

QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION AND ITS 3-A CONCEPT INDICATORS AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper agrees that primary education plays a key role in the development of the child and society at large. It identifies three main providers of primary education as government, private investors and voluntary agencies and went ahead to examine the extent government primary schools can be described as being qualitative. To ascertain the quality nature of the school system, it identifies 12 qualitative school indicators. The paper proposed and argues that the quality indicators can be subsumed under what it describes as 3-As (availability, adequacy and accessibility). It however notes that some of the qualitative indicators are lacking availability, adequacy and accessibility. It therefore advocates some measures to guarantee quality primary education in Nigeria. One such recommendation is since feeding/health care of school children, provision of portable water and infrastructural/instructional facilities are key to quality primary education, NGO's, individuals and relevant agencies need to volunteer in taking care of feeding/health needs of pupils as well as providing portable water and other facilities in the schools and another is that those who manage schools such as ministry officials and other agencies need to monitor and ensure that schools operate within recommended teacher/pupil ratio, rules/regulations and a violent free environment.

Keywords: Quality indicators, 3-A concept, providers

INTRODUCTION

Considering the multidimensional roles of childhood education towards the proper upbringing of the child and overall societal development, there is the need to institute measures that would guarantee quality provision of primary education in Nigeria. To successfully do this, there is the need to identify the providers of childhood education in Nigeria as government, private investors and the voluntary agencies (missions and groups). The fact that different bodies are involved in the provision of both pre-primary and primary education suggests that quality may be lacking or may not be the same across board. The immediate last sentence is made because each of the three categories of school providers is engaged in the provision of primary education for different purposes. The intention of any of them predetermine the extent the group will take the business of primary education serious.

The private investors are known to get involved in the business of primary education for the purpose of making profits. This view informs them of perceiving it as a serious business and as a result they inject some elements of competition thereby ensuring that some degree of quality is maintained. On the part of voluntary agencies such as mission groups, they get involved to assist their members to acquire education at an affordable rate and in line to the belief of their doctrine. In doing this, they try to operate within stipulated standards. Primarily the government is engaged because they consider it a constitutional responsibility. They consider themselves as umpires and may or may not bother if standards are maintained. The

assertions made so far are indeed understood but the most worrisome is the view that government as an umpire may not mind operating outside the recommended rules and regulations. The position taken against government calls for verification. In doing so, the following shall guide the discussion.

1. What is quality?
2. What is the 3-A concept to quality and its indicators?
3. How has the 3-A concept of quality primary education been attained?
4. Recommendations and conclusion.

What Is Quality?

Quality as a loose management concept can be defined from any perspective. The concept 'quality' in education has attracted various definitions. In all, each time quality is mentioned, what comes to mind is the extent to which the education system or level achieves set goals. However, quality is generally considered as a standard against which an outcome is measured. Agom (1983) explains that quality in education entails three factors namely; output/input results, ability of the students to pass relevant examinations and the relevance of education to the society. Madumere-Obike and Udoh (2008) explain that quality is multifaceted and multi-dimensional. By this, they see quality as a class of two distinct variables namely status or process variables. They use status variables to refer to physical facilities such as libraries, classrooms, furniture, textbooks etc. and conversely, see process variables to be chiefly concerned with daily school administration. To them, it deals with time, utility, pupils' activities, teaching method, supervision and management. Contributing towards this, Dashen (2005) explains quality as that which entails setting minimum level for determining quality. At this point therefore, what are the minimum standards of determining quality in the Nigerian primary education? Responding to this question, Etejere (2008) in a study investigated the extent to which the objectives of pre-primary and primary education had been implemented in the public school system in some selected States of Nigeria. The States were Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Abuja (FCT). A questionnaire was used as the main instrument to elicit information from 1,200 public nursery school teachers. 100 nursery primary school teachers responded to the questionnaire in each of the States. Frequency counts and percentages were used for the analysis. The result of the findings show that even though none of the objectives had attained a hundred percent (100%) implementation level, most of the objectives had gained reasonable degree of success. Etejere and Dashen are not specific in stating what constitute quality primary education. This means that the indicators of quality education may vary from person to person, group to group and country to country. The constituents of quality primary education shall be discussed in the succeeding phase of this paper.

3-A CONCEPT TO QUALITY AND ITS INDICATORS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Concluding based on Etejere's and Dashen's views means that so many things may be involved in determining quality or standard primary education. Some such things are pupils enrolment/completion rates, health/nutrition of pupils, availability of portable water in the schools, provision and utilization of instructional/infrastructural materials, violence free school environment, quality recruitment process of staff, staff retraining process, teacher pupil ratio, teachers readiness, family support services, support from other stakeholders, proximity of schools, compliance to school rules and regulations and many more. The identified factors stand to be the indicators of quality primary education in Nigeria. In

examining these factors three key issues must be borne in mind. This is to say that in Nigeria, quality primary education can be determined by considering the extent the quality indicators are available, adequate and accessible. This study therefore describes or refers to availability, adequacy and accessibility as 3-A concept of quality primary education in Nigeria.

It is indeed not out of place to throw some light to the usage of the concepts. The concepts can be explained one after another.

Availability

The fact that those meant to benefit from early child schools encounter some problems due to cost and other inconveniences one is forced to ascertain if the extent the schools are available makes it free for all as purportedly declared by government. Besides, the concept of its availability cannot be declared in negation to the indicators of quality education.

Adequacy

One may say that the schools are available but a major question is if the number of schools available is adequate. Another angle to it is to find out if the available facilities and personnel are adequate. Therefore schools may be adequate but lack qualitative indicators. Adequacy in this context must be discussed in relation to indicators of quality education.

Accessibility

The schools may be deemed available and adequate but not accessible. Accessibility can be determined in many ways. One such way is examining the enrolment and completion rates of pupils. Another is the proximity or distance within which the children attend school. Besides one may also be interested to examine the extent within which the school facilities or other things that can enhance learning are accessed by both the teachers and the pupils.

In Nigeria therefore availability, adequacy and accessibility of schools for primary education is key in determining the extent the school system can be crowned qualitative. This is to say that quality can only be achieved if some factors are not found lacking in the school system. The factors as identified in the introductory part of this phase shall form the bases of determining the extent primary education in Nigeria can be said to be qualitative.

ATTAINMENT OF 3-A CONCEPT OF QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In applying the 3-A concept to determine quality primary education in Nigeria, the factors indicating quality primary education shall be discussed one after another in relation to any or all the 3-A concept (availability, adequacy and accessibility).

Health and Nutrition of Children

Children faced with poor health and nutrition is known for absenteeism and poor performance in school work. There are adequate evidence to prove that poor health and nutrition are major causes of primary school absenteeism in China, Guinea, India and Mexico (Carron & Chan, 1996). In the bid to improve the health and nutrition of pupils, the government of United States of America in 1965 embarked on head start project. The head start project targeted at improving the health and nutrition of children from poor homes. The programme was for children of early childhood education aged 0-5 and another group of people were the pregnant mothers (Lee & Schnur, 1988). Emulating the government of United States of America, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 academic sessions declared the free feeding programme for primary school children in selected states of Nigeria. The free feeding programme led to some research projects. Anero

(2011) found out that the completion rate during the feeding was higher than when there was no feeding among pupils in Rivers State. The magnanimity of United States of America and the Nigerian governments in terms of health and nutrition of school children stresses the need to take the health and nutrition of children serious. Parents and teachers must therefore engage in programmes such as pre and post natal medical checkups, vaccination against disease as well as monitor the quality of food taken by children. By so doing, the enrolment and completion rates of the pupils shall be worthwhile. This conclusion is reached because Anero's account revealed that government feeding programme in some selected states in Nigeria recorded monumental achievement in terms of pupils enrolment and completion rates. If the feeding exercise can be carried out in all the Nigerian schools, primary education can be available, adequate and accessed by all.

Portable Water

Closest to health and nutrition of children is the availability of portable water. It is not in dispute that one group who are casualties to water born disease are the children. To ensure that they are in good health condition, government owned primary schools must provide portable water. Inability of the schools to provide good water within the school premises may obstruct the attainment of school goals. Reporting on this, Colby & Miske, (2000) say that when pupils leave school and walk significant distances for clean drinking water they may not always return to class. Availability of portable water within the school premises is crucial for attaining school goals. Unfortunately a good number of public primary schools in Nigeria cannot boost of portable water in their premises. Since none availability of water in schools warrants pupils' to abscond from classes, those who manage the schools must try to make water available in the schools. In other words, the availability of portable water is one of the yard sticks to determine the extent primary education can be described as adequate for the pupils. This is so because if pupils abscond from classes it simply means that the number of pupils that would complete primary education with good grades will be few. This negates the submission of Agom (1983) who argues that one indicator of quality education is the ability of the pupils to pass relevant examinations.

Violence Free Environment

It is observed that war and violent zones are dangerous to the overall development of the child. In the same vein, noisy and uncontrolled environments are not good for the overall development of children. When children encounter violence in their environment, they are bound to suffer lasting physical, psychological, social, emotional and behavioral problems. In line with this, Pigozzi (2000) reports that if pupils mostly girls experience physical threats and other forms of assault they may either lose confidence, self esteem or identity. Pigozzi's assertion suggests that violence for pre-primary and primary school children can take place in many ways. Speaking on this, Anero (2013) explains that psychological or emotional violence damages the emotion of children. Psychological and emotional violence can be manifested in schools in the following ways: shouting, frightening, insulting, humiliating, slapping, kicking, beating, pinching, pulling hair. Outside these, Ozen (2002) also identifies psychological and emotional punishment to include scolding, threatening and denial of affection. Government as early child school provider must make efforts in providing violence free school environment through the implementation of school rules and regulations. This aspect of quality school indicator seems to be left without check. This is so because there are several accounts among rural school children who either absent or withdraw from school due to threats and other forms of harassment from male counterparts. This act has the potent of putting several school children out of school. If this assertion is true, it means that the chance

of accessing primary schools by children even where they are available is put into great jeopardy.

Quality Recruitment of Staff

All categories of early child school providers are guilty of recruiting the untrained teachers and the government is no exemption. Reasons for doing so cannot be justified. The recruitment of those without the requisite academic training can be criticized based on many grounds. One among which is the fact that over the years, observation shows that trained teachers assumed to possess good knowledge of child psychology through their academic training still find it difficult to manage children in classes, if so what would be the fate of those without the needed training? This assertion points to the fact that untrained teachers who are not exposed to the knowledge of child psychology and other pedagogical issues may be the worse in managing and controlling the behavior of children in classes. The teacher recruitment exercise of 2012/2013 by Rivers State Government where large numbers of untrained teachers are recruited into the teaching service is indeed a malady and an evil wind that would further devastate the school system. If school goals must be achieved, those who recruit teachers must employ academically trained teachers who possess a minimum of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) as recommended by law. Since government may be found guilty of recruiting the wrong people to do the job, it suggests that the available schools may be filled with teachers who may not credibly deliver. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the services rendered by the schools are adequate.

Workshops, Seminars and Conferences for Teachers

Until recently, public primary school teachers were not involved in workshops. Realizing that much is needed from the childhood teacher, no individual teacher may independently possess all that it takes to be a good teacher. The need to constantly engage in workshops, seminars and other forms of retraining programmes do not need to be over stressed. Mentorship and the aforementioned strategies have been found very useful for improving teachers' skills in coping with pedagogical challenges, knowledge of subject matter, class management strategies. In the light of this, Rasik (1972) asserts that the effectiveness of any educational programme is a measure of the caliber of teachers in its service. It is apparent that training and retraining of teachers is an important ingredient that improves the teachers' general job performance. School as a social system is known to function better when quality inputs are made. Therefore the idea of retraining teachers must be considered important because it is a major way of ensuring that quality is achieved. Quality here refers to adequacy in terms of the number of teachers who gain from the retraining exercises. Number in this context is mentioned because observation shows that the selection process of those who attend the workshops and other teacher retraining programmes indicates that the Head teachers and board officials regularly select their close friends and relatives and leave out a good number of teachers due to the financial rewards attached.

Teacher Pupil Ratio

One problem common to childhood school is teacher pupil ratio. This problem has existed since the birth of formal education in Nigeria. It is experienced more when programmes targeted at increasing pupils enrolment and completion rates are implemented. On this note, Lyon and Ekpo (2008) commenting on the implementation of UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State observe that the state experienced increase in pupils enrolment such that the teacher pupil ratio is very high. They gave the breakdown on local government bases as Abak (1:87), Eastern Obolo (1:230), Eket (1:113), Esit Eket (1:118), Essien udim (1:61), Etim Ekpo (1:104), Etinan (1:130), Ibeno (1:148) Ibesikpo Asutan (1:70), Ika (1:98), Ibiono Ibom (1:95),

Ikono (1:106), Ikot Abasi (1:171), Ikot Ekpene (1:42), Ini (1:108), Itu (1:65), Mbo (1:114), Mkpai Enin (1:124), Nsit Atai (1:84), Nsit Ibom (1:68), Nsit Ubium (1:73), Obot Akara (1:111), Okobo (1:124), Onna (1:100), Oron (1:62), Oruk Anam (1:152), Udung Uko (1:46), Ukanafun (1:93), Uruan (1:84), Urue Offong Oruku (1:120) and Uyo (1:72). An analysis of the figures as reflected by Iyon and Ekpo indicates that the teacher may not manage the pupils such that learning is assured. Those who manage childhood schools must indeed avoid over blown classes, to enable teachers cope. The problems of high pupil teacher ratio are many. One such problem is that, it becomes difficult for the teachers to secure attachment between them and the children they care for (Anero, 2012). In that wise, it will be difficult to achieve good social and emotional development among children. To avert this danger, the school managers must assign each teacher to teach the number of children which he can effectively manage. The issue of attachment as reported here drags one's mind to adequacy. This is so because if the number of teachers is not adequate, the teacher as a surrogate parent cannot exhibit the model behaviours expected of him.

Proximity of Schools

The distance in which children walk from home to school is a major indicator of determining quality childhood education. Children who walk long distances before arriving at school are bound to burn off their energy for the day's learning. Those who manage childhood schools must look inwards to site such schools within walk-able distances. The situation where Rivers State Government engages in demolishing and rebuilding of existing schools has not solved the problem created by sitting schools in distant places. Besides, they regulate the number of pupils admissible in the school to ensure good pupil ratio. This act denies a good number of the Nigerian child the opportunity to acquire early child education. Schools must therefore be located within a distance of say less than a kilometer. The issue of distance is indeed a strong indicator of accessibility of schools by children.

Instructional and Infrastructural Facilities

One perennial problem of early child education in Nigeria is the issue of instructional and infrastructural facilities. Many childhood schools are ill equipped instructionally and infrastructurally. Unfortunately, no meaningful learning can take place among childhood schools without good facilities. In providing the facilities the school providers such as the government must give consideration to usage of the facility by both the teacher and the child. In a situation where certain facilities are provided in schools but cannot be used by neither the teacher nor the child is a complete aberration. None usage of such facilities may be due to lack of manipulative skill, inadequacy or absence of power. The provision of computers in primary schools in Rivers State under the Governor Rotimi Amaechi led administration where the provision of computers in some schools is not adding to learning because the teachers and children who are expected to use them lack the manipulative skills is unwarranted and may be considered a waste. Besides, the absence of power worsens the situation. This factor affects the 3-A concept of quality of availability, adequacy and accessibility.

It may not be disputed that in Nigeria and beyond children are found receiving instruction under harsh conditions. It is not an exaggeration that children still take lessons in dilapidated buildings, sit on the floor, walk to school on bare foot etc. On the side of the teachers, some of them rarely had seats, tables, boards etc. to write and there are pronounced absence of libraries and laboratories. Following the poor state of facilities in Nigerian schools, the Nigerian Country Report (2008) explains that available records indicate the accomplishment of some instructional and infrastructural facilities. The list of the items enumerated by the Nigerian Country Report is stated herein.

- a. Completion and supply of 109,440 units of classroom furniture at an average of 2,880 per state and 5,760 for FCT intervention;
- b. Completion and handing over of 490 classrooms and provision of 11,270 sets of pupils' desks and chairs, 382 toilets, 13 head teachers' offices, and 19 bore-holes to 70 primary schools in Kaduna, Niger and plateau states to the tune of N1.6 billion.
- c. 25,399 classrooms were constructed throughout Nigeria for a total enrolment of 881,594 basic literacy learners, and a further 9,770 classroom for an enrolment of 325,405 post-basic learners.
- d. The book policy which states that the minimum ratio of textbooks, play equipment, charts and computers for basic education has been approved by the NEC, UBEC and the target to provide each pupil with textbooks in at least the core subjects. So far, 9,189,592 assorted textbooks have been procured and distributed since 2005 (ie a textbook to 4 pupils).
- e. Other teaching-learning materials: In order to ensure maximum guidance for teachers on the implementation of the new curricula, NERDC has developed teachers' handbook for the 9 – year basic Education Curriculum; a manual for the development of instructional resources for local materials and instructional sign language text book for Nigerian schools (ISCTENS) (pp 17-21).

Considering these, no one can confidently say that early child schools in Nigeria are very well equipped. The condition in which learning takes place may be a major factor contributing to diminishing motivation of children and even parents in sending their children to school which indeed can affect quality in many respect.

Teachers' Readiness

Several economic and emotional factors are responsible for teachers' unwillingness to carry out their day-to-day activities. Whatever is, it must be noted that teachers' presence in the classroom is a major starting point. A class without a teacher is like entering a plane without a pilot to travel to a distant town. The teachers must try to put aside every other distraction in order to be prompt and regular at all times. Absence, irregularity or lateness of a teacher tells on the quality of instruction and the nature of training he can give to children. Having teachers who are not ready to teach deflects the plans to achieve school goals. Teacher readiness factors affect the extent primary education can be said to be available, adequate and accessible. This is so because without teachers presence no learning can be available or adequately given. In the same vein, accessibility of education cannot be possible.

Compliance to School Policies

Well managed schools and classrooms greatly contribute to educational quality. Teachers and school administrators must agree upon school and classroom rules and regulations. The policies should be clear and understandable. It must as matter of importance is communicated effectively to parents and guardians who would supervise such policies at home and even in the school. This aspect of the school is important because order, constructive discipline and reinforcement of positive behaviour communicate a serious sense of purpose to the children. This is a sure way of providing quality in all respect.

Family Support Services

Successful attempts to increase parental involvement in the child's education have taken place around the world. Not all parents may have the tools and background to support their children education. Williams (2000) observes that children whose parents have primary education or less were more than three times as likely to have low test scores or grade

repetition than children whose parents had at least some secondary education. This suggests that parent's education may not only influence parents-child interactions only but may also affect the child's overall development. This is so because parents with little formal education may be less familiar with language used in school thereby limiting their ability to support learning and participation in school related activities. Besides they may also be unwilling to provide the child with the basic tools that can enhance learning. This to say that family supports is key to quality provision of primary education in all regards.

Support from other Stakeholders

It may not be strange to discover that the interaction between the parents and early school providers can be described as a loosed one. To bridge the gap, the government may need to approach the youth bodies, women groups, family organizations, student unions, companies in the communities etc. to render some services that would promote the child's education. By so doing, primary education would not only be available but it will also be accessible and adequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the prevailing problems in providing quality primary education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since feeding/health care of school children, provision of portable water and infrastructural/instructional facilities are key to quality primary education, NGO's, individuals and relevant agencies need to volunteer in taking care of feeding/health needs of pupils as well as providing portable water and other facilities in the schools;
2. Those who manage schools such as ministry officials and other agencies need to monitor and ensure that schools operate within recommended teacher/pupil ratio, rules/regulations and a violent free environment;
3. To avoid recruiting teachers who do not possess the teaching readiness and the requisite academic qualifications faculties of education in collaboration with relevant agencies need to be involved in recruiting, retraining and ensure that teachers who teach are ready for the task; and
4. Government and public companies need to sponsor enlightenment programs to educate the less literate parents and other stake holders to support child education in all ramifications.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, primary education is understood to play crucial roles towards the overall development of the child and the nation at large. Considering its roles, one expects that those who manage it such as the government would give it their all. On the contrary no one can confidently say that the government has provided quality primary education because quality indicators show that primary school system is lacking in many areas. Since the provision of quality primary education is an unavoidable task, all hands must be on deck in ensuring that primary education receives a boost. The extent the primary school system can be described as rendering quality services can be evaluated using 3-As namely availability, adequacy and accessibility.

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