

FACTORS THAT AFFECT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is on the factors that affect the academic performance of students in both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. It sees it as very important to the life of any nation which holds the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system. Therefore, it is very critical in a developing country like Nigeria to develop primary and secondary schools so as to make them sustainable virile transitional instruments to other levels of education. However, the present economic recession and the resultant scarcity of resources have led to deterioration of academic performance of students in Nigerian public schools. In this paper, some inputs such as provision of functional school library, provision of instructional facilities and materials, recruitment of more professional teachers with proper motivation among others have been suggested to boost academic performance of students in both primary and secondary schools in the country.

Introduction

There is a very big problem with educational disposition in Nigeria especially in both primary and secondary schools. This is the reason why reaching the 'promised land' amongst the scientific and technologically advanced countries of the world through the instrumentality of sound education has become a mirage. The primary and secondary school education are regarded as the foundation-stone laying for youth development. Advanced nations like: Britain, USA, Germany, France, Japan, etc., do not play with them as they made them free and compulsory for their

citizens, because they know that all other levels of education squarely rest on them. Hence, the quality of instructions received at this lower stage could, to a greater extent, have either positive or negative impact on the individual child. This is because developmental and educational psychologists the world over believe that children at this early stage are at the formative period of their lives.

Considering the National Policy on Education (2004), it is clear that Nigeria wants to provide high quality education for her citizens. This is logically so because it has become an axiom that a huge and

heavy structure, cannot rest on a weak foundation or put in a different way, that a weak foundation cannot support a heavy super-structure. The provision of a sound and high quality schools is a subject of great concern to many Nigerians. Quality education is a very serious issue as this may be the only formal education that some Nigerian children may ever receive throughout their life - times.

As earlier stated, quality education is a subject that has agitated the minds of many Nigerians and is still is. At this point, one wonders what really constitute high quality education. While some regard quality from the point of output, i.e., test scores or academic achievement, others view it from the point of input. One such scholar that consider quality education from the point of inputs is Ocho (1995) who emphasized the need for quality teaching staff, the curriculum and the textbooks, the physical plant including furniture, the equipment, the existence of libraries, etc. If the saying in the computer science parlance is anything to go by, that is; "garbage in, garbage out", then inputs in primary education to a greater extent determines the quality. In this paper, some essential inputs are hereby discussed. It must, however, be noted that the effectiveness of any of these inputs is a function of how it is used in conjunction with all other inputs.

The Concept of Quality Performance in Education

The quality of an education programme is often associated with the students level of academic achievement. In

other words, if test scores are low and there is high rate of drop-out and repetition, education is said to be of low quality. Much of the time, evaluations of quality of education are based on the output of educational programme. These inputs are rather obvious but difficult to measure. Quality is better measured by inputs probably because teaching processes are generally easier to measure. To obtain a valid measurement however, a direct measure of both school inputs and outputs should be taken to provide information on quality.

Educational quality has many dimensions. Qualitative changes may imply availability of instructional materials, improving classroom facilities, school library services as well as in-service training of teachers and so on. Quality is also a function of how much time is spent on learning in and out of school. In addition, the importance of quality depends on some learning variables at home, in the community and through the media.

Basically, the teacher and the school constitute the major factor when considering educational quality. Wilson (1988), Oyewole and Olanrewaju (2005:10) see quality teaching as excellence of function by the teacher. The teacher is expected to plan, deliver and evaluate the optimum curriculum for the individual pupils.

Early researchers like Heyneman (1984) and Welch (1976) have viewed school quality as a junction of character of school facilities, strength of academic programmes, class size, teachers' efficiency, adequate testing and teachers'

morale. They stated that all these inputs have been found to influence individual pupils academic achievement in schools.

Measures for Improving Education Quality

Much has been said about improving the quality of education in Nigeria. A lot have been suggested such as increase in availability of instructional materials, improving classroom facilities, in-service training of teachers and so on. Without doubt, all these inputs will definitely enhance quality of education in Nigeria. However, it is important to state that one cannot achieve a desired educational quality in the absence of a functional school library. In Nigeria today, neither the pupils, the teachers, nor the government seem to fully appreciate the importance of library services in the educational system. For teachers, this is understandable since many of them not have even made use of the library during their training (Okeh and Oyewole, 2001). On the part of the government, despite the promise as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) that the government would ensure that libraries are provided for schools, and that school library service will be established, very little seems to have been done in that dimension. This lackadaisical attitude has led to stagnation in the growth of library services for primary and post-primary education programmes, and has also affected the quality of primary education. Establishing school library services is as essential as establishing schools and implementing education programmes.

Ajayi (1993) and Fayose (1995) noted that primary school authorities and educational administrators do not seem to appreciate the need for a functional school library that we cannot be talking of quality primary education without mentioning the need for school library. The school library referred to here in this sense does not mean the so called School Library which completely lacks all the basic materials that facilitate learning which makes it a mere reading room.

A quality primary education requires nothing less than a functional school library. This is because libraries support the schools' work of literacy and education. A functional school library in the words of Baird (1994) is useful in literary work from the earliest stage because it encourages good reading habits to be formed when children are young.

Instructional materials when effectively used in the course of teaching contribute to the quality of instruction at the primary level. It has been observed that increasing the provision of instructional materials is the most cost effective way of improving quality of primary education as observed by Gbeleyi (1994). From the observation, pupils enjoy the teachings of teachers in-training who are posted to their schools for teaching practice. This is because the use of instructional materials is mandatory for all teachers in-training on teaching practice. Learning could be made more meaningful and enjoyable if government can adopt the prescribed instructional materials by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in its curriculum

module and that they should be equally supplied to schools. The materials should be well distributed to schools. The government would, however, do well to establish zonal repair centres for the maintenance of these materials and equipment and probably the adaptation and development of new ones.

Issues and Problems Militating Against the Achievement of Quality Performance of Primary and Secondary Education

The following are the factors which militate against the achievement of quality academic performance of primary and secondary school students in Nigeria:

1. Control and Management of Primary and Secondary School Education

No education, primary or otherwise, can be successfully run unless there is a good administration and control. Ozigi and Ocho (1981) explained that a major problem of primary education is inconsistencies in the control and its management. This started with the introduction of formal education and lasting till today. Take for instance, it started with the missionaries in 1842, shifting to the voluntary agencies and local authorities, shortly before the state take-over of schools in 1970. At other times, it was the joint responsibility of the states and local government to control primary education without clear directives from the Federal Government such that states, rather accepting this, the 1997 constitutional provision shifted the management of

primary education completely to the local governments, whose members were politicians and were corrupt. The situation continues to worsen to the extent that within the six-year period that ranged from 1988 to 1993, three different decrees had been issued prescribing management bodies. These decrees are:

- (a) The National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) Decree 31 of August 8, 1988: This decree was promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida. The decree provides that ownership and control of primary education in Nigeria was to be the responsibility of Federal, State and Local Governments. By this arrangement, the Federal Government accepted to pay 65% of salaries of personnel working in the primary schools in Nigeria. The States and Local Governments should share the remaining 35%. However, the modality for sharing the 35% allowed both State and the Federal Governments was not stated and so it was poorly directed and contradictory.
- (b) The Local Government Education Decree 3 of January, 1, 1991: This decree replaced Decree 31 and placed full autonomy of management and control of primary education back to the local governments. In this regard, local government's share of the national revenue was increased from 10% to 15% and from 15% to 20% respectively, while

reducing the State share from 30% to 25%. Also, local government's share of Federal Grant was no longer remitted to it through the State but directly to it. This increased the powers of Chairmen of Local Governments over things within the local government primary education inclusive. Unfortunately, most of the chairman were half-educated and were politicians. They knew nothing about management strategies and money meant for primary schools in their area of authority were embezzled and by this act, reduced further the standard of education (Aguokogbuo, 2000).

- (c) The National Primary Education decree 96 of 1993: With the promulgation of this decree, the Federal Government accepted to pay teacher's salaries through the NEPC. This is a welcome relief in spite of the fact that chairmen of local governments were complaining of usurpation of their powers.

The present state of affairs now is that the payment of teachers' salaries is in the hands of state governments. Some states still lag behind by paying teachers' salaries irregularly, and this does not go well in curriculum implementation in primary education management.

However, the point being made is that the proscription of management bodies within short intervals of six years is not good for policy implementation.

2. Teacher Factor

The teacher assumes an enviable position in curriculum implementation. No matter the appropriateness of the learning experiences selected, teachers are the determinants of the corresponding learning outcomes. This is because their major task is to stimulate learning and as such engage in the act of making learners Learn. They know the amount of learning that is suitable for the learner at a period of time as well within an academic year. Also, the teachers' is in a position to orient their idea of societal values to the dominant values which the curriculum planners want to promote. Hence, the quality of development of any society depends on teachers.

According to Ukeje (1991), it is the teachers that translate policies and programmes into action. Also, Lassa (1996:1) opined that the teacher is the initiator of the learning process, the learning skills, the coordinator of the learning sequence, the assessor of the learning efficiency, and indeed, the pivotal element in the entire educational development. In spite of this enviable role of the teachers in curriculum implementation and societal development, teachers are not well treated by the government as well as other stakeholders in education.

Also, the present situation where the National Certificate in Education (NCE) graduates are drafted to teach in the primary school is at present wrong. This is because their curriculum is designed to enable them teach in the junior level of the secondary school and not in the primary

schools. Besides, in the primary schools, one teacher teaches all the numerous primary school subjects. However, one may argue that primary education departments in Colleges of Education should be able to produce suitable teachers for primary schools. But the position is that so many Colleges of Education have no primary education departments, to start with. Even where there are primary education departments, the curriculum is not such that will enable the NCE graduates to effectively teach the primary school subjects.

Also, the complexities in primary school subjects even demand that no single teacher should teach all the primary school subjects since there now new introduced subjects such as the computer studies, primary science, etc.

3. Infrastructural Facilities

Infrastructural facilities in schools are many and varied. They include school buildings, and classrooms, libraries, desk, seats and chairs, tables, cupboards, books and stationary items, laboratories and its equipment such as chemicals and other incidental materials. These facilities are very important in teaching and learning. The government realized the importance of the facilities in primary schools when is stated in the National Policy on Education (1981) now revised in 2004, that "government will ensure that suitable textbooks and libraries and provided for schools." According to Adesina (1990), an important index for assessing the quality and standards of education is an examination of the infrastructural facilities

available for learning. In fact, primary school is the bed-rock upon which future educational career of the child is based and determined. In Nigeria, this level may be the only one which many children may attend as many of the female ones would end up marrying, while some of the boys would end up in child labour.

Therefore, children at the primary school need good environment that includes adequate infrastructural facilities and care. Unfortunately, an examination of the availability and adequacy of facilities in the schools in Nigeria is better imagined than discussed. The dilapidated condition of the school buildings or many primary schools, constitute a real source of worry. Okpala (1980) and Aguokogbuo (2003) noted that in the primary school, where children should be playing with teaching aids, one finds nothing but "dull uninviting sagging roof and colourless dilapidating walls." It is under this appalling condition that our children and their teachers are squatting in the name of education.

Also, Ntoh (2002) reported that in many schools in Nigeria, there are not even chalk and paper, library, books, etc, are non-existence. Maduewesi (1996) opined (hat when we bring up primary school children in buildings looking like rat holes, mud and wattle, we can only expect in return a rough and uncouth generation. "What a child beholds, that is what he becomes." This presuppose that the learning environment to which the child is exposed to actually determines learning.

4. Lack of Guidelines on the Establishment of Nigerian Schools

The various tiers of government in Nigeria have not been serious with primary education level. In fact, primary schools are established and located in every nook and cranny of the country without guidelines on their establishment. This has far-reaching consequences towards the implementation of the objectives of primary education in Nigeria. For instance, the problem of infrastructural facilities, lack of proper community funding and maintenance, teacher factor as well as control are likely problems of indiscriminate establishment of primary schools in the country (Aghenta, 1993).

5. Corruption in Low and High Places in Nigeria

Nigeria is becoming very notorious in corruption and this is massively taking place in low and high places; and the trend is severely affecting the funding of education. There have been some complaints and reports of reckless looting of Nigeria's treasury by accounting officers of all tiers of government, parastatals, and agencies, c banks, oil companies, construction and fertilizer companies, etc., that so much hard-earned money is being siphoned out of the country and stocked in foreign bank accounts. It has been found that many court registrars have pocketed fines paid by convicts, pervasive over-invoicing, unreceipted purchases, multiple payments for one job, paying for work not done, illegal contracts, etc, in the above-mentioned offices, while some Nigerian State governors have been

severely indicted for gruesome involvement in money laundry as in the case of an erstwhile governor who dressed like a woman after being indicted and convicted in Britain. Such monies are supposed to be used for developmental projects which stimulate investments, quality education, production, savings, and employment, and invariably enhance good standard of living of the people. Instead, citizens have continued to wallow in abject poverty, unemployment and shortages of infrastructures.

All leaders and the people in Nigeria should shun corruption including its many forms. Corruption is a part of greediness and self-centredness; hence, different leaders have used it to exploit their people and the environment This is the reason why Akpochiafo (2002:38), quoting Utomi (2001), opined that Nigeria's prolonged economic and political turmoil could be attributed to the seven deadly sins as enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi of India before he died in 1947: wealth without work, politics without principles, commerce without morality, knowledge without character, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity and religion without sacrifice.

Therefore, leaders, youths and adults should take bold steps to counteract them. Many Nigerians want wealth without working for it, and this is the reason why some of them indulge in ritual murders, advance fee fraud (419), prostitution, human trafficking, armed robbery, etc. They have knowledge without character; hence, many students join secret cults on campus, while some teachers practices

sexual harassment, etc. They also practice politics by setting the constitution aside, and rig elections to impose a click-candidate; practice commerce without morality; hence, we have many cases of trading in expired drugs, sales of impure sachet water, bromated bread or other adulterated goods, etc. Many religious leaders practice religion without sacrifice; hence, we now find churches, mosques, shrines, or temples as commercial zones. Many people also practice science without conscience; hence, guns are made or imported to assassinate their political rivals, etc. Some other Nigerians practice pleasure without conscience, and this is the reason why kids could be raped and kerosene adulterated.

In this regard, there should be an emergence of new positive cultures, values, unity, and the sacrifice of greediness for the progress of the citizens in all its ramifications.

Conclusion

A good academic performance of any student determines to a great extent the level of development of a nation. What greatly determines the quality of education are the inputs, that is, functional school library, provision of both material resources and infrastructures, qualified personnel that are properly motivated and so on. All these put in place will make for a quality education.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, therefore, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Government should remunerate teachers adequately. They should as, a matter of urgency, re-establish rural positing allowance, accommodation allowance, science allowance, etc, including regular payment of salaries as and when due. These will make them to get committed to their job.
2. There should be a national primary and secondary education board (the like of NUC, NCCE, NBTE).
3. Government should do all within its power to insulate primary and secondary school education programme from the corrupt politicians.
4. The three tiers of government as well as parents should close ranks and fund it. The Federal Government should pay staff salaries and allowances and remove primary education from the state government, and an education development fund be established to take care of it. This should be made into law through the National Assembly.
5. Teachers' Grade II training institutions should, as a matter of urgency, be reestablished to complement few Colleges of Education that have primary education department and whose curriculum is basically geared towards graduating teachers that

- will be suitable to teach in the primary schools. Therefore, NCE graduates other than these should never be allowed to teach in the primary schools.
6. The situation in our primary schools where one teacher teaches all the primary school subjects is unacceptable especially now when new subjects are included in the curriculum.
 7. Government should issue a policy guideline to be followed by communities and all who wish to establish primary schools.
 8. All tiers of government including the citizens should find ways of stopping corruption in low and high places. It is affecting all developmental efforts in all aspects of economic and national development, otherwise, nothing works for the common good.
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