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MANAGEMENT OF NIGERIAN PRIMARY EDUCATION SECTOR DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT
The Nigerian primary education is one of the important stages in every child's schooling and development. Primary education offers education and training for children from the age of 6 years and above. However, the importance of primary education to total development of children personality for national development cannot be overemphasized. Notwithstanding, the relevance of the primary education sector in Nigeria especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the management of this sector still faces a lot of challenges which has warranted this paper. This paper therefore, was designated to discuss the management of the Nigerian primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, looking at some issues and challenges. Several key terms such as management, primary education sector coupled with its goals and the COVID-19 pandemic were conceptualized in the paper. The importance of management of the primary education sector were equally highlighted in the paper. Some of the issues and challenges in the management of the Nigerian primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic were discussed in the paper. The paper was concluded by suggesting possible way forward towards improvement in the management of the Nigerian primary education sector during pandemic.

Keywords: Management, Nigerian, Primary, Education, Sector, COVID-19, Pandemic Issues, Challenges

Introduction

The Nigerian primary education sector offers educational programmes for children between the ages of 6 to 11+ years. The primary education sector lays solid foundation and sound basis for children learning and personality development in areas of scientific, critical and reflective thinking, among others. Anero (2014) opined that the primary education sector is a basic tool for effective children upbringing and overall societal development. The primary education sector serves as an important hub for individual and societal development in Nigeria and other places of the world. Thus, the crucial role of the primary education sector towards overall development of the child and the Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized. Notwithstanding the critical roles and contributions of the Nigerian primary education in national development, however, there seems to be some management issues and challenges bordering the primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic which need to be addressed. Considering the multidimensional role and contributions of the Nigerian primary education sector, yet this sector is facing some challenges which have worsened during this COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which countries all over the world including Nigeria suffered from the deadly epidemic Coronavirus disease. The government including other stakeholders such as parents, school

administrators, among others, seem not to have played important role towards curbing the challenges inhibiting management of the primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO (2020) and other scholars observed that most parents were blamed for engaging their children in economic ventures during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than providing their children with the needed facilities to carry out their studies. In the same vein, government cannot escape being blamed for poor/inadequate funding and quashing of educational treaties which would have improved the management of the primary education sector. Therefore, if the primary education sector must live up to expectations, all stakeholders must be up and doing towards curbing and resolving all the issues and challenges hindering effective management of the primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions were done in the paper in different sections in order to discuss issues as they relate with the management of the Nigerian primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, looking at issues and challenges.

Conceptualizing Management

The term management as opined by Amadi-Eric (2008) is derived from an Italian word "maneggiare" which means to "train horses" or literally "to handle". Management is the direction or guidance of people towards organizational goals and objectives (Amadi-Eric, 2008). Akpakwu (2012) conceptualized management as a social process which is designed to ensure the cooperation, participation, intervention and involvement of others in the effective achievement of a given or predetermined goal or objective. It involves getting things done through others. In education, management is the co-ordination of all resources of an organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling in order to attain objectives (educational). Management therefore, brings together all six M's that is; **M**en and Women, **M**oney, **M**achines, **M**aterials, **M**ethods and **M**arkets. Indeed, management of the Nigerian primary education sector is the effective organization and utilization of human and material resources in such a system for the achievement of identified primary education goals and objectives.

The Nigerian Primary Education Sector

Scholars and authorities have described the primary education sector in several ways. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011), the primary education sector provides learning and educational activities to children in fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy). Primary education establishes a solid foundation for learning and understanding in core areas of knowledge for children personal development. It focuses on learning at a basic level for children from 6 to 12 years old. Primary education provides children with an elementary understanding of mathematics, language, science, as well as skills for their lives. Its programmes are generally designed to give pupils sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics, and an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, natural sciences, social sciences, and arts (IGI Global Partnerships, 2021). Primary education is therefore, provided after Early Childhood Education or preschool education. Odigie (2012) explained that primary education is the programme of studies providing opportunities for genuine learning to children between the ages of 0-5 years prior to their entering the primary school.

The goals of primary education therefore, as articulated under section 2, pg. 9 of the National Policy on Education (NPE) by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) are to;

a. inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;

b. lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking;

c. promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity;

d. instill social, moral norms and values in the child;
e. develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
f. provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;
g. give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
h. mold the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child; and
i. provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The above goals showcases that the primary education sector is very crucial stage for every child's development. It is an important stage which forms the foundation of children's learning. All children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances, have the right to quality education which must start with effective management of the primary education sector. Since primary education is the foundation of any education. If it is properly managed, it means all other aspects, that is, secondary and tertiary institutions will be well built (Abel & Amenger, 2014).

Why the Management of Primary Education Sector is Important

Effective management of the primary education sector is important for several reasons. According to Mba (2019), good primary school education underpins all the vocational and technical skills acquired in technical colleges, polytechnics and universities. Furthermore, the primary education sector is not just vital to the child, it is critical to the development of a country's economy. Primary education serves as a preparatory ground for the child to acquire basic life skills that would assist the child throughout life, and considering this important fact, one is forced to determine the ways management of primary education sector contributes towards the child's overall development likewise the development of the Nigerian society. For the overall development of the child, the management of primary education sector is important and relevant. Primary education inculcates permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively. The child at the primary school level is taught basic arithmetic and language skills. The skills acquired enable him to effectively communicate and transact in the society. Primary education provides the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality. Primary education is a preparatory period for the child to actively participate in the next level of education. Rudimentary skills which will enable the child to cope with basic education are presented to the child considering his physical, social and intellectual abilities. The primary school apart from teaching basic subjects renders certain services that help the child to develop the skills that would enable him/her cope with future studies. Some of such services are the provision of school library, counseling, Fine arts, Music, Home Economics etc. In addition to this, special periods are created to teach the child some crafts that are locally prepared within the environment. Some such crafts are making of brooms, baskets, ropes and many more. Primary education as observed by Anero (2013) molds the child character and develops in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment. It gives the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity. The primary school as an all-round development agent does not neglect the teaching of any aspect of the child's potential. The school achieves it by exposing the child to several skills. Such skills as the games/sports which may not be easily acquired in the home or any other socialization institution. It is therefore important to note that the primary school period is an important period in the life of every child. Corroborating this

position, Odigie (2003) pointed out that Bloom's taxonomy stated that the rate of intellectual development in people occurs in the following sequence: 0-4 years (50%), 4-8 years (30%) and 8-17 years (20%). If Bloom's assertion is true, it means that a child who receives a haphazard early child education has lost a huge chunk of his intellectual development (Anero, 2014, p.56-57). However, for the overall development of children and the Nigerian society, effective management of the primary education sector is important. This will require resolving the issues and challenges inhibiting effective management of the primary education sector in the country.

Issues and Challenges in the Management of the Nigerian Primary Education Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The issues and challenges affecting effective management of the Nigerian primary education sector has long been in existence, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation concerning management of the primary education sector in Nigeria have worsened. However, the issues and challenges that hindered smooth operation of primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic included underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, equipment and instructional materials, poor teacher motivation, poor supervision and monitoring of instructions, corruption, among others. Scholars and researchers have discussed most of these challenges in their literary works. Anero (2014) also citing other scholars and authorities has identified some of the key issues and the challenges bordering effective management of primary education in Nigeria which still affected the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic as follows;

i. The family issues: The acquisition of primary education by the child is dependent on the family. It is the family that presents the child for primary education. Perhaps it is this view that made Ezekiel–Hart and Adiele (2008:7) to say that "no matter how highly qualified the teachers are, and no matter how sophisticated the infrastructure, the quality of preparation given to students (inputs), the family plays significant roles in determining the end products of the school system. Until the family is able and willing to perform their roles effectively, not much would be expected from the school in the overall attainment of quality education". Contrary to the view expressed by Ezekiel-Hart and Adiele, most of the Nigerian families including during the COVID-19 pandemic, still use their children as economic tools thereby denying them primary education. Commenting on this, Anero (2010) explained that it may be strange to most people that the child is considered as a tool of economic viability by some parents or families in Nigeria. Indeed, some children are so much engaged in economic activities to the extent that they are presently denied the acquisition of any form of education. In support to this view, Thomas, Abolade and Junaid (2004) had explained previously that most parents know why they keep their children out of school. They explained that they are unwilling to surrender their exploitative strange hold on children whom they use for making money. Outside the perception that children are used as economic machineries, some families do not also seem to ensure that the children they bring to school are provided with the demands of the educational needs of the 21st century and in the COVID-19 pandemic period. This is so because some parents have demonstrated unwillingness to provide their children with educational materials needed by their children and wards. Some of the ways the families shabbily attend to the educational needs of their children are:

a. most families refuse to send children to school at the appropriate age;

b. some refuse to provide children's educational needs such as books, feeding, school uniforms, transport etc.; c. good number of families are unable to follow up children to find out what are their

academic challenges in terms of the child's areas of strengths and weaknesses; and

d. many are guilty of not providing good learning environments through the provision of libraries or reading corners (Anero, 2014, p.60). With the COVID-19 pandemic which has thrown a lot of economic hardship on parents, many children have been withdrawn from school. UNESCO (2021) observed that the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic placed pressure on children to work and generate income for financially distressed families. Also, following the directives from the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), that all schools should be closed in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic, this affected 50 million children and youths who are now not attending schools, in addition to the large number of children who were already out of school (UNESCO, 2021).

ii. The government issues: Anero (2014) opined that the government may be accused of being responsible for the challenges obstructing the management of primary education from being as relevant as possible to the child and the society at large. The government is not meaningfully committed to demonstrate sagacity and doggedness in implementing policies and programmes to improve the management of primary education. Some of such prove is the failure of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programmes in the 1950's -1960's due to poor funding (Anero, 2011). The problems caused by poor funding of the 1950's-1960's Universal Primary Education affected the development of primary education sector in Nigeria which lingered even during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Some of these problems are overcrowded classrooms, incompetent teachers, shortage of instructional materials and many more. UNESCO (2021) indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic created a complex challenge for the education delivery system in African countries the most, to support equitable access to quality education for all children. Despite critical additional funding needs, two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries had to cut down their public education budgets during the pandemic, as observed in a recent joint report by the World Bank and UNESCO. In all, the government is known for epileptic financial support to primary education and non-implementation of treaties targeted at improving primary education even when they participate in signing such agreements. Examples of such treaties as reported by Federal Government of Nigeria (2000) are the Jointem declaration and framework for Africa on Education for All (1990), New Delhi (1991) declaration on E-countries, the Dakar (2000), Education for All (EFA) forum, among others (Anero, 2014).

Other areas of concern and challenges to effective management of the primary education sector as observed by Ughabugo (2020) and other scholars include;

a. Inadequate funding which has caused immeasurable havoc during the COVID-19 pandemic in our education system giving rise to common phrasal expressions: falling standard in education," "decay and decline in education, "collapse of education, disrepair in education', "brain drain", etc. as the standard of education in Nigeria declines. Taiwo (1980:131), previously observed that education is an instrument for creating an education and forward-looking democratic society and for providing the trained manpower needed to implement the development plans of the nation, The FRN (2013:1) in the National Policy on Education (NPE), noted that education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society. Primary education is the foundation of any education system. For Nigeria to guarantee future progress and development of the country, primary education must be rescued from total decay and further decline during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Mato (2002:12) previously concurred that the state of primary education in the country today is pathetic

which poses great dangers for both the present and future generations. Primary education in Nigeria needs an overhaul if the sector desire to restore quality and move forward to join the human race during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ughabugo, 2020). However, the issue of poor funding and underfunding of the primary education sector has grieve impact on the development of the sector. Ughabugo (2020) observing the impact of underfunding of education said that enough damage has been done already on the primary education system including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Greater damage can still be prevented especially through an improved adequate funding of the sector. Everyone knows that despite the large number of primary schools in the country, education, especially at that level is not in a pretty shape. Decline is the right word. The continued decline in primary education must be arrested. That can be done through an improved funding. Funding is the central and crucial issue and perhaps, the fulcrum sustaining all aspects of education. Funds are needed for infrastructural development and maintenance, adequate provision of instructional materials, school facilities and equipment, recruitment of quality staff in the desired quantity, staff development, routine supervision and inspection, teacher motivation and empowerment, etc. For Nigeria to join the human race, the budgetary allocation to education must be reviewed upwards to meet the United Nations, Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the Gross national product (GNP). The inability of the government to adequately fund the education sector has always resulted in an uneasy calm in schools, often from the teacher, other workers and even the pupils, and their parents. The obvious result of these strike actions has been destruction of facilities, disappearance of the most instructional materials and equipment, a lowering and degradation of standards and the quality of the knowledge and leaning imparted. Onyekpe (1996) in a previous literature fingered poor funding as the root cause of several strike actions, stating that these were the results of underfunding.

b. Infrastructural challenges: Ughabugo (2020) opined that our primary schools are in very bad shape especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The condition of building in primary schools especially those in the rural and most urban areas, epitomize the state of rot. The facilities in schools are decayed and in deplorable state, in most cases, hazardous to both the children and the teachers. The mud buildings of many years are still in use with the walls cracked and collapsing, the roofs yawning for repairs in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adeyemo (1972:14) previously advocated that "classrooms should be protected from rain, they should be clean and free from the germs for the sake of the child because without the child, nobody will use the school buildings". Under proper organization and management, the school should be well built to accommodate the pupils and to make things convenient for them because children should learn under attractive building. Learning is most effective under a conducive environment.

c. Equipment challenges: Ughabugo (2020) observed that the primary schools need equipment like benches, desks, chairs, blackboards, books. pictures and apparatus of different kinds for illustration so that the child may understand and remember what is taught. In terms of equipment, the condition in most primary schools in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic era is a far cry from the standard. The prevailing scenario is totally unacceptable, in most schools and furniture are never provided. Children more often, sit on bare floors to receive lessons. When they are lucky, mats are provided. Sometimes in remote villages, children are made to provide chalk, the most rudimentary school material. In the National Policy on Education, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013:57) recommended the provision of the educational support services such as: school library,

basic health scheme, counselling, educational resource center and specialist teachers of particular subjection. As of during the COVID-19 pandemic, the listed educational support services are found in a few private primary schools in the urban centers.

d. Teachers recruitment and retention challenges: The NPE (FRN, 2004:39; FRN, 2013:43), recommended that "minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria certificate in education'(NCE)", and that "for effective teaching and learning the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:35 (NPE, 2004:16). Today, many NCE teachers are holding sway in primary schools in line with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education, but still, there are yawning vacancies here and there especially in the branded educationally disadvantaged stated. Some of the NCE teachers teaching in the primary schools are not even qualified in the real sense of it since they have not fully satisfied all the requirements for certification. In most primary schools, especially those domiciled in the rural areas, teachers with lower qualifications are still numerous. With adequate funding, university graduates can be recruited to teach in primary schools in the remotest of villages. Primary school teachers need to be recruited massively in terms of quality and in quantity to cater for the increased primary school enrolment consequent on the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes. Large class size in primary schools is never good-for effective teaching and learning. Deliberate efforts should be geared towards closing the gap to meet the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35 as recommended by the NPE (2004:16). That way, quality which has been eroded may be restored in the long run. Most importantly, uncertificated teachers at whatever level need to be expunged from the system. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria should make hay while the sun shines. Quality teachers need to be motivated and retained by enhancing their working conditions; prompt payment of salaries and allowances, loans of various kinds, medical care etc. when quality teachers are adequately motivated, they can impart the right knowledge to the children because no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004:39). To ensure that quality teachers are available for recruitment in the desired number, teacher education institutions should be given an impetus to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers especially for the primary education level. However, such teachers must be given professional recognition and adequate remuneration (Ughabugo, 2020).

e. Routine supervision and inspection challenges: Ughabugo (2020) expressed that since the government takeover of schools in the early 70s, routine supervision and inspection in primary schools is no longer taken seriously. When such routine exercise takes place, it is often designed to haunt and victimize political opponents. Well intentioned school supervision and inspection will restore commitment in the teacher and quality in their teaching especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. School supervision guarantees regular tidiness of school premises. Fabunmi (1999) previously advocated that children should be comfortable at their work and above all, there must exist in a class good ventilation. The clean and tidy school, the neat and tidy compound decorated with flowers, with roads and walks properly made will have far-reaching and good influence on the pupils. Supervision and inspection ensure standards in all spheres of primary education. The neglect of school supervision and inspection have contributed to the sordid state of primary education in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sordid stated does not augur well for quality which more often is compromised (Ughabugo, 2020).

f. Instructional materials challenges: Alani (2005), Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) and Ubani (2007) contended that the problems of public primary schools are inadequate physical, material, and human resources needed to give qualitative

education. The above scholars lamented that this has remained a perennial problem arising from the age-long neglect of the funding of education coupled with corruption in the system. Again, the poor integration and use of the information and communication technologies is equally a challenge to educational management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qekaj-Thaqi and Thaqi (2021) observed that with the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions suddenly had to adapt to the new way of learning such as the use of social networks like ZOOM, Google platforms, among others, which differed from the traditional approach where students meet at school and have direct communication to the distance learning. Educational institutions by decision of the Government to protect the welfare of pupils and students from the spread of the COVID-19, were obliged to close and continue with online learning but most schools failed to implement the online learning because of such challenges as inadequate funding and ICT tools, teachers' inefficiency in use of ICTs, among others. Online learning has also been challenging for teachers due to the fact that they need to be trained in new ways of creating online and interactive learning. The extent it has been possible to conduct such training in the case of Nigeria or elsewhere in developing countries is a challenge (Qekaj-Thaqi & Thaqi, 2021).

g. Examination malpractice challenges: The high level of examination malpractice in Nigeria schools is currently a big business involving syndicate and stakeholders in the school at all levels. Unfortunately, this started as a proverbial small mustard seed, planted by teachers with the support of some parents at the primary school level. Notably, some teachers who do not teach effectively and cover their scheme of work do resort to helping pupils to cheat in internal and external examinations. By so doing, a wrong foundation is laid in the children. As they pass common entrance examinations to secondary schools, the same virus of examination malpractice is nurtured and they cheat from class work to external qualifying examinations like the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO), and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013).

Given all the above issues and challenges, a way forward that will aid improvement in the management of the Nigerian primary education sector during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has been provided below.

Way Forward Towards Improvement in the Management of the Nigerian Primary Education Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To improve in the management of primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, the following way forward were suggested.

1. Effective management of the primary education sector must start with the family support for their children education. Mass orientation and enlightenment programmes should be organized for parents to encourage them on the need to support and provide education for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anero (2014) opined that the non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and government need to sponsor enlightenment programmes to educate the parents on the relevance of primary education to the child and societal development and explain the dangers of using the child as an economic tool as well as the need to provide the enabling environment that will enable the child to acquire primary education. This strategy can be equally adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve the development of primary education sector.

2. Government at all levels should show their support to primary education by increasing their budgetary allocations to education. Adequate funding of education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic will aid in facility provision, development of school plants, payment of teachers' salaries and other benefits, teacher development

and motivation, among many others. Auxiliary educational bodies at the national and international levels such as Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), United Nations Children's Education and Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) need to liaise with government on how to meet up with funding and other conditions reached during treaties (Anero, 2014).

3. Adequate infrastructure and instructional materials should be provided in the primary schools by all concerned authorities. Amadi (2007) and Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) previously outlining the importance of ICT noted that ICT gives learners the opportunity to apply and develop their ICT capability through the use of ICT tools to support their learning in most subjects, enabling pupils to use these technologies to design, deliver, select, administer and extend learning or communicate with experts, colleagues, peers both in and outside the classrooms. The aforementioned authors confirmed that in this age of computers coupled with during the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and their learners have to understand the language of computing in order to carry out basic operations such as processing, checking information through surfing the computer to visit websites, sending and receiving information, storing and retrieving data, buying and selling, playing games, music and a host of other activities that are now available. But the problem facing the system is poor funding, hence ICT through introduced at this level, is at theory stage with no computers for practical. If the foundation must be laid properly, each school must be provided with computers for effective teaching and learning of the basics as outlined by Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) and Uya (2000).

4. Adequate provision of school facilities must be accompanied by proper facility maintenance culture and thorough and constant school supervision (which incorporates both instructional supervision and school inspection). Effective supervision as highlighted by Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) can go a long way in helping the teachers in the primary schools to lay solid foundation for other levels to build on.

5. Effective training and retraining of primary school teachers is very crucial during COVID-19 pandemic. Nakpodia (2001) cited in Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) also pointed out that teachers that are already serving should be retrained in order to make them functional in their jobs. This could be done through in-service education programmes or courses which include workshops, seminars, conferences, induction or orientation programmes, part time or sandwich courses and effective supervision by the bodies concerned. Accordingly, Chike Okoli (2006) cited in Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) previously stressed that teacher improvement would: ensure that teachers do their assigned work effectively; ensure new teachers receive training to enable them function effectively on the job; provide professional information to teachers; guide teachers to sources of instructional materials; provide technical assistance to teachers, e.g preparation and use of teaching aid; ensure that discipline is maintained in the classroom; maintain high morale among the teachers; suggest ways of improving teacher's performance; and provide an opportunity to discover teachers with special abilities or qualities. Any teacher that is so guided would be able to lay an enduring foundation for Nigeria's educational system. In the foundation laying, the teacher plays various roles.

6. Instructional materials and facilities are of great importance in the school system. Without them no meaningful learning can take place. For teaching, these materials should be adequately provided – chalkboard, chalk, maps, globes, textbooks, magazines, chairs and desks, musical instrument, cupboards, school diary and register, continuous assessment, record books, charts, etc. others include school facilities such as buildings, pipe borne water, good lightning, television, video machine and tape recorder (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013).

Similarly, Ubani (2007) and Umoh (2006) maintained that learners must be made familiar with radio, television, kerosene and gas cookers, scientific toys, instrument and machines. The learner must be allowed to use, touch, feel and play with them. The school should also provide funds required for the improvisation of the relevant instructional materials for effective foundation laying in the primary schools. Some of the improvised materials can be supplied to the learners through the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA) since government alone cannot provide all the instructional materials needed for effective teaching and learning in the primary schools (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013).

Other ways of improving the management of primary education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic should include the recruitment of professional teachers. Thus, professionally trained, talented and well screened teachers should be employed to teach in primary schools. Primary school teachers' motivation should be boosted by providing new salary structure for teachers which should be well-implemented to enhance their job satisfaction and retention. Also, to check incidence of examination malpractices in primary schools, teachers should be made to teach effectively and cover their scheme of work sufficiently. Those caught in examination malpractices such as students, teachers, invigilators and supervisors should be made to face the law (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013).

Conclusion

The crucial role and contributions of the primary education sector towards human capacity building and national development cannot be overemphasized. This is so because the primary education sector forms the basic foundation of every child's learning in which other levels of the Nigerian education system depends on. But when the foundation is faulty, it affects the rest of other educational levels. This is the reason why effective management of the primary education sector especially during the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance. However, discussions in this paper centered on the issues and challenges in the management of Nigerian primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Challenges from the family and government coupled with inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure, equipment and instructional materials, teacher recruitment and retention challenges, routine supervision and inspection challenges, among others, which hindered effective management of the primary education sector during the pandemic period were extensively discussed in the paper. A way forward towards improvement in the management of the primary education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic were also suggested in the study.

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