

# QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

By

DR. ADOKIYE A. OKUJAGU

*Department of Primary Education,  
Rivers State University of Education,  
Rumuolumeni. Port Harcourt.*

## **Abstract**

*Among the strata of the education system, primary education has been identified as the most sensitive stratum, the reason being that it determines the success or failure of the entire system. This calls for qualitative instructional delivery in the primary schools and quality assurance is required to ensure and sustain quality education at this level. This paper, therefore, reviews the concepts of primary education and quality assurance. Some requirements that are directly related to quality assurance in primary schools are discussed and challenges of quality assurance at this level of education enumerated. Based on the challenges, recommendations were made.*

In the modern world, education has come to remain as the bedrock of development in societies. Hence, nations have adopted formal education as a veritable instrument for national development. In this direction, schools have been institutionalized to dispense education at different levels and components. In these schools, teaching and learning take place as teachers and students (learners) are engaged in one form of instructional activity or the other. It is important to note that these instructional activities must not be at variance with the procedures set out for them, and must result in the objectives set out for attainment in the schools. The need then arises to ensure that the quality of instruction in the primary schools is assured. This paper will, therefore, examine the following:

- ◆ Primary Education and its Objectives
- ◆ Quality Assurance (QA)
- ◆ Requirement for Quality Assurance (QA) in Primary Schools
- ◆ Challenges of Quality Assurance in Primary Schools
- ◆ Conclusion
- ◆ Recommendations.

### **Primary Education**

Primary education is the first level of formal education preceded by early childhood education. At this level, children are prepared for a broad-based education which emphasizes the attainment of permanent and functional literacy, numeracy and effective communication skills. It provides the basis for progressive learning of the child. In Nigeria, primary education is defined as education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years (FRN, 2004:14). Okujagu (1997:12) likened it to the builder's foundation, which determines the number of storeys a gigantic building can carry. '*Foundation*' is primary education and '*gigantic building*' is the entire system of education. Primary education is a major component of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education. It is free, compulsory and universal.

At this level of education, the curriculum offerings have been differentiated into several subject areas. These subjects are to be taught using practical, experimental and exploratory methods. In order to facilitate advancement of knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been integrated into the curriculum of primary schools. The objectives of primary education are as follows:

### **Objectives of Primary Education**

- (a) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively.
- (b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- (c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- (d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- (e) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- (f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- (g) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (FRN, 2004:14).

Achievement of these objectives will lay a solid foundation for the next subsequent higher levels of education (i.e secondary and tertiary). The objectives are stated to reflect the three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

### **Quality Assurance (QA)**

Due to the function of education and the importance attached to it, the world over, there is the dire need to ensure that education produces what it is intended for at each stratum of the system. This means that curriculum content and instructional procedures would be improved upon while meticulously implementing the curriculum document in the primary schools. This calls for the mobilization of both human and material resources to determine and sustain, through monitoring and evaluation, quality, standard and outcomes of education.

Quality assurance is a wide ranging concept which covers all matters that individually or collectively influence the quality of products and/or services. The American Heritage Dictionary defines quality assurance as a system of evaluating performance, as in the delivery of services or the quality of products provided to consumers, customers, or patients, (clients). According to Wikipedia (undated) quality assurance is the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service or facility to maximize the probability that minimum standards of the quality are being attained by the production process. In another definition, Ciwar (2005:2) stated that quality assurance is the practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard. In relating quality assurance to primary education, therefore, the author opines that it is the systematic practice of verifying or determining whether the products of primary schools (i.e pupils) actually acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values expected of them at that level via the curriculum offerings i.e both curricular and co-curricula activities). Quality assurance viewed from this perspective would result in qualitative primary education because it is a monitoring and evaluation mechanism put in place to ensure that curriculum and instructional practices are consistent with and leading to the attainment of set objectives of primary education. Therefore, quality assurance is a total and holistic process concerned with ensuring the integrity of an outcome (UBE, 2002).

### **Requirement for Quality Assurance in Primary Schools**

Because there is need for a shift of emphasis in education discourse from how much and how many to how well; from more to better and in fact to more of the better (Obanya, 2001), quality assurance in primary schools requires a number of provisions, and these include:

1. **Curriculum Relevance:** The curriculum is a document that guides learning experiences and how they are dispensed. Thus, the curriculum impacts directly on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Hence, there is the need to make it relevant for qualitative education. This would include reviewing the curriculum regularly and updating it to accommodate emergent issues in society. In this way, it would serve the interest, needs and challenges of learners and society at large, as the teacher is better informed about what pupils will learn and how he will teach that.

2. **Infrastructural Facilities** This is as essential as the curriculum document. Okujagu and Sokari Adox-Okujagu (2011) stated that school infrastructural facilities are those elements found within the school environment which facilitate its optimal functioning that culminate in the achievement of set goals. These elements include classroom blocks and furniture, health facilities and services, library, laboratory, Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, and toilet and water facilities. Infrastructural facilities when provided in primary schools, not only engender effective and efficient running of the schools, but also provide a reasonable amount of comfort for teaching and learning to thrive, thereby assuring quality.
3. **Instructional Materials** These are indispensable materials in the teaching-learning process because they are the media through which instruction is facilitated. According to Manga and Mangal (2009), they are associated or concerned with determining and providing appropriate stimuli to the learner to produce certain type of responses for making learning more effective. Generally speaking, instructional materials could be categorized as high and low technology materials that are used to aid the teaching-learning process in any formal educational institution. The characteristics of these materials are such that they assist or help to present the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be acquired by a primary school pupil in a qualitative manner.
4. **Funding** To ensure quality assurance in primary schools, adequate funding is required. The funds would be utilized in the areas of training and retraining of quality assurance agents at all three tiers of government, providing mobility for these agents to access primary schools, including those located in remote and rural areas, development of viable tools for quality assurance and getting teachers involved in the quality assurance process, among others.
5. **Regular Capacity Building Exercise for Primary School Teachers** Obanya (2004:3) remarked that human development which is a product of capacity building is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potentials and lead productive creative lives in accord with their needs and interest. Since no system of education may rise above the quality of teachers, it becomes expedient that the capacity of primary school teachers should be built. This exercise would enable them become acquainted with modern ways or means of discharging their professional duties (i.e translating the curriculum document into action). During the capacity building exercises teachers acquire more and new knowledge, skills, positive attitudes and values in their different areas of specialization or the subjects taught in the classrooms. When these are ploughed back into the classroom, they would improve the quality of instruction children receive in primary schools.

6. **Qualified Teachers** Teachers hold the key to the success of any educational system. Therefore, for them to properly translate or interpret the curriculum to the understanding and utility of pupils, they must be adequately qualified for the job. It is in this direction that (FRN, 2004:39) recommends that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession should be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). This is a move to ensure that primary school teachers are qualified, since it is such a teacher that can introduce quality teaching and learning initiatives that could result to quality education. The author adds that the processes leading to acquisition of NCE should be reviewed and strengthened to actually enable teachers dispense education that would lay a solid foundation for the subsequent higher levels of the system.

### **Challenges of Quality Assurance in Primary Schools**

Quality assurance in primary schools is plagued by a myriad of challenges and these include:

(a) **Weak Capacity of Quality Assurance Agents** The capacity of personnel entrusted with the responsibility of assuring quality in primary schools and education in general is weak. For this reason, they lack the wherewithal to carry out a qualitative quality assurance exercises that could induce quality in education in the schools. In the three tiers of government, as operated in Nigeria, there are school supervisors and inspectors of education in the Ministries of education, Zonal Universal Basic Education Commission Offices, State Universal Basic Education Boards and Local Government Education Authorities. These agents feel comfortable in their offices to the effect that they hardly remember to go out to the field for their professional assignment. If and when they do, their posture is punitive than being corrective and interactive for better results. There also is a weak synergy and networking among quality assurance agents for data collection and sharing of information and ideas that could improve control and assure quality in the system.

(b) **Low Learning Outcomes** The outcomes of learning in literacy, numeracy and life skills in primary schools are very low. This is occasioned by inadequate infrastructural facilities and classroom furniture, among others. These inadequacies do not provide any measure of comfort and congenial environment for any form of teaching and learning that could stimulate qualitative education. Perhaps, this condition could be partly responsible for the reason why quality assurance agents are not enthusiastic about going for fieldwork.

(c) **Lack of Standardized and Uniform Quality Assurance Tools and Reporting Mechanisms** FME (2009), reports that standardized and uniform quality assurance instruments and reporting mechanisms are lacking in our educational system. Hence, quality assurance agencies develop, design and utilize tools that they are favourably disposed to without recourse to the fact that a common curriculum is in use. This in turn yields a reporting mechanism that is also not uniform, hence, creating discrepancies and variances in the feedback from the field. Decision making is therefore

hindered given this condition. In addition, some of the tools in use can best be described as archaic, obsolete and out-of-date, hence, they have become ineffective, inefficient and irrelevant for data gathering on quality assurance.

**(d) Lack of Adequately Qualified Primary School Teachers:** This is one major and outstanding challenge of quality assurance in the primary school. A large number of teachers with certificates below the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) still abound in the system (FME, 2009) as FRN (2004) declares that the minimum qualification for entry into the teacher profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Maduwesi in Okujagu (2009), laments that the quality and quantity of teachers produced in Nigeria over the years fall short of national expectation and needs, and this remains a big challenge to the education system. The current crop of primary school teachers is unqualified to the extent of not being sufficiently resourceful and, nationally and globally competitive. Not being globally competitive is even a more serious challenge given the fact that Nigeria aims at becoming one of the 20 strong economies/countries by the year 2020, yet teachers at its foundation level of education are far from being Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compliant. This is a dangerous threat to quality assurance in primary schools.

**(e) Lack of Fund** Nigeria is a country that is populated by about 150 million people. More than half of this population lives in the rural and remote areas. For access to universal basic education, it is implicit that more primary schools would be located in these rural and remote areas whose terrains are very difficult in most cases. It is public opinion that quality assurance agents (i.e inspectors and supervisors) do not visit these schools as often as they should do due to lack of fund to provide mobility for them to get to these nooks and crannies of the country for quality control exercises. Hence, they only get to schools within their reach and leave the ones unattended to, to imaginations.

- **Attitude of Quality Assurance Agents** Often times, inspectors and supervisors see themselves as superior officers to the members of staff of the schools visited. In these schools they conduct themselves in a manner that suggests arrogance, intimidation, punitive measures and rigidity. They are, largely, supposed to be friendly and humble as individuals and the practice itself to be interactive and corrective. In fact, they play the role of mentors and should see teachers as mentees whom they should collaborate with to ensure improvement, maintenance, sustenance and assurance of quality in education.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed primary education and its objectives in the Nigerian context, and the concept of quality assurance. Some requirements for quality assurance to thrive in the primary schools and challenges were identified. It is the considered optimism of the author that if the underlisted recommendations are brought to bear,

qualitative education could be accessed in Nigerian primary schools through quality assurance.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations are as follows:

- Capacity building exercises should be organized for quality assurance agents. This would update them in terms of knowledge and ideas through acquisition of current information in quality assurance. As fallout from these exercises, quality assurance agents should synergize and network for data collection and sharing of information and ideas in that area (i.e quality assurance).
- Government and other well-meaning stakeholders in education should assist in providing adequate infrastructural facilities and classroom furniture to engender some measure of comfort for both teachers and pupils so as to stimulate an environment that is congenial for qualitative teaching and learning necessary for enthronement of high learning outcomes.
- An independent professional quality assurance body in primary education should be established to fashion out a comprehensive quality assurance document (in terms of policy), regulate quality assurance practices and develop tools or instruments that will be effective, efficient and relevant for use.
- Teacher training institutions should intensify effort in producing well-grounded and adequately qualified teachers to teach in primary schools for improved or high academic gains as preparatory for vision 20: 2020. Primary school teachers should be trained to be ICT compliant as to be able to lay a good ICT foundation for their pupils.
- Funds should be adequately provided for quality assurance practices in terms of field allowances, mobility, development and revision of quality assurance instruments as well as refresher courses for supervisors of schools and inspectors of education.

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