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Achieving Qualitative Primary Education In Nigeria Through A Collaborative Responsibility.

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Abstract

The development of any nation requires a collective responsibility. It is especially so in a declining economy. Provision of qualitative education has been identified as the propelling force for any sustainable development. It is thus, imperative that the provision of qualitative education to the citizenry is a collective responsibility of stakeholders in education. The paper therefore examines the circumstances of provision of primary education in Nigeria vis-à-vis the ideals for achieving qualitative primary education. The emerging trend of, and the need for collaboration of stakeholders in the provision of qualitative primary education is highlighted. The focus being identification of the stakeholders required to collaborate, the cost of provision of education, how to share the cost, and scheduling implementation for achieving the required results.

Introduction

Through the ages, human beings have engaged in the training of younger generations to prepare and equip them with skills for productive living. Education inculcates the skills that are required to provide services for the sustenance and development of the society, as well as provide a means of livelihood to those with such skills. With the pursuance of Universal Basic Education (UBE), schools are increasingly becoming the viable agents for achieving the objective. The concern about the state of schools and the process of schooling is therefore relevant.



Achieving and enhancing schooling effectiveness largely depends on provision and utilization of school resources to facilitate teaching and learning. Achieving and sustaining qualitative education therefore, requires that adequate provision and effective utilization of the resources in a conducive school environment are maintained. To properly focus the discourse therefore, the paper attempts to casually examine the state of public primary schools in Nigeria where majority of the primary school aged population obtain basic education; with a view to appreciating the basis for the status of teaching and learning achievement in the public primary schools. Also, to articulate a position that will lead to overcoming the inadequacies that undermines effective schooling in primary schools in Nigeria.

Achieving effective primary education

The objectives of primary education in the Revised National Policy on Education (1981) include among others;

- (i) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and
- (ii) Provide basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The effectiveness of primary education is determined by the extent to which these and other objectives are being achieved. Available evidences however, tend to indicate that the rate of achievement of the objectives is considerably low and deteriorating. Situations where majority of the pupils leave school without achieving functional literacy either in English or a Nigerian language simply suggests that the objectives are not being achieved (Oyetunde & Umolu, 1991; Umolu, 1998; Okoro, 1998). The question to ask here is, what is fundamentally responsible for the prevalent low level of achievements?

Provision of school resources

The quality of teaching and learning achievement depends largely on the condition in which the process of teaching and learning occurs.

There are evidences to suggest that the quality of resources-input into the process of schooling determines the level of achievements. For instance, World Bank (1988) has observed that the quality of educational resource provision would influence considerably, the effectiveness of educational system in achieving the expected results. It follows then that school environment where each pupil has to seat in a well ventilated classroom, and is provided with all the recommended textbooks, reference books, supplementary reading materials, and writing materials, is capable of boosting teaching and learning achievements. Regrettably, Mboye and Nwamwenda (1994) noted that schools in developing countries lack basic infrastructural facilities especially textbooks and reference materials, which are educational resources that have been identified as being very important requirements for boosting school effectiveness.

Indeed, available evidence reveal that teaching and learning in many of the primary schools in Nigeria experience severe deprivation of these critical school resources (Okere, 1989; Sofolahan, 1998; Bature, 2002). For instance, pupils in many of the primary schools seat on the bare floor, and in classrooms with leaking roofs and, or doors and windows without shutters and take lessons under make-shift arrangements. Other unfavourable schooling conditions prevalent in the primary schools include the fact that majority of the pupils attend school without adequate provision of recommended textbooks, reference books, supplementary reading materials, and other instructional materials. These conditions may culminate to undermine effective schooling.

Feeding of pupils

A hungry person is emotionally unstable and is ill-disposed to effectively participate in teaching and learning activities. Such activities as the completion of class assignments, participation in class discussions as well as group assignments, require pupils to be emotionally stable and motivated. The conditions for which pupils will



participate in these activities are that they should be properly fed. Situations where pupils therefore leave home without adequate food, and have to stay the whole school day without food, is unfavourable for effective participation in the school activities. Such pupils may hardly achieve any significant levels of success in their learning activities. Parents must thus, ensure that their wards are fed before the commencement of lessons or during break time.

Nonregular school attendance

Interruptive school attendance does not work well for achieving effective schooling. It disrupts the process of “block-laying” of teaching and learning experiences that cumulatively build up to attain acceptable levels of prescribed performance (standard). It is especially so where there is such a dearth of teaching and learning resources as is being experienced by majority of the primary schools in Nigeria.

In spite of the negative effects of non-regular school attendance on effective schooling achievement, many parents indulge in using their wards on the farm and other domestic chores on school days. Off course, teaching and learning activities do not wait for such pupils who, at the instance of their parents or other reasons fail to attend school regularly. The attitude of irregular attendance to school, tends to lead pupils to develop other habits that undermine effective schooling. Parents have a role to play in ensuring the regular attendance to school by their wards.

The emerging issues of quality assurance

The striking revelation that emerges from the discussion so far is that the conditions under which primary education is provided in Nigeria, is induced and sustained by poverty. These conditions thrive in poverty ridden societies, and insidiously destroy the productive potentials of those societies.

The issue of quality assurance for primary education in Nigeria dangles on cost. Identifying the cost implication of providing qualitative education therefore becomes very relevant. Since

government alone cannot bear the cost of education, other relevant concerns that corroborate cost to be critical in the provision of qualitative primary education indulge in the identification of stakeholders in education and, sharing the cost among them. The issue of stakeholders really is that of roles allocation; who is saddled with what responsibility in the scheme of providing qualitative primary education? It is important to caution that roles must be assigned taking cognizance of the ability of the stakeholder to cope with the task. It is worthy of note that there are certain aspects of quality that are beyond the competence of some of the stakeholders. It is in this light that the call for effective awareness of roles and interaction among stakeholders stands. Schedules of compliance must also be developed and enforced as mechanisms for control to ensure standards.

Networking efforts to achieve effective schooling.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has at different times made it clear that, government alone, cannot bear the cost of education, and appealed to other stakeholders in education to contribute to its development in the country. Indeed, the world declaration on basic education stresses collaborations and emphasized that “meeting basic learning needs constitute a common universal human responsibility” (World Conference on Education for All, 1990 P.33). These suggest that the provision of education is a responsibility to be shared among stakeholders.

There are many joint activities among stakeholders in support of effective schooling. A participatory net-working developed to exploit economies of scale and comparative advantages of stakeholders, has the potential to yield impressive results. Proper weighting of roles assigned to each stakeholder must be done. Doing otherwise will disrupt the net-work and thereby undermine achievement.

The provision of some of the school resources can be done more effectively by government. For instance, government can take advantage of the



large school population in Nigeria to develop and produce instructional materials of high quality and at a relatively low price. Governments at all levels in Nigeria and other stakeholders can develop strategies and schedules of supplying such materials to schools. The teaching and learning gains accruable to adequate provision of these instructional resources will thus be achieved.

An over-crowded classroom has emerged as an important factor that undermines effective schooling. Available evidences (Okoro, 1998; Bature, 2002) indicate that majority of classrooms in primary and indeed secondary schools in Nigeria, are overcrowded and stretched beyond limits of minimal effectiveness. The demand for places in the schools is still high and growing. Government will require to research into low cost high quality materials for construction of standard classrooms. Strategies that will motivate other stakeholders to participate in providing adequate classrooms should then be articulated and adopted. Compensatory strategies should be adopted by government for the rural and other less privileged populations.

Adequate and effective utilization of school resources requires that teachers who guide the interaction of the learners with the other resources are skilled in sourcing, storing, utilizing, and in the maintenance of the resources. This is necessary in order to maximize the learning gains that accrue to the schooling process from the resources. Furthermore, the life span of the resources will be preserved. Establishing these circumstances will guide the stakeholders in developing schedules for replacement and plans for provision, to facilitate sustainable access to the resource. Government should therefore develop curricula content and provide training that equips the personnel with the relevant skills.

A cost-saving devise that is relevant to quality assurance is improvisation. Teachers that are equipped with the relevant competencies will be able to develop and use locally sourced materials to produce instructional materials to replace the foreign ones which may either be difficult or too expensive to obtain. The efficacy of such locally

produced instructional materials can be impressive. It is so because the learner may have been familiar with materials from which the instructional aid was produced, and therefore his attention will be focused on the content of instruction.

In determining and sharing the cost of education among stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate the salient costs born by households. For instance they bear the enormous costs of accommodating, feeding, clothing the pupils and transporting them to school. Communities donate land for the development of school infrastructure. With proper interaction in the collaboration, members of the communities could volunteer services such as teaching of local crafts, moral instruction, and providing security to the school.

It appears that the efforts of the stakeholders in education are not concerted and properly networked. What appears fundamentally weak in the provision of primary education is the inability of the stakeholders to jointly discuss, identify and share appropriately the cost of education.

Conclusion

Achievement of the objectives set for primary education in Nigeria poses a great challenge to stakeholders. It is especially so in a deteriorating economy such as is being experienced. Providing qualitative primary education, which is critical and underlie development of other levels of education, is imperative. There is no gain re-emphasizing the fact that qualitative education is fundamentally required to explore and exploit the full potentials of the productive population for the survival of the society.

While it is obvious that the provision of qualitative primary education must be jointly born by stakeholders, it is however necessary for the cost of providing the education to be identified and shared appropriately among the stakeholders. It is important for the government to note that the whole society (the nation) has delegated, in trust, the operation and provision of education to it for the over all benefit of the society. The members of



the society have made themselves available to contribute in such manner and areas as is required by the government, and as they are able. Government therefore, must lead in coordinating the process of identifying, sharing and scheduling the cost of providing the quality of education that is acceptable to the society. It is relevant to urge all stakeholders in education to be more responsive to issues that will facilitate the provision of qualitative primary education in Nigeria.

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