structure and Features of Formal Education

Structure and features of formal education are:

- Age or grade requirement
- Duration of compulsory education
- Access to education
- Enforcement and penalties
- Inclusion and special education
- Literacy and numeracy
- Social and economic benefits
- Equal opportunities
- Promoting citizenship and civic responsibility (Peter, 2006).

The Concept of Informal Education

Informal education is a process of education which takes place through interaction with elders, age mates and friends. There are no separate places of period of intensive training and anybody can serve as a source of knowledge. This education is a continuation of the past and links with the future. It is tailored to be relevant to daily living. It is pragmatic to the extent that it works and solves practical and changing life problems (Ebo, 2014).

Informal education is comprehensive and integrated into life. It is not separated from daily social and professional life. Informal education is qualitative. It is for everybody. It is egalitarian. It is a process of learning the social life of the people. Sometimes, informal education allows the freedom of choice of professional interest. The training is non-formal, involving for example the apprenticeship system. The whole community teaches the child informally. Such informal education takes place in home, during social visits, at place of work and in the community at large. Informal education takes care of the upbringing of young members of the society in the development of good characters, good social behavior, acceptable habits and practice of customs and traditions of the community. Teaching professional skills particularly under the informal education system, takes place in a relaxed environment. The teacher is sympathetic and helpful. Many times, a child learns the profession of his father. The home becomes his learning environment. If he has to learn a different profession, he is apprenticed to a master in his chosen career (Ukuje, 2019).

Objectives of Informal Education

The objectives of informal education are to foster practical knowledge, skills and ability, enhance personal development, encourage lifelong learning and promote a deeper understanding of the world through experiential and self-directed learning.

The structure and features of informal Education are:

- Non-structured setting
- Real life relevance
- Self-directed learning
- Experiential learning
- Informal mentoring and peers interactions
- Lifelong learning
- Dynamic and ever changing
- Intrinsic motivation (Obisanya, 2001).

Merit and Demerit of Informal Education

According to Ogunsaju (2003) the merits of informal education are:

a. There are no strains of any type on the mind of the learner.
b. It is a natural way of teaching and learning.
c. The learner is self-motivated in process of learning
d. Most of the learnt things are situational as they are learnt in one situations or the other. So they are remember for a long time
e. In this type of education, there is dependence on rote learning

Demerits

a. It does not give much confidence to the learner. Inspite of good knowledge, the learner may feel inferiority complex in a group of highly educated person.
b. Here, education is received in the absence of a teacher
c. Discipline, good habits and attitudes etc may not be acquired properly and righty (Akilaiya, 2007).

Relationship between Formal and Informal Education

The relationship between formal and informal education is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, they can be seen as complementary, with informal

learning providing a foundation for formal learning. On the other hand, they can also be seen as competing with each other, with each seen as more valuable than other. Ultimately the two are interdependent and one cannot be successful without the other. A balance of the two forms of education can help children develop skills such as common sense, problem solving, empathy etc.

The synergy between informal and formal education refers to the potential collaboration and integration of both types of learning experiences. Formal education typically takes place in structured setting such as schools and following a standardized curriculum. Informal education, on the other hand, occurs outside of these formal setting and includes activities like self-directed learning, community engagement and experimental learning (Adeyemo, 2002).

The combination of informal and formal education can offer a more holistic and well founded learning experience. Informal education can provide practical skills, real world applications and opportunity forpersonal growth that may not be fully addressed in formal education. It can also foster creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.Formal education, on the other hand, provides a structural framework, academic knowledge and a recognized credential. It offers a systematic approach to learning and ensures a certain level of equality and consistency in education (Chinyere, 2015).

Education for no formalities are observed is known as informal type of education. In this type of education there is modification of the behavior of the learner but no conscious efforts are made for it. Whatever it is learnt here is not preplanned. It is natural and incidental. Here neither the teacher nor the learner is conscious of the process of teaching learning. In this type of education there are no predetermined aims, no definite curriculum, no well thought methods of teaching, no qualified and trained teachers and no definite place of education. Here education is received by the company of friends, relatives, community etc. Whatever as education is received plays a very important and significant role in the life of the educated. Informal education complements the formal education which has a particular pattern. Education of this kind has no specific time or place at which it is provided. Even the educator is not fixed. All fixed syllabi, rules, formalities are absent from it. Education of this kind is the education one received while playing in the field

talking to family members in the house roaming around somewhere, infact everywhere. This kind of education never comes to an end. And it teaches the individual more than he ever learns through formal education. A child learns many when he comes in contact with new people. He discovers many new words when, he goes to new places. This education that he receives cannot be evaluated as formal education can. Formal education can be evaluated by some specific techniques and the quality and quantity of education imbibed by the educated can be known. But, this is not true of informal education for there is no standard or measure in its case. It also does not provide the recipient with a certificate or a degree. Informal education is gradual process, for people learn a few things after years of experience. But the things learnt in this manner prove to be more valuable than all the degrees accumulated through formal education. Informal education is more general in nature (Ngwu, 2006).

Primary Education as a Bridge between Informal and Formal Education

Primary education is a vital factor in improving synergy between informal and formal education to meet the challenge of 21st century Nigeria. Primary education is often seen as the link between the two types of education. It takes place between the ages six and eleven, and it is typically the first time children experience a more structured, formal type of education. At the same time, primary education also emphasizes experiential learning, which is similar to the kind of learning that occurs in informal education. One way that primary education combines elements of informal and formal education is through the use of play based learning. Play-based learning allows children to explore and learn through hand-on activities, which is a key feature of informal education. However, play based learning is also structured and takes place in a classroom setting, which is a feature of formal education.

Another way primary education combines elements of informal and formal education is assessment. In primary education, assessment is used to evaluate pupil's progress, which is a feature of formal education. However, assessment is also used to provide feedback and encourage pupils to learn, which is more similar to the process of informal education. In this way, assessment in primary education combines the best of both worlds (Nathan, 2020).

Primary education develops skills that are important for both informal and formal education. For example, primary education helps children develop social and emotional skills such as communication, cooperation and empathy. These are important skills for both informal and formal education. Primary education prepares children for future formal education in that it provides a foundation for later learning, such as in secondary school and university. The skills and knowledge learned in primary education become the building blocks for more advanced learning.

Art is used to combine informal and formal education in primary school through process-based art. Process-based art is an approach that emphasizes the process of creating art, rather than the end product. This allows children to express themselves creatively, while also learning about color, shape and texture; it also helps to develop problem-solving skills, which are important for both informal and formal education. Another way is through interdisciplinary learning. This is when different subjects, such as maths, science and art are combined to create a more holistic learning experience. This allows children to make connections between different areas of knowledge and to develop a better rounded understanding of the world (Nathan, 2020).

Conclusion

Primary education is the foundation, pillar, cornerstone and key to success or failure of every other levels of education. Formal education starts at the cradle, where the tap root is formed and without effectiveness at this level, the future is bleak. Formal education provides structure, standards and qualifications, while informal education provides flexibility, creativity and practical skills. The two can work together in a variety of ways to create a more holistic and effective education system. Therefore, parents and teachers should develop partnership between formal and informal education institutions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn:

i. Primary education should be tuition free, universal and compulsory as stated in National Policy on Education.

ii. There should be a kind of partnership between formal and informal education institution. This could involve things like curriculum sharing, joint teacher training and pupils exchanges.
iii. Government should create new types of credentials that recognize both formal and informal learning
iv. Government should use technology to connect the informal and formal education, through online learning platforms and mobile apps.
v. Religion organizations should make sure that good moral are inculcated to the child.
vi. As teaching starts from the womb, the mother should be able to inculcatein the child the right behaviors that will make him able citizen.
vii. All dilapidated schools structures, obsolete machinery and tools should be properly discarded.
viii. Government should increase primary school teacher's salary so that they will be happy to inculcate real knowledge to the pupils.
ix. More qualified teachers should be employed for effective teaching and learning
x. Finally, teachers should be encouraged by organizing workshops and seminars for them to update their knowledge and by giving good incentives such as allowance and other rewards, to enable them produce good citizens of the country.

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