

EMERGING ROLES OF COMMUNITY AGENCIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The paper examines the role and responsibilities of the family / community / society in sustaining public primary schools in Nigeria. It is evident from the data collected that public primary schools have lost the desired patronage even in rural areas. Emphasis is now placed on the private Nursery and Primary Schools. 2000 respondents were randomly selected from teachers; school heads, parents, community leaders and social groups in five states. A questionnaire containing items on the sustainability of public primary schools were drawn in line with the two research questions raised for the study. The data collected were analyzed using the simple frequency. The study revealed that the fundamental problems include; wrong societal value, socio-economic status of parents, and school environmental factors among others. The study recommends among other things that public primary schools should be made more attractive for patronage and the society should be given a better orientation if the public primary schools are to be sustained.

Introduction

The Portuguese explorers unsuccessfully attempted to introduce formal education in Benin Empire in the 16th century but the Christian missionaries succeeded in 1842 with the establishment of a primary school at Badagry (Nduka 1964, Ukeje 1966, Fafunwas 1974, Taiwo 1980 and Adesina (1982). The sole aim of the Christian mission as at that time was to promote evangelism hence the curriculum consisted of reading, writing, singing, catechism, Bible knowledge and English language. However, when the commercial activities of the European business men increased, there was demand for clerks and account clerks. This demand necessitated

changes in the school curriculum hence emphasis shifted to English language, commercial Arithmetic, British Geography and Culture.

By 1859, several primary schools were established by different missions. By 1912, Taiwo (1980) noted that both the Government and the missions had become partners in educational development. In 1916, Lugards colonial administration issued educational code which emphasized discipline, organization, moral uprightness, general tone, adequacy and efficiency of staff, examination, progress, building equipment and sanitation.

Despite Lugards interest and contribution to Educational development, the Phelps – Stokes' commission found in 1920-1922 that the British Council Colonial Policy on education is defective and as a result, the British Council Administration drew up the 1925 memorandum and the 1926 education ordinance with a view of correcting the defects. In 1959, the Federal Government set up the Ashby Commission to plan education of an independent Nigeria, this led to the review of the curriculum. Several other commissions were set up to consider different aspects of the national education system such as; Banjo Commission (1961) Dike Commission (1962) Ajayi Commission (1964) and Taiwo Commission (1966).

The civil war in 1967 – 1970 disturbed the educational plans but in 1970, Government took over the ownership and management of schools in many states in Nigeria. In 1976, the universal primary Education was launched and in 1977 the 6 – 3- 3- 4 system of education was introduced.

1970 – 1977 actually marked the beginning of a new educational era in Nigeria. Primary education has received sufficient attention from the missionary to the colonial periods. After independence, the federal Government of Nigeria had also intensified effort in promoting the primary education section as it remains the foundation of formal education.

The public primary schools are fast losing grip of the primary function as a result of low patronage. In Nigeria today, most public primary schools are known to

be a converging point for those who have no defined plan for the education of their ward. Despite all the efforts made by government to revive the status of public primary schools, the entire nation has lost confidence in them and they now patronize the private primary schools even with exorbitant fees and in most cases sub-standard materials and unqualified teachers.

Ezewu (2000) highlighted some of the reasons why parents and guardians prefer private primary schools:

- i. They teach better in private schools
- ii. Teachers in private schools hardly go on strike to close the school for months
- iii. Teachers in private schools are more dedicated
- iv. There is better discipline in private schools
- v. My friends/neighbours send their children to private schools, so I had to do the same.

Where parents / guardians are to consider a public school at all, they in most cases think of the old missionary schools as a result of the following reasons as noted by Okonkwo (1979).

The school administrator lived in the school compound with his family and so he was always available in school

- i. The old missionary tradition still exists in the school
- ii. The boarding house system was better managed
- iii. The children were well disciplined.

It should be noted however that parents/guardian require quality education

for their children and they believe rightly or wrongly that private schools and selected public schools would provide the needed quality education. Generally, it has become a kind of status symbol to send ones children to private fee paying schools or elegant public schools. Infact, parents and guardians are always in search of quality education for their children or wards but in doing so, many have neglected the public primary schools thereby relegating it to the background and making the huge expenditure of government in providing human and material resources wasted.

This paper is intended to address the role of the parents / community / society in sustaining the public primary schools before they go finally into extinction or academic oblivion.

Statement of Problem

Enrolment into public primary schools is dwindling fast despite the effort of the government in making it almost free. The public primary schools in Nigeria today parades teachers who are trained and qualified for the job. The environment though dilapidated in most schools but almost conducive for learning unlike most private schools. The infrastructure needed are also provided by the government but despite all these, parents and guardians still prefer to send their wards to private fee paying schools. In sustaining the public primary schools, the parents / community/ society have a crucial role to play to be able to revive the public primary schools to schools of the old.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the reasons why parental guardians prefer private fee paying primary schools to the almost face public primary schools. So, the study sought to

1. Examine factors that influence preference for private schools.
2. Determine the extent of performance of community agencies in sustaining public primary schools.

Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions

1. What factors influence preference for private schools.
2. To what extent do the community agencies assist in sustaining public primary schools in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Factors Enhancing Preference of School by Parents.

Distance from school

Painfully the schools established by the missionaries even though they have taken over new names and few model schools that were built by the Federal Government several years ago remains the only existing primary schools and in most cases they could not cope with the high enrolment rate of primary education.

Parents therefore prefer to send their children to schools that are very close to their homes. In a study by Keyes (1977) he found that there is a strong relationship between the distance of the school from the child's home, his level of

performance and the chances of his dropping out. The study opines that children who were generally found to live closer to their schools did not only attend school more regularly but were generally two or three classes ahead of their age mates in rural areas who generally lived far from the school and were less frequent in attendance.

Transportation

Reavis (2000) noted that “in the absence of a good transportation network, distance is the strongest factor influencing quality of school education”. Most public primary schools in Nigeria do not have adequate transportation system to assist pupils who live far from the school. O. Brien (1972) in his correlational study between distance, attendance and quality of school work concluded that from school causes more absceince, absceinces lower the quality of school work, low quality of school work increases chances of failing, failing retards the progress of the child through grades and retardation through grades results in dropping out.”

Infrastructural Facilities

In the choice of school by parental, the infrastuctural facilities available remains a factor. Nissen (1975) Segals (1976) and van Denburg (1972) found that one of the major factors determining the quality of school work and how long children persist at school is the nature of infrastructural facilities available to them. The school infrastructural facilities as enumerated by

Missen (1975) and Van Denburg (1972) include;

- School building and size of the school
- Equipment (including audio-visual elements)
- Instructional materials and supplies
- The kind, nature and size of the chalkboard
- The size and appearance of the classroom / as measured by the number and type of pictures on the walls)
- The ventilation and heating systems etc.

Recreational Facilities

The recreational facilities include The type and number of games, sporting activities, and play facilities both indoor and outdoor/available to the children The size and suitability of the play grounds etc.

Okonkwo and Anijah – Obi (1991) stated that adequate and relevant recreational facilities enhance communication within and outside the classroom, help to develop the child’s interest and encourage attendance thereby reducing the chances of failure, frustration and dropping out.

Quality of Instruction and Instructional Supervision

The quality of instruction and instructional supervision assist parents to make choice of school for their children. The quality of instruction depends on the qualification and experience of teachers,

the availability of instructional materials and the extent to which the quality of instruction is being monitored or closely supervised. Wiseoman (1977) advised that head teacher, and teachers, like the children before them, need to be purposefully, and regularly guided, controlled, directed, advised, stimulated, counseled and motivated not just for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools but to avoid a situation where the school would degenerate into mere routine establishments in which each individual would just do what he likes. It is easier for parents and teachers to analyze the conditions surrounding the child and determine the causes behind the poor quality of the school work and assist the child to adjust through proper supervision.

Language of Instruction

Lambert (1970) asserted that the language of instruction matters in parents preference of schools. The joy of a family is to see the child communicate in the foreign language fluently. The official classroom language in Nigeria remains English and a school that does not make frantic and practical efforts to teach the child this basic language of communication is often rejected by parents. The public primary schools except in urban settlements often loose sight of this important fact.

Socio-Economic Status of Parents

Curry (1972), Fland (1966) and Melley (1973) agree that the degree to which the school system succeeds in

maintaining quality of school education, depends on the interplay of several factors among which is the socio-economic status of parents. This is determined by their occupation, interest, experiences and the size of the family. All these factors influence the general attitude of parents to the form, quality and level of education their children receive. Holley (1978) noted that there is a close relationship between the advantages of a home, its educational, economic, and social status and the quality of school education its children receive as well as the number of years they spend in school. He stated that "the best measure of the quality of school education children received ...is the number of books in their homes". This factor affect the choice of school by parents.

Fees

This remains a factor for parents preference for schools for their children. Missen (1975) noted that the question of fees depend on the individual financial capability but in searching for quality education by parents, fees may not be considered as a factor, although it depends on the setting and the social economic status of parents.

Methodology

The study is intended to find out roles of the community agencies in the management of primary schools in Nigeria.

Using the stratified random sampling technique, 2,000 teachers, parents, community members were

selected for this study from five states in the republic of Nigeria.

The instrument “Sustaining Primary Education (SPED) was deigned by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two sections A and B. Section A sought information on personal data of the parent and teacher. While section B consisted of 20 items.

The items sought information on parents preference for schools and the role of parents or family, community and society in sustaining primary education in Nigeria: Experts in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State ascertained the validity of the instrument. The instrument was further subjected to a pilot test in order to ascertain its reliability. In the pilot test, the instrument was administered to 50 subjects, 25 teachers and 25 parents. The 50 subjects who would not take part in the main study were randomly selected but they displayed the same characteristics of the respondent in the main study.

The respondents were required to tick the appropriate response on the items scaled –strongly Agree 4, (SD), Agree 3 (A), Disagree 2 (D) and strongly Disagree 1 (SD).

The data collected from the pilot test were subjected to statistical analysis using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Co-efficient. The computed result of 0.85 was obtained, and the instrument was therefore considered to be highly reliable.

The Instrument (SPED) was administered to the randomly selected

respondents by the researcher and other research assistants. They visited the sampled school teachers and parents. 1,740 questionnaires were returned.

Analysis of Data

Table 1

Factors enhancing parents preference of school

Factors	Public schools		Private schools	
	F	%	F	%
Discipline	240	13.8	1,500	86.2
Quality of Instruction	320	18.4	1420	81.6
Quality of supervision	218	12.5	1522	87.5
Transportation	270	15.5	1470	84.5
Distance from school	270	15.5	1470	84.5
Infrastructural facility	113	6.5	1627	93.5
Recreational facilities	100	5.7	1640	94.3
Quality of language	350	20.1	1040	79.9
Fees	743	42.7	997	57.3
Socio-economic status	700	40.2	1040	59.8

$$N = 1,740$$

Decision rule 40% and above is considered to be of high preference while below 40% is considered to be low or no preference.

Table 1 above shows the factors responsible for parents preference of schools. The table reveals that there is a high preference for private schools as the parents consider it the best in the area of discipline (86.2), quality of instruction (81.6), quality of supervision (82.5) Distance from school (84.5) transportation (84.5) infrastructural facilities (93.5), Recreational facilities (94.3) quality of language of instruction (79.9) even with

the high fees, parents still prefer the private schools (57.3) the social-economic status of parents also influence their choice for private primary schools for their wards (59.8).

Table II The Role of the family, community and society in sustaining the public primary schools:

	Items	Rarely Done	Often Done	Not Done	Decision
1.	Parents teachers Association meetings	1,000 57.5%	20 1.1%	720 41.4%	Rarely Done
2	Encouraging members of the community to send their children to the public primary school	710 40.8%	30 1.7%	1,000 57.5%	Not Done
3	Provision of land for expansion	220 12.6%	320 18.4%	1,200 69.0%	Not Done
4	Community development projects in sustaining the public primary schools	420 24.1%	220 12.6%	1,100 63.3%	Not Done
5	Regular visitation of parents to the public primary school	420 24.1%	320 18.4%	1,000 57.5%	Not Done
6	Regular election of school committee by the community	710 40.8%	30 1.7%	1,000 57.5%	Not Done
7	Scholarship by members of the community to deserving pupils in the public primary school	140 8.0%	500 28.7%	1,100 63.3%	Not Done
8	Maintenance of facilities by the community	740 42.5%	500 28.7%	500 28.7%	Rarely Done
9	Organizing old – pupils association	340 19.5%	200 11.5%	1,200 69.0%	Not Done
10	Assisting government in providing supporting staff	740 42.5%	500 28.7%	500 28.7%	Rarely Done

The decision rule is that the highest percentage is accepted at the extent of the

role performed by the community agencies. (N = 1,740).

The table above shows that apart from attending Parents Teachers Association Meeting, maintenance of facilities by the community and assisting government in providing supporting staff which are rarely done, all other responsibilities are not done.

Findings

The result of the analysis of data shows that parents / guardians prefer the private primary schools as a result of the good disciplinary measures adopted by the school management; the quality of instruction; quality of supervision; the distance from school, provision of transport; improved infrastructural facilities; adequate recreational facilities; the quality of language of instruction; not minding the fee charged, as well as the socio-economic status of parents acting as a factor for preference of school for their children/ward. These findings are in agreement with the opinions of Ezewu (2000), Keyes (1977). Reavis (2000), Alisen (1978) and Anijah Obi (1991).

The role of the family/ community/society in sustaining the public primary schools according to the findings of the study include, the non-chalant attitude of parents towards Parents – Teacher’s Association meetings and so they may not have an up to date knowledge of the administration of the school, such that the issues of discipline, quality of instruction, language of instruction, provision of recreational and instructional materials which are supposed

to be discussed are never done. The members of the public are never encouraged to send their children to public primary schools because the society believe the school is meant for the government and not the community. The findings reveal that community development projects such as building additional classrooms or renovations are often left for the government. Parents don't consider it necessary to visit their wards in the public primary schools to ensure that proper teaching and learning are carried out. A public primary school is expected to have school committee and members are drawn from the community but the study reveals that this is rarely done by most communities. In public primary schools, members of the community rarely offer scholarship opportunities to the pupils to encourage others.

Most communities rarely assist in maintaining the existing school facilities, thereby making the school unattractive. Most prominent citizens in Nigeria today attended the public primary schools but there are no old-pupils Association to address the problems facing their alma-matar. This has made the public primary schools unattractive. Where government is unable to provide security men, clerks, secretaries, etc, the community rarely assist the government in providing such supporting staff as revealed by the findings.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made;

1. Parents Teachers Association meetings should be held regularly and parents should be encouraged to attend.
2. Members of the community should be encouraged to send their children to the public primary schools through village meetings and social group meetings.
3. Land should be easily provided to public primary schools for expansion
4. Community development programmes should be geared towards assisting the public primary schools.
5. Parents should be encouraged to visit the public primary schools regularly
6. School committees should be appointed and encouraged to function
7. Scholarship should be offered to deserving pupils in the public primary schools
8. School facilities should be properly maintained
9. Old pupils Association should be encouraged
10. The family/community/society should learn to assist the government in sustaining the public primary schools.

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