

TOWARDS A QUALITATIVE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper sought to give insights into the achievement of a qualitative primary education in Nigeria in the 21st century. The nature of primary education and insights on quality control formed the introduction of this paper. The paper also discussed the significance of the positive influence of the following factors in the achievement of quality in primary education in Nigeria, professionally trained teachers, curriculum content and implementation, school inspection, infrastructural facilities, conference seminars and workshops for teachers, problems associated with quality control in primary education in Nigeria were stated in this paper. The paper proffered recommendations and conclusion.

Introduction

Nature of Primary Education and Quality Control

The FRN (2004:14) defines primary education *as the education given in institutions 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.* It's the gateway to other levels of education and it provides the fundamental knowledge which an individual needs to cope with common social demands in the society.

In view of the significant role which primary education plays in knowledge building, its quality cannot be undermined. Since a good beginning makes a good end in most cases then, the learning journey should commence with a good beginning, if a good end is expected. It is in the wake of this concern that educational planners and policy makers came up with the idea of stipulating the minimum standards (or basic requirement) in Nigerian schools. The education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Decree No. 16 of 1985, contained the guidelines on minimum standards in Nigerian schools. To this end, the Federal Inspectorate Service, in collaboration with other relevant bodies such as UBEC, NCCE, NTI, NERDC; has the following responsibilities among others:

- i. Production of guidelines on minimum standards for primary and secondary schools nationwide.
- ii. Determining the educational standard to be expected of the child after completion of the school course programme.
- iii. Determine whether or not the standard of education is actually failing;
- iv. Determining whether or not schools are achieving the set educational goals and objectives (Maduewesi, 2005:215).

Nkom (2002:48), observes that the learning environment includes the balance between the learner, teacher; facilities in ratios and how they will be managed and coordinated to ensure efficient use of time and all other resources.

The Professional Teacher and Quality Control in Primary Education.

According to the FRN (2004:39), "No Education system may rise above the quality of its teachers; thus the minimum qualification for entry into teaching shall be the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE)".

Tanner and Tanner (1975), in Denga (2001:50), defined a profession as an avocation whose activities are subject to theoretical conclusions derived from that analysis. Callahan and Clark (1977), cited in Denga (2001 : 50), see a professional as a "Person who is a master of specialized skills who has both practical and theoretical knowledge that laymen do not have". Going by the definition of Callahan and Clark, a professional teacher is therefore, a person who is a master of specialized teaching skills and can provide specialized services of a higher order in the process of knowledge transfer than a non-professional or layman.

The professional teacher has the following competencies that can bring about qualitative ends in teaching in the primary school;

- i. Sound knowledge of subject matter and general principles of teaching.
- ii. Professionally equipped with skills of handling children according to their ages;
- iii. Skillfully plans his lessons to achieve set objectives
- iv. has professional knowledge of appropriate learning activities that can enhance knowledge transfer;
- v. has knowledge of children's problems and ways of solving them;
- vi. is very skillful in measurement and evaluation of the learning process;

Curriculum Content and Implementation

Maduwesi (2005: 218) stated that the bulk of the guidelines on Minimum standards focus on the physical and material requirements nonetheless the curriculum content constitutes an important aspect of the minimum standards in schools. The content of the curriculum must always be based on the National Policy on Education. The Policy document contains a list of all the subjects offered at the primary school. The curriculum should reflect the relationship approach in terms of teaching support material (textbooks, teachers guide, workbook, learning aids/resource materials, teacher's teaching style and techniques.

For curriculum implementation to be achieved, according to Adeniyi (1999), the following conditions must be met:-

- a. A credible curriculum must be in place.
- b. Adequate teacher preparation; teacher classroom behaviour and teaching effectiveness;
- c. Textbook support materials conducive learning environment and relevance of teaching materials.
- d. Evaluation of school curricula-formative and summative. :

School Inspection and Quality Control in Primary Education

According to the FRN (2004; 59J, Government shall establish efficient inspectorate services at Federal, State and Local Government levels for monitoring and maintaining minimum standards at all levels. State ministries of education and local education authorities in collaboration with the Federal Inspectorate Service, shall be responsible for the organization of supervision and inspection of all education institutions under their jurisdiction. The primary responsibilities of inspectors as contained in the FRN (2004:60), shall be to:-

- a. Diffuse information about instructional materials and tested and effective teaching methods.
- b. Obtain information in respect of difficulties experienced by teachers in schools and institutions and further provide advisor}' solution through appropriate authorities
- c. Organize meetings with and workshops for teachers when necessary with a view to improving their professional competence; and
- d. Provide a strong sense of comradeship and professionalism among teachers."

Infrastructural facilities and Quality Control in Primary Education

The school which¹ is learning environment should have adequate infrastructural facilities and equipment. There should be enough classrooms, spacious, properly ventilated and generally conducive to learning. There should be a library, laboratory, water, electricity etc in the school. Though, degree 16 of 1985, according to Maduwesi (2005), has clearly stipulated the guidelines on infrastructural / physical facilities including measurements for both primary and secondary schools.

Staffing and Quality Control in Primary Education

The quality and quantity of teachers employed is also an important factor in maintaining standard in primary education. The quality of teachers in terms of experience, and professional competence has been discussed earlier in this paper. The quantity (i.e. total number of teachers and the variety of their disciplines) will alleviate the problems of large class size and to a large extent will reduce excessive work load of teachers. According to the National Policy specification on teacher-pupil ratio "in pre-primary schools, (FRN, 2004: 59), there shall not be more than 20 pupils to a teacher and a helper (assistant teacher); in the primary and secondary schools, there shall not be more than 35 and 40 pupils respectively to a class.

Teaching / Learning Activities and Qualitative Education in the Primary School

As stated in Maduewesi (2005: 220) this is another very important aspect of the curriculum: Teaching and learning are easily facilitated when activities and hands-on experiences are made part and parcel of instruction. Activities are useful for giving the learner concrete ideas, knowledge and skills about any given topic. They also promote cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of knowledge. Learning activities includes experiments, practical demonstrations, games, dramatization, field trips and excursions, projects etc.

The function of instructional materials in learning cannot be overemphasized. They make learning interesting, concrete and realistic and facilitate understanding of ideas. They help to reduce and stress of long teacher explanations. These materials include real objects, models, charts, pictures, textbooks, teacher's guides, modules, workbooks etc.

Conferences, Seminars and Workshops for Primary School Teachers

Teachers, being the core implementers of the school curriculum, need to regularly update their knowledge so as to keep pace with the rapid changing society. Attendance of conferences, seminars and workshops by teachers will ultimately improve their professional competence. This is in line with the National Policy directives that workshops for teachers were necessary for self improvement and should be regularly organized by the state and local education authorities

Impediments to Effective Quality Control in Primary Education

There are many problems militating against the maintenance of standard in the primary school. Some of them identified in this paper are:-

- (a) Primary schools especially private, are not being regularly supervised or inspected by the state and local education authorities where such suffice, discussions are more centered on tax payment by the school rather than the curriculum inspection.
- (b) The reports of inspection of primary schools by state and local education authorities in most cases are not reliable and lack objectivity because of compromises.
- (c) Lack of follow-up by government is another point of weakness to quality control in primary education.
- (d) Poor utilization of government fund for improvement of primary education facilities by school administrators.
- (e) The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004: 41), stated that Effect towards the improvement of quality education at the primary and secondary levels shall include appointment of academically and professionally qualified persons as teachers and headmasters. Research still shows that most teachers and school heads in Kano state are not professionally qualified especially in private schools.
- (f) Over populated classes: - The teacher-pupil ratio as stipulated by the National Policy document is 1:35. Averagely in Kano Government Primary Schools the ratio is 1:80. (One teacher to 80 pupils).
- (g) Teachers are not being closely or strictly supervised internally by the school heads; so there is gross negligence among school heads and teachers to their duties in public schools.
- (h) Private Schools on the other hand, have advantage over public schools in terms of close supervision of teachers and teacher-pupil ratio but save cost to maximize profit by employing low profile teachers,
- (i) Competition in the private sector has brought anxiety into the system; thus, the curriculum guidelines are being flouted and children are over stressed academically far above the mental ages.

Recommendations

- i. Primary school teachers and heads should be given the opportunities to attend seminars and workshops at least once or twice annually.
- ii. The jinx working against quality in every system in Nigeria is insincerity of purpose and greed which leads to compromise. If these factors are put at the back

- of educators. A solid foundation will not be far-fetched
- iii. The inspectorate departments in the education ministries should have the interest of the nation and her education as heart and come up with more objective and dependable reports of inspection.
 - iv. School Inspection should be more frequent.
 - v. More government schools should be built to reduce overcrowded classes
 - vi. School should have internal supervisors who will oversee the implementation of the curriculum activities daily in their respective schools.
 - vii. Primary school heads must be professionally qualified.
 - viii. Private schools that lack adequate infrastructure and are operating in home parlors and uncompleted and dilapidated buildings should be closed down,
 - ix. In-service training programme should be encouraged in schools.
 - x. No school should be allowed to operate without government approval and such approvals should be given only when such schools meet the minimum standards.

Conclusion

Considering the sterling role of primary education, as a gateway to other form/levels of education and as the foundation of verbal and numerical proficiency, its quality cannot be compromised. The quality of primary education in Nigeria in the 21st century can be upheld if the primary schools are being objectively inspected by the authorities and bodies concerned' and recommendations from such inspections followed up without compromises.

Reference

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