BASIC EDUCATION AND READINESS TO LEARNING IN SCHOOLS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract
liasic education has been defined by a range of organization with each definition revolving around core themes. Each of the definitions of basic education shares common elements. These include the development of competencies, knowledge, attitudes and values as a basis for lifelong learning. On the other hand, readiness to learn occurs when a child has achieved cumulative learning of component sub-skills, and the developmental maturity necessary to integrate these sub-skills into the desired skill. Readiness is relative, however, not only to the skill, but also to the technique of instruction. This paper makes a relationship between basic education and readiness in learning and how learning readiness is a prerequisite condition for the effective learning process among school children. It further shows how learning readiness determine the provisions of basic education and how learning readiness affects the educational achievement of students and pupils at the various levels of the educational process. Finally, it is believed from this study that program-based and system wide support for basic education reforms which also leads to greater participation of learners in the teaching process could result in more transformative change in our educational system.

Keywords: Basic education, Attitude and values, Sub-skills, Readiness and educational reforms

Introduction

Basic education refers to the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings that aim to meet basic learning needs. According to the international standard classification of education, basic education comprises primary education and lower secondary education (UNESCO 2011). The promotion of Education for All and Millennium Development Goals galvanized development partners into investing funds firstly into getting more children particularly the disadvantaged into school and secondly to focus on raising the quality of education for all. The 2030 Agenda tackles the unfinished business of Education for All movement by prioritizing quality and equitable education and lifelong learning for all boys and girls, women and men.

In this context, lifelong learning must begin with boys and girls that are ready to learn and acquire basic education. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commits all countries, like Nigerian to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG and its targets are specific about a new way of advancing education, where access to and participation in good quality education can cultivate the skills, competencies and values that influence people's choices to create more just, inclusive and sustainable societies (United Nations, 2017). That is why SDG is at the heart of all other sustainable development goals. When people are ready to learn at an appropriate age and have access to quality education, they can break from the cycle of poverty. What happens when we ignore the readiness of children who are of approximately the same chronological age but different readiness levels and attempt to teach all the children the same thing in the same way? Obviously, there exists differences in the way children learn as there are fast learners and slow learners. Therefore, in the contexts of teaching and learning slow learners must be given special attention. Education and learning help to reduce inequalities and reach gender equality. It empowers people to make informed choice about a more healthy and sustainable life. It also fosters tolerance between people and helps build more peaceful societies. Basic educational and readiness to learning is in the context of this study.

What is Basic Education?

The international standard of classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 states that Basic education corresponds to the first nine years of formal schooling and is made up of two levels. Level I is primary education (usually six years) and level 2 refers to lower secondary (usually three years JSS 1-3) in the Nigerian context. It also covers non-formal and informal activities intended to meet basic learning needs of people of all ages (UNESCO, 2011).

Different countries define basic education in slightly different ways for instance, some partner countries of United Nations include pre-primary education as part of basic education. Further definitions of basic education see it as more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and

training (UNESCO, 1990).

The World Bank briefing on education in South Asia indicates that basic education is a key need, along with other basics, in today's world for anyone, anywhere to have a good quality of life. In developing countries particularly, such as those in the South Asia region, basic education is crucial to alleviating poverty, reducing inequality and driving economic growth (World Bank, 2017). From the fore-going definitions, it could be acceptable that the World Bank definition of basic education in South Asian countries could be adapted to the African continent especially Nigeria, where education is a better means of livelihood.

Readiness to Learning

Learning readiness is the physical, motor, socio-emotional, behavioural, linguistic and cognitive skills indicating preparedness to receive formal education instruction (Sam Goldstein, 2011).

The terms learning readiness and school readiness were derived from educational reforms and the outcomes from early childhood programs. Learning readiness is associated with school readiness. It is the observable traits that indicate young children are ready to receive early academic instruction. However, learning readiness and school readiness refer to different aspects of early learning and education. School readiness refers to the wide range of the skills children need to acquire to enter and be successful in a school setting when basic education is provided while learning readiness indicates young children's ability to receive purposeful instruction (Duncan, 2012).

Learning readiness also refers to how well equipped a pupil is to learn, including circumstantial and environmental factors. A student with a low readiness to learn may be encumbered by difficult personal circumstances in his or her life, or a lower emotional or physical maturity.

Classroom Differentiation: Ability, Readiness and Interest

There are three principal learning conditions that teachers should understand when considering differentiation in the classroom. As a key part of differentiation, teachers should establish their pupils' readiness to learn, their learning interest and learning ability. Scoring learner profiles in these three areas arms teachers with the best strategy to teach a mixed ability class. However, it is important to understand that readiness is not synonymous with pupils' ability and both can influence his/her motivation as well as external factors.

Learning Ability

The academic capability of a pupil generally dictates the pace at which he or she learns. A student with lower ability and thus a slower pace of learning is by no means an indicator for future failings. A student with less ability may be less academically capable than his or her peers, but teachers should be aware this learner may excel in more specific areas. Students with a medium ability score may find themselves less motivated to learn, particularly if they lack the confidence to perform in groups. While they may not be as reserved as low ability learners, these pupils may benefit from learning materials with progressively harder tasks to grow their confidence.

A student with a high learning ability score may not present any immediate concerns for teachers or parents, but teachers must ensure this type of learner does not become complacent. This type of pupil should still be given regular attention and assessment so his or her interests are constantly stimulated to avoid a lack of motivation.

Learning Interest

Referring to the levels of motivation a pupil possesses to learn, learning interest will indicate how passionate learners feel about general and specialized subjects. A pupil with a low interest score could be feeling unmotivated due to his or her academic ability or disruptive external factors and circumstances. Teachers should assess his or her ability level to ascertain the situation that is imparting their motivation.

Empirical Studies of Readiness to Learning and Academic Performance of Students

Good education helps to flourish individual's capacities but without learning readiness and provision of basic education it cannot be possible. Learning readiness is the degree of concentration and eagerness to learn among students. According to Thorndike (1989) the laws of readiness is the first primary law of learning which means that learning takes place when an action trend is aroused through preliminary modification deposit or attitude (as cited in Gandhi, 2010). In another words learning readiness implies a level of particular mindedness and excitement to do something (Hayden, 2008). When an individual is ready to do an act of learning intrinsically, they can learn effectively with greater satisfaction but when they are not ready to learn all the efforts done by them and others will go wasted.

Learning readiness is the overall state of students' readiness, family readiness and school readiness (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2012). The student readiness is that individual state of student where he or she is physically, mentally and emotionally ready to learn. Similarly, the school readiness is defined as that complete preparedness of school (teachers) to create a favourable environment (UNESCO, 2007) which contributes to achieving the best learning among their students. In the same vein, Alexander, Entwisle and Bedinger (1994) 'ed',see family readiness as the complete preparedness of family (parents) to send their child to school to learn and to create a favourable environment at home to help their child gain the best level of learning. These three: student readiness, school readiness and family readiness are the major components of learning readiness and they lead towards high academic achievement among students.

Educational achievement is the total outcome of learning among the students (Khadka, 2017) which is achieved through teaching/learning process. It signifies the effectiveness of educational process which is conducted in the school as classroom activities as well as indoor activities. It deals with the class examination results (Magnus and Peresetsky, 2018). Educational or academic achievement, represented the performance outcome (Steinmayr, MciBner, Weichinger & Wirthwein, 2015). It indicates the degree to which an individual has fulfilled certain goals. It further focuses on those activities which specifically concentrate in instructional environment of school (Steinmayr et.al., 2015).

Provision of Basic Education and students' readiness to learn is essential for the better educational performance of the student in learning process (Deyo, Huyah, Rodestar, Sturpe & Kiser, 2011). Every effort to provide quality education in school becomes meaningless due to the absence of learning readiness on the part of the students. If the student is prepared to learn, he cannot learn successfully (Prakash, 2012) without learning readiness, this leads to the decrease of educational achievement of students. It also decreases the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom teaching and also waste government investment in the educational system.

The Nature of Readiness

There are basically two distinct theories of readiness which are the growth readiness of mental development and cumulative learning theories. The growth readiness of mental development is associated with such eminent psychologists as in Stanley Hall and Arnold Casell (1926) and it holds that certain organized patterns of growth of neural structures must occur before certain experimental factors can effectively contribute to development. The rate of intellectual development is seen as due primarily to internal physiological mechanisms and their orderly, sequential growth, rather than to inputs from the environment. The contrasting viewpoint emphasizes learning as the major causal factor in development. The simplest, most extreme statement of this position is simply that humans like all mammals, possess the neural structures for the formation of associations between the sensory inputs from receptors and the output mechanism of the effectors. This is in short, the capacity for acquiring stimulus response connections or habits. The sets of habits which we identify as intelligent behaviour are seen as being built up through the acquisition of habits and chains of habits which interact to produce complex behaviour (Jensen, 1969). Thus, mental development is viewed as the learning of an ordered set of capabilities in some hierarchical or progressive fashion, making for increasing skills in stimulus differentiation, recall of previously learned

responses and generalization and transfer of learning. In recent years this view point has been most notably developed by Gagne (1965,1968), who refers to it as the cumulative learning model of mental development.

Probably everyone who has attended to the relevant evidence in this field would agree that both the growth-readiness and cumulative learning theories are necessary for comprehending all the facts of the matter. These two aspects are not at all mutually exclusive but work hand in hand to produce the phenomenon we observe as cognitive development. There is little doubt that the physical maturation of the brain, particularly the cerebral cortex, underlies the development of particular cognitive abilities. The developmental sequence of these abilities or more exactly, of the readiness to acquire them through interaction with the environment, is especially evident between birth and seven or eight years of age. In fact, we know that not all the brains potential neural connections are physiologically functionable until at least seven or eight years of age in the vast majority of children when they begin the basic education and when readiness to learning starts.

Developing Effective Strategies for Implementing Basic Education

Based on two decades of attempts to meet firstly the Education for All (EFA) and then Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the overall lesson is that project-based interventions are generally not sustainable. Program-based and system-wide support for basic education reforms can result in more transformative change. Effective, country-led approaches to basic education reform may include:

J Institutional management and human resource management/development •t* Policy, strategic and operational planning, budgeting and fiscal management *»* System monitoring, including education management information system (EMIS), evaluations and research *t* Whole system of communications including information and communications technology infrastructure

Ministries of Education

Supporting ministries of education in their multiple responsibilities is a key strategy. In Basic Education, Ministries of Education must simultaneously focus on:

J access
J equity
*«« efficiency

Being able to analyze the successes and priories in basic education depends on a robust and accurate EMIS system (with statistics on students, schools, teachers and learning performance). This needs to include human resource database with data on teachers' qualifications, experience, deployment and record of professional development.

Key Priorities in Basic Education

Inequality is a great source of division both with and between countries. On the average, while gender parity in education was achieved globally in 2014, these global average masks continuing disparity in many regions and countries like Nigeria, where also readiness to learning is affected in school age children. At the primary level, disparity persists in 37 percent of countries, mostly in Africa and Western Asia, with girls from the poorest households the least likely to set foot in a classroom (UNESCO 2016). And just as gender limits opportunities, the following factors can also exclude children from educational and learning opportunities

- disability
- ethnicity
- language
- displacement-of refugees and those internally displaced especially in the North East and North West by terrorists and bandits in Nigeria
- impact of natural disaster

rural residence (UNESCO, 2016).

Educational Inequality in Nigeria

Inequality is magnified for vulnerable children in Nigeria trying to access basic education despite having attained a maturation and ready to learn primary school age children in conflict - affected zones in North East in states like Bauchi, Adamawa, Yobe and even in North West like Kano and Sokoto, Kebbi etc. account for 35 percent of those out of school. It is also a problem in North central. In further instances too, climate change also has the potential to lead to increased number of out of school children and youth particularly in the pacific region and South Asia (UNESCO, Institute for Statistics and Global Education, 2016).

Engaging the Disadvantaged Children in Learning

Governments find it particularly difficult to engage the most disadvantaged in basic education, partly due to limited funds but also due to entrenched attitudes that discriminate against certain groups. Schools and education system, must be flexible and welcoming to those who are educationally ready to learn and who face many barriers to access and complete basic education. Flexibility may demand changes in local curriculum and timing of school terms or semesters for example, the harvest season, the rearing of cows by nomads or herdsmen in Northern Nigeria and the migrant fishermen in southern Nigeria. This means ensuring that the Fulanis or the Hausas and the Ijaws are not discriminated against in terms of their right to acquire basic education.

The Importance of Basic Education and Readiness to Learn

In an ideal situation, where and when basic education is given as a right, the target audience first and foremost must be ready to learn. There have been cases where children are forced out of school in Northern Nigeria among the Fulanis and the Ijaws of Southern Nigeria probably to help them in animal rearing and fishing occupation. Cases abound too, where children of farmers are not allowed to go to school in states like Benue and Ebonyi so that children who have attained school age could help their parents in farm work. What is paramount here is that, once children are ready to go to school no parent should prevent them from attending schools and those children should also be made to know that there is advantage and value in attending schools than being involved in their parents' occupation.

Conclusion

In the context of this study, efforts have been made to relate the provision of basic education to readiness to Icam. Without the educationally advantaged and the vulnerable been ready to learn, the place of basic education will be a waste of effort, since government's huge investment in that regard will be a colossal waste.

It follows therefore, that there must be a conscientization and awareness effort made towards bringing children in war-torn and natural disaster zones to attend schools. It is also important that learning facilities be provided in internally displaced camps to enable Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to have access to basic education.

Suggestions

For the purpose of this study the following suggestions are made:

1. Improvement in learning environment: Education tends to reflect society's values and attributes. Circumstances ranges from society's wealth to national goals and standards, curriculum and teachers all influence the quality of learning environment under basic education and the pupils' readiness to learn. In the same vein physical structures and facilities also have an impact such as appropriate technology, water and hygiene.
2. Learner's characteristics: Learners do not come to primary and lower secondary schools as equal. Socio-economic background, gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS and emergency situations create inequalities. These issues should be taken into account in policies to increase enrolment in schools and bolster readiness.
3. Curriculum Content: Inputs into the curriculum content are material resources such as text books, learning materials, classrooms, libraries, school facilities and human resources such as managers, supervisors, inspectors, and most importantly teachers are needed to improve the quality of basic education.

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