Abstract
This paper examined quality assurance in primary education in Nigeria. It discussed the concept of quality and quality assurance, objectives of primary education as indicated in National Policy on Education (2004) were enumerated. Activities involved in quality assurance in primary education were highlighted. Problems militating against quality assurance in primary education were discussed such as: inadequate provision of facilities, insufficient provision of instructional materials, not ensuring curriculum relevance. Recommendations were made to include: provision of facilities should be by a combined effort of school administrators, Parent Teachers’ Association, philanthropists and government. Teachers, pupils and government should help in the provision of instructional materials. Conclusions were made.

Introduction
Education is a tool for national development. Observing this, Onyeachu (2006:51) says: “it is through education that cultural heritages are transferred from generation to generation.” This being the case, there is every need to maintain quality in all levels of our educational system starting from primary level. Primary level of education is very important because it is the foundation level. To that end, FRN (2004) describes primary education as the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system because all other levels are built upon primary level of education. Hence there is need to maintain quality in primary education. This paper is therefore looking into quality assurance in primary education in Nigeria. This will be treated under the following sub-headings:

1. Concept of quality and quality assurance

Activities involved in quality assurance in primary education

Problems militating against quality assurance in primary education in Nigeria

Recommendations and conclusion.

Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance

The term quality has been variously defined by many people. Hornby (2000:953) defines quality as: “the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it, how good or bad something is.” Ijaiya (2001:297) views quality as: “something everyone considers good and wants to have.” Tahir (2006:10) on his own views quality to mean: “three interconnected factors: efficiency (e.g. better use of available resources); relevance (e.g. to need and contexts); and something more (e.g. to journey a little further than mere efficiency and relevance).”

From the foregoing definitions, one can describe quality as something that is very relevant which every member of the society considers good and strives to possess for effective utilization.

Quality assurance is the process of ensuring that good standard is maintained. Hence Ciwar (2005:2) defines quality assurance as: “the practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard.” Primary level of education need to be managed in such a way that very high standard will be maintained. The need to maintain quality in education arises because without quality education becomes a waste. Ijaiya (2001) observes that without quality education not only becomes wastage but also posses dangers to the individual beneficiary and the society. To that effect, Ijaiya maintains that, the worth of any educational system as an investment lies in its capacity to continuously serve its customers (students, parents, employers of labour, the society) better and remain challenges providing for quality and quantity. In further appreciation of the need to maintain quality in education, Omolewa (2007:5) says: “educational reforms invariably emanate from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made in a nation and by its people through a careful engineering of the educational process. This means that when the process of any educational level is carefully engineered objectives of that level of education will be achieved.


Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:14) identifies the objectives of primary education as to:

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 the child’s changing environment;
f) Give 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;
g) Provide the child with basic tools for future educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The above well articulated objectives of primary education cannot be achieved if standard are not maintained in primary education. This necessitates the need for making sure that all the activities involved towards maintaining quality in primary education take place.

Activities Involved in Quality Assurance in Primary Education

There are so many activities involved in quality assurance in primary education. These include:

- Provision of facilities
- Provision of instructional materials
- Curriculum relevance
- Constant retraining of primary school teachers.
- Updating teachers knowledge and skills
- Adequate number of qualified teachers
- Adequate funding
- Time management

Provision of Facilities

Facilities are plants, buildings, equipment which enable people to carry out their activities effectively. Ehiametalor (2001:305) defines facilities as: “those factors which enable production workers to achieve the goals of an organization.” Facilities which enable primary schools to be run effectively are needed adequately in order to assure quality. These facilities are necessary in primary schools because as Ehiametalor (2001) observes pupils learn better when facilities like buildings, comfortable seats for teachers and pupils are available. The school is like a manufacturing organization where plants and equipment must be in a top operational shape to produce result. And moreover, Onyeachu (2006) observes that pupils learn better when facilities like buildings, comfortable seats for teachers and pupils are available.

Provision of Instructional Materials

To assure quality in primary education, instructional materials have to be provided in sufficient quality. This is because of its importance for effective teaching and learning. Observing this, Onyejemezi (1981:281) says:

*Any established school curriculum calls for ways and means of implementing it in order to reach the objectives at the various levels. And no discussion of the curriculum is complete without suggestions about methods and means of effective implementation.*
No wonder Dike (1987) describes instructional materials as alternative channels of communication which teachers can use to compress information and make them move vividly to his learners.

Supporting Onyejemezi (1981) and Dike (1987), Ughamadu (1992: 142) and Maduewesi (2000) noted that: “curriculum materials are indispensable in the teaching and learning process/ curriculum implementation.” Appreciating this perceived importance of curriculum materials, Abdukareem (2001) notes that resources are very necessary for mobilization and utilization by human resources in order to accomplish the set goals. To this end, Babalola (2004) recognizes curriculum materials as ways and means of making the teaching and learning process easy, more meaningful and understandable. As such Babalola (2004:114) emphatically says: “as ingredient is to soup so also is resource materials to curriculum implementation.” Primary school pupils who will always like to see, smell, and even touch resource materials meant for learning need quality materials. This is necessary because as Mkpa (2007:8) observes that: “good quality resources are positively related to good quality products.” Mkpa (2007) therefore suggests that for effective results, adequacy of resource supply to the productive process has to be consistently maintained.

**Curriculum Relevance**

To assure quality, primary school teachers are expected to write their scheme of work as well as their daily and weekly lesson notes from the first day the school re-opens to the last day. This is to make sure that learners learnt what is in their curriculum.

**Constant Re-Training of Primary School Teachers**

This is one of the ways of ensuring that quality is maintained at primary school level. Primary school teachers need to be retrained from time to time for improving their methodological approaches to instruction. Appreciating the need to retrain teachers as a way of assuring quality in primary education level, Bassey and Archibong (2001) are of the opinion that retraining of existing teachers to acquaint them or create awareness at a general level and highlight new ideas to the various subjects are some of the ways of assuring quality at primary education level. Emphasizing on the need to re-train primary school teachers even head teachers, Mkpa (2007) says, the teaching staff requires to be constantly updated in pedagogy for the classroom staff and administrative mechanisms.

**Updating Teachers Knowledge and Skills**

Updating teachers’ knowledge and skills is one of the enhancement strategies towards maintenance of good quality teachers for primary level of education. Doing this can bring about permanent change in an employee’s knowledge, skills, attitude or social behaviour. Bassey and Archibong (2001) note that this method will help in improving performance and stability at the workplace. In an attempt to encourage teachers to update their knowledge, FRN (2004) stipulates that every teacher should go on learning.
Adequate Number of Qualified Teachers

Quality cannot be assured in primary level of education, if schools are not equipped with adequate number of qualified teachers. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) had earlier recommended through her National Policy on Education that minimum qualification into teaching profession should be Nigerian certificate in Education; this is a move towards maintaining quality teachers. This recommendation is necessary because as Ojo (2006) observes, education is power, while the teacher is the dispenser of education, as such the teacher holds the secret to that power. Teachers with good quality education are in a position to dispense education to the learners starting from the primary school. This is necessary because as Ojo (2006:161) says: “good teachers thereafter mean good education, which in turn translates into tremendous power in the hands of people. That is power to transform the society into a better place.”

Adequate Funding

Fund refers to money needed for effective primary education. To maintain quality in primary education, Onyeachu (2008) notes that enough fund should be allotted for payment of teachers salaries, building of new classrooms, renovation of school buildings, purchase of equipment, furniture and instructional materials.

Time Management

Time is another thing that is needed for ensuring quality in primary education. Ajayi and Oluchukwu (2003) describe time as a major and an essential resource being managed by an officer/ teacher in any organization/ school. Ajayi and Oluchukwu (2003) observe that without ensuring that time allotted to an activity is adhered to, it will be difficult to ensure peace and stability in the organization. This is because all the activities such as preparing the lessons, teaching the lessons, preparation of instructional materials and other extra-curricular activities require specific time mapped out for them to be effective. In appreciation of the need to enhance quality primary education in Nigeria, Mkpa (2007) says that time is a resource that could be meaningfully utilized to sharpen the quality of the output in teaching-learning situation. Mkpa (2007) further describes time as an enabling factor in the process of the implementation.

Problems Militating Against Quality Assurance in Primary Education in Nigeria

There are so many problems militating against quality assurance in primary education in Nigeria. These include:

Inadequate Provision of Facilities

Facilities needed for effective primary education are inadequate. This militates against maintaining good standard.

Insufficient Provision of Instructional Materials

Instructional materials for effective implementation of curriculum content are not sufficient. This is an impingement to ensuring that quality is maintained in primary education.
Not Ensuring Curriculum Relevance

Most of the activities needed for ensuring curriculum relevance are not done by primary school teachers and their head teachers. This attitude makes it difficult for assuring quality.

Infrequent Re-Training of Teachers

Teachers are not re-trained frequently. This prevents them from learning new additions in various school subjects.

Inability of Some Teachers to Update their Knowledge and Skills

Some teachers find it difficult to leave their homes and go out for in-service training. Hence they do not acquire knowledge and skills as expected when teachers go on learning.

Inadequate Number of Qualified Teachers

There is inadequate number of qualified teachers. As a consequence, some teachers with teachers’ grade two certificates (TC II) are employed to teach in our primary schools. This is a very big problem towards maintaining quality.

Inadequate Funding

Fund allotted for primary education is not enough. In most cases, fund meant for primary education are diverted to other sectors of the economy. This is also a big problem to assuring quality in primary education.

Improper Time Management

In most cases, time allotted for all the activities involving primary education are not strictly adhered to, as a consequence many vital activities are neglected. This affects quality assurance in primary education.

Conclusion

To maintain quality in primary education in Nigeria, government, head teachers, teachers, pupils, philanthropists and parent teachers’ association should put their heads together in performing all the activities expected of them.

Recommendations

To assure quality in primary education, the following recommendations are made.

Facilities needed for primary education should be adequate. School administrators, Parent Teachers’ Association, (PTA), philanthropists and government should contribute towards provision of facilities needed in all primary schools in Nigeria. To assure quality in primary schools, provision of instructional materials should be made by combined effort of the teachers, pupils and the government.

Curriculum relevance could be assured by the head teachers making sure that their teachers write their scheme of work, lesson notes and other records and utilize them for effective teaching and learning in primary schools.
For improved performance in teachers’ methodological approaches in various school subjects, government should re-train teachers constantly, this could be done through capacity building programmes, organization of workshops, seminars and conferences.

Teachers should update their knowledge and skills through evening programmes, part-time courses and other types of distant learning programmes. Government should reward teachers after attending any of these courses.

Government should employ qualified teachers to teach in our primary schools. This is necessary because it is the quality of teachers that determines the quality of the product.

Fund allotted to primary education should be enough. This should be done by setting up a monitoring team who will ensure that all the monies meant for primary education are judiciously used.

Time allotted for all the activities in primary education should be strictly adhered to. Head teachers as internal supervisors should ensure this.

References


