

EXECUTION OF DECLARATIONS AGREED AT TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS AS A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO THE REPOSITIONING OF CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper explains how government's inability to implement decisions reached at international treaties and conventions are responsible for the poor state of childhood education in Nigeria. It gave a catalogue of declarations which government did not implement. Some such decisions are the MDG2 of 2000, The Dakar (2000) Education for All (EFA), the UNESCO 26% annual budget for education among others. The paper contends that the failure of government to execute the international directives accounts for the recruitment of untrained teachers, poor enrollment and completion rates, lack of portable water in schools and poor state of both infrastructural and instructional facilities. Considering these scenario, it recommends that if childhood education must free itself from its present impoverished state or be repositioned, those who manage childhood education must involve international supports, dedicate a given percentage of funds from revenue sources to childhood education like in the case of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and use special task force or commission to execute decisions reached at treaties and conventions.

Keywords: Declarations, Treaties and Conventions, Pragmatic approaches and Childhood Education.

INTRODUCTION

Childhood education simply refers to the first but most important stage of the educational system. The crucial position it occupies has warranted many people to describe it as the foundation stage of the entire educational system. Since it occupies an important place in the educational system, many scholars, agencies and nations attach much premium to it. Its relevance has made government of many nations to propose the implementation of viable strategies that if executed will enable them reposition childhood education in their countries. Most such decisions are taken at national, regional or international levels. The decisions reached at regional or international levels are best regarded as universal declarations. It is no exaggeration that the declarations made at regional and universal treaties serve as mandates to nations to vigorously pursue the attainment of goals of early childhood education. As good as the decisions are, most nations do not implement 25% of the policies and one such country is Nigeria. The inability of the Nigerian state to aggressively pursue the universal declarations has made education of the child and the entire educational system to be on the slow pedestrian. There are abundant facts to justify the bold assertion put up in the immediate last sentence. If there may be no reason to buttress the claim, the Nigerian state is not rated as one of the nations that has the best system of education in either the regional or global levels. It is still described as one of the nations where there is low school completion rate, poor

school infrastructure, lack of portable water, use of untrained teachers as teaching staff, high non enrolment of school age children among others.

Considering that, it is not an unfounded fact to describe the pre-primary and primary schools to possess the features identified in the last sentence of the immediate paragraph, it means that childhood education sub-sector of the school system needs to be repositioned. It is therefore regrettable that implementation of universal declarations which would have served as the panacea to usher the Nigerian childhood system to global visibility is ignored. In this paper therefore, efforts shall not only be made to articulate how the neglect of universal declarations has plugged childhood education into a dwindling state but this opportunity will be used to point out two major aspects of universal declarations that are ignored have contributed negatively to the uprising of childhood education in Nigeria. It is not pragmatic to identify the areas without suggesting remedies to the problems, this paper will therefore proffer the ways in which the Nigerian state can execute the decisions reached at treaties and conventions hitch freely. Following this background, this discussion shall adopt the following as guides:

1. what is childhood education?;
2. what is universal declarations?;
3. major universal declarations ignored by the Nigerian state;
4. effects of ignoring universal treaties and conventions on childhood education in Nigeria;
5. ways of repositioning childhood education in Nigeria amidst the none compliance of the Nigerian government with the universal declarations.

What is Childhood Education?

The definition or conceptualization of childhood education is differently understood by many people. In attempt to propose its definition, it is important to point out that the term childhood education is made up of two distinct terms namely childhood and education. To articulate its meaning, there is the need to define the two terms differently.

1. **Childhood:** A child can be defined differently by many people. The *Revised Sociology* (2016) defines childhood as a period in a life time when an individual is physically and psychologically not matured. The definition suggests that the individual within the childhood stage depends on others to do almost all things. Interpreting this definition further means that the action of a child whether good or bad cannot be accounted by the child rather the person or persons who take care. In the midst of what constitute childhood, United Nation (1989) in Article 1 while articulating what are the rights of a child, gave an age bench mark of whom a child is by defining a child as someone whose age is not up to 18 years. A summary of these views simply mean that childhood is a period when those who handle people within the period must do so by devoting much care and attention.
2. **Education:** An old philosopher Dewey (1916) defined education as a process. As a process, it can be understood as that which helps to bring out the potential of an individual.

An inference from the definitions suggests that childhood education is that which transmits the needed culture to the child before the individual attains adulthood. In this discussion, it is regarded as teaching and learning that formally take place in a school or an institution. Efforts shall concentrate on how the execution of universal declarations can help the childhood schools to promote teachings that can enable the child transmit into adulthood without hitches.

What is Universal Declarations?

The word universal simply means the whole world. Declarations refer to position or decision statements. The term universal declarations can be understood as decisions reached in conventions and treaties organized by nations of the world. In this discussions efforts are made to examine some such decisions taken by nations in which Nigeria was a signatory. The world decisions or declarations in this write up shall be discussed as it relates to education and the childhood education in particular. At this point, it is important to point out that Nigeria has actively participated in taking good number of decisions herein referred to as universal declarations. Observations indicate that the government of Nigeria has treated the universal decisions with a hand glove. The nonchalant attention given to universal declarations are accountable for the perennial problems inherent in our educational system. It is this thinking that prompted the authors to contend that implementation of educational decisions reached at treaties and conventions will serve as a panacea towards the problems confronting childhood education in Nigeria.

Major Universal Declarations Ignored by the Nigerian State

The bogus statement that the Nigerian state ignores universal declarations as it affects the child's education is not an axiom. It is not disputable that Nigeria as a nation has actively joined other nations to participate in formulating policies and programmes targeted at improving the child's education. This paper may not give the full opportunity to chronicle the role of Nigeria in educational treaties and conventions. A recount of some treaties and conventions indicates that Nigeria participated and is a signatory to the following treaties and conventions.

1. Jomtien declaration and framework for Africa on Education for All (1990);
2. New Delhi (1991) declaration on E-9 countries;
3. Ouagadougou (1992) declaration on the education of women and girls;
4. Amman (1996) affirmation on the pursuit of the goals of Jomtien;
5. Durban (1998) statement of commitment on inter-African collaboration for the development of education;
6. OAU decade of education in Africa (1997 – 2006); and
7. The Dakar (2000) Education for All (EFA) forum (FRN, UBE implementation guide lines, 2000);
8. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 2000; and
9. United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 26% annual budget for education.

This paper may not avail the opportunity to exhaustively discuss on how each of the identified treaties and conventions were signed and neglected by Nigerian government negatively impact on the education of the Nigerian child. For the purpose of clarity it is important to briefly discuss on three of them.

Some Declarations that Provides the Framework upon which the Nigerian Childhood Education can be Repositioned

The Nigerian state participates and indorses the ideals of the treaties and conventions with the target of either repositioning or taking the childhood education system to the next level. Unfortunately, the system do not seem to have changed much such that anyone can describe the system to have metamorphosed into a better system. The list of such treaties and conventions remain incomplete without including the Jomtien Declaration and Framework for Africa on Education for all (1990), Amman (1996) Affirmation on the pursuit of the goals of Jomtien and the Dakar (2000) Education for All (EFA) Forum. The choice of these treaties and conventions in this context as samples is because the changes noticeable in the childhood

education system in Nigeria is traceable to them. Nigeria was an active participant to the decisions respectively taken and reviewed at Jomtien in 1990 and Amman 1996 which was consequently revisited in Dakar 2000 suggests that she will not seat on her oars in implementing the decisions reached at treaties and conventions. Educators belief that outside the recommendations of 1987 Dr. Samuel Cookey led political bureau, the major factor that contributed to the formulation of the ideas of the on-going Universal Basic Education programme (UBE) is the consent Nigeria gave to the Jomtien, Amman and Dakar treaties.

The UBE programme is the most radical measure adopted by the Nigerian state to offer a worthwhile childhood education. This assertion is made because it takes the credit of being the education programme that includes the pre-primary as an integral of the school system in Nigeria. It is also known for articulating how to universally and compulsorily, offer basic education to all Nigerians. UBE programme is acknowledged to have a template designed to correct the anomalies experienced over the years as regards the child's education in Nigeria. This view was expressed by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the then President of the nation who while launching the programme at Sokoto on 30th September, 1999 said the nation cannot afford to fail this time around (Dike, 2009). An interpretation of the president's speech suggests that all is not well with basic education in Nigeria. Basic education as explained by Jagaba (2008) is an aspect of education that covers among other things early childhood care and education. Since basic education includes early childhood education and the programme designed to enable it attain its goals cannot be described as having attained the expected goals, it simply means that if the original template of the programme which was the content of the treaties that gave birth to its formation was pursued with vigour the child's education in Nigeria would have met the ear marked standard.

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 2000 as one of the Conventions Signed by Nigeria with the Intention to Reposition Childhood Education

Millennium Development Goal is one of the universal declarations that Nigeria participated and it is known for her 8 goals, 21 targets and 60 indicators. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) was designed with the hope that between 1990 and 2015 all countries who took part in signing the MDG document must give good account of themselves. It is on record that Nigeria in the year 2000 joined other 189 nations to endorse the MDGs. Where it concerns us in this regard is the MDG2 that emphasizes that every nation should achieve universal primary education by the year 2015 (World Health Organisation, 2005). By this declaration, it means that every child of school age irrespective of sex, ethnicity, tribe, religion, state or whatever must acquire primary school education. Nigeria as a signatory cannot boast of all Nigerian children have enrolled into school. Nigerian government being a signatory to the MDGs and MDG2 in particular may be held accountable when the government of Nigeria promulgated the policy which says in every primary school, there should be a pre-primary school.

The primary target of this policy is among other things ensure that Nigerian children enrol into pre-primary school so as to cultivate school habits that would help them attend primary school. Acknowledging the effectiveness of this strategy, Education For All (2015) reports that in Kenya, pre-primary education is free and compulsory; in Tanzania each primary school has a pre-primary classroom; while in Rwanda, the Government is responsible for teacher training as well as curriculum development; these measures are all targeted at improving enrolment of pupils in primary school. A cue from what Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda has done to improve child education is a reverse situation in Nigeria because the proposal to domicile pre-primary in all public primary schools in Nigeria is a mirage

nationwide. The attainment of MDG goal as regards ensuring that every child of school age in Nigeria acquires primary education is like asking a fowl to urinate.

However, the Nigerian poor disposition to implement universal declarations may not be without causes. Reasons attributive to it may be justified on the following grounds:

1. Most Nigerian communities are violent prone: The long lasting Boko Haram disturbances in the northern part of Nigeria and the militant activities have halted any form of school activities in the affected areas.
2. Cultural belief: Some cultural practices in some African communities impede the education of either the girl or boy child. For instance, in Ogoni area of Rivers State, the first female child is expected not to marry or engage in anything that will take her away from the father's compound. It is the belief of the Ogoni's that the female child will stay and take care of the father's compound.
3. Under age marriage: It is a common practice in some African communities that children at birth will be given out for marriage. Such a practice will not create opportunity for the child to go to school.
4. Lack of political will by government to implement decisions reached at treaties: One worrisome factor is the unwillingness of the Nigerian government not to implement or carry out actions reached at treaties. In Nigeria for instance, there are frequent backsliding or renegeing of government positions in terms of funding and managing childhood education. A good example of how government engage in policies that deter the progress of childhood education in Nigeria are the 1988, 1991 and 1993 NPEC (National Primary Education) decrees which promulgated and abrogated laws and edits that have caused irreparable damages to primary school system. The on-going UBE programme also has a share of government's unwillingness to match actions with its words. The issue of abandoned school feeding programmes is a good example. The government while signing the UBE programme into law declared that in the bid to meet up with global expectations, any child found hawking or wandering during school hours will be arrested along with the parents. Indeed till now no one has implemented such good decision of government.
5. None free nature of childhood education in Nigeria: Childhood education in Nigeria is sponsored by parents. Unfortunately most parents do not have the finance and all that are needed to offer good childhood education to children. This is unlike Europe and USA where it is a right of the child to be educated. They do so in compliance to United Nations declaration on the right of the child to be educated.

No doubt, the Nigerian realities are not disposed to favouring the proper education of the child. Its indisposed nature, accounts for its quash of decisions reached at universal conventions. As a follow up, one may wish to know if the ugly situation may remain unsolved because the education of the child in Nigeria is becoming chaotic every day.

United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 26% Annual Budget for Education

United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) an agency of United Nations (UN) gave a standing order that minimum annual budget for education by any country should be 26% of its overall budget. Nigeria as a member nation is expected to comply with this order. Unfortunately, Nigeria has always budgeted far less than 26% of its annual budget to education. In the last 20-30 years it can be recalled that Nigeria has budgeted 14.87% in 1994 and thereafter has budgeted less than 1994 figure which did not meet the UNESCO bench mark. This analysis is derived from the account rendered by Teboho (2000)

who gave account of the Nigerian educational budget in mid-1990 as 1994 10.30 billion naira (14.87%), 1995 12.70 billion (11.42%) and 1996 15.35 billion naira (12.33%).

From 2010 till date expenditure for education has increased in figures but has not increased in terms of annual percentage expenditure or budget. A cummulation of the comments made by Ujunwa (2015), Olanrewaju (2016), Dayo (2017) and Daily Post (November, 5 2017) gives credit to the assertion. A summary of their views can be presented in Table 1:

YR.	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
AMT	249.08b n	306.3b n	400.15b n	426.53b n	493bn	492.03b n	369.6b n	550b n	605.08bn
%	7.19%	9.32%	9.86%	10.15%	10.54 %	10.78%	6.01%	6%	7.04%

Table 1: 2010-2018 Nigerian Education Annual Budget in Terms of Amounts and Percentages

The low percentage voted to education by Nigerian government as shown in Table 1 is a clear case of disobedience and a show of unwillingness to take the business of education serious. Following this accusation, Democratic Socialist Movement (2016) while lamenting on the care free attitude of government towards education noted that 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 were higher than 2016 even though the previous years did not meet the UNESCO bench mark of allocating 26% of the budget to education. The show of lackazadicalism towards education by government will no doubt leave childhood education and education in general with ugly experiences and situations. Some such experiences will be discussed in the next phase of this discussion.

Effects of Ignoring Universal Treaties and Conventions on Childhood Education in Nigeria

With the cases of government non-compliance to universal declarations, shun of the UNESCO directive and lack of zeal to vigorously pursue the attainment of MDG2, no one may argue that government disposition will not hold positive effects on childhood education in Nigeria. The actions of government in terms of executing treaties and conventions may account for recruitment of untrained teachers, crowded classrooms, poor school infrastructure, lack of portable water, high non enrolment of school age children, high dropout rate or poor school completion rates among others. The nonchalance of government in implementing universal treaties and conventions is an odd omen to attain the goals of childhood education. Considering that the goals of childhood education is multidimensional to both individual and societal development the government of Nigeria ought not to play with policies and programmes designed to place education on a developmental pedestrian. Recounting the roles of childhood education in the development of the individual and the nation Vicki (2017) remarked that childhood education is a productive education of an individual and subsequent years. Vicki further explained by advancing some reasons. Some of the reason include:

- a. Socialization: One problem the world over is the ability of an individual to cope with life after immediate family. Early childhood education exposes the child to life outside the home and by so doing; the child acquires social skills as required by the immediate environment.
- b. Holistic development: Exposure of children to good education helps them to develop in all areas of life (emotionally, socially, physically, mentally, morally and many more).
- c. Enthusiasm for lifelong learning: Since the child education has a good foundation, it becomes easier for the child to discover, read, write and acquire other lifelong skills that would enable the child transform into adulthood without stress.

- d. Team work: Many school activities are centred on team work. Availing the child an early childhood experience is a rich avenue to inculcate team work and thereby build sense of belonging among people in small and large groups.
- e. Resilience: Childhood education provides the children with the opportunity to lose games and fail examinations but equip them with the strategies to cope with lost grounds so the children become acquainted with the skills to cope with life challenging situations.
- f. Exposure to diversity: Early childhood education avails children the opportunity to interact with others from other families of diverse backgrounds and culture thereby exposing them to different issues of life and they begin early to make necessary adjustments. The advantage of such quality cannot be over emphasized.

A recount of the advantages of childhood education may not be very important in this discussion but it is not out of place because its discussion tries to tell its relevance to the child and nation as a whole. Considering that its roles are significant to nation building and national development, the Nigerian nation ought not to allow the system to be described in the following ways:

1. Recruitment of untrained teachers: It is not a secret that the national policy on education specified that Nigeria certificate in Education (NCE) should be the minimum teacher qualification. Despite the emphasis placed on this policy, most childhood schools in Nigeria are staffed with those who did not attend teacher training institutions. One of such recruitment worthy of note is in 2012, the then governor of Rivers State His Excellency Governor Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi engaged 13,000 teachers into the primary and post primary schools in the state. It was observed that a good number of those engaged were not trained teachers. The action of Rivers State Government did not only contradict the national policy but it also negates universal declarations. It is observed that the case of Rivers State is a common phenomenon in terms of recruiting childhood teachers.
2. School infrastructure and facilities: Non-compliance to international decisions and policies can be held responsible for the under development of education in many ways. Going round the schools, in Nigeria shows a display of abandoned infrastructures which points to the fact that more has to be done. The worrisome aspect is even with the launch of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was one of the measures adopted by government to comply with the Dakar declaration of Education for All no one has noticed a significant change in the provision of infrastructure in Nigerian schools. This view has led to several testimonies. Testifying to this, Ameh (2006) observed that the state of infrastructural and instructional facilities will jeopardize the implementation of the UBE programme in Anambra State. Sokari (2008) while commenting on this best described the primary school buildings in Rivers State as dilapidated forgotten colonial residence where children sit on the floor to take lessons and teachers rarely had seats, tables, chalks and even boards to write. No doubt, if the government considers education as a serious business and comply with universal declarations, Ameh and Sokari would not have the opportunity to describe the state of instructional and infrastructural facilities in demeaning manners.
3. School enrolment and completion rates: Some index of school system performance are the rates with which the children enrol and complete school education. In the Nigerian situation, the enrolment and completion rates are still low. Common observation is that during school hours children are found hawking in spite of the provision of the UBE act which says that children not found in school during school hours should be apprehended alongside with their parents and possibly taking to court for interrogation. In support to this Anero (2011) noted that the UBE programme in its blue print of 1999 explained that efforts will be made to counter the factors which are known to have hindered the achievement of the goals of the UPE programme. It, therefore, declared to embark on

public enlightenment and social mobilization strategies. In this wise, one is yet to ascertain the extent those who manage childhood education has succeeded in embarking on efforts that can mobilize the masses to acquire childhood education. Beyond these, many testimonies are bound to indicate that the enrolment and completion rates of primary school education in Nigeria are still low.

4. Portable water: Availability of portable water in school is as important as the child coming to school. Children use water for play, wash, learn, drink and do other things. Unfortunately, the situation of Nigerian schools is that most childhood schools lack good water. Contributing to the usefulness of water, Colby and Miske (2000) observed that if children leave school and walk distances away in search of water for any purpose they may not return back to their classes. If the mile stones set must be achieved, those who manage schools must be up and doing by providing water and other basic facilities that will enable the schools operate smoothly.

Ways of Repositioning Childhood Education in Nigeria amidst the None Compliance of the Nigerian Government with the Universal Declarations

No doubt, the non-compliance of the Nigerian government with international directives or mandates is as old as formal education in Nigeria. The failure of several educational programmes to reposition childhood education is attributed to quash of policies and programmes designed and designated for childhood education. The failure of the regional UPE programmes of the 1950s and 1960s, the 1976 national UPE programme, the late 1980s and early 1990s' National Primary Education Commission policies, the on-going UBE programme are eloquent testimonies to this assertion. If subsequent childhood education programmes or existing ones must succeed, measures must be taken.

1. Task force: Since there is significant snob of international policies and programmes designed to improve childhood education in Nigeria, a special educational commission or task force should be set up to monitor the implementation of declared decisions. Membership of such commission should be drawn from people of proven integrity and honour.
2. Phase by phase action plan: Since all the resources required to implement the decisions may not all be available at the same time, those who manage childhood education can programme the implementation of the events on mile stone bases. By so doing, the proposed targets can be achieved.
3. Dedication of funds from revenue sources to education: Funds may be a factor impeding on carrying out the international directives therefore, a given proportion of funds from oil, solid minerals, taxes, levies and others should be devoted to financing childhood education in Nigeria. The case of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is a good example.
4. Involvement of international support: At this point in our national life it is almost frightening that the nation who describes herself as the giant of Africa is yet to get her childhood education aright. If the system must get it right, the managers of education in Nigeria can seek for both human and other forms of supports from nations who got it right. By so doing, childhood education can be reposition

CONCLUSION

It is indeed a thing of concern that after more than a century when formal education was introduced in Nigeria, the nation is still struggling to make a head way educationally. It is not as if, the government of Nigeria does not desire to usher a viable childhood education system, if she does not, she would not engage in the failed educational policies, projects and

programmes. The failed efforts of government, has given rise to this paper to source ways of repositioning childhood education in Nigeria. It does not demand a logical thinking to concede to the fact that the non-compliance of government to international directives is a chief cause of the epileptic state of our childhood education in Nigeria. If the nation must rise and recover its lost position, all hands must be on deck. The government must be willing to seek for international supports, parents must be willing to allow their children attend school and not use them as economic tools, the managers of childhood education must put a round peg in a round hole so as to reposition the nation's childhood education system.

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