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PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION WHEN RESOURCES ARE SCARCE: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SECONDARY SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

BY

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Abstract

Most education systems have always exercised some control over the quality of their output. This has taken the form of supervision of the output from the system. This paper attempts to analyse the issue of quality and how to improve on the quality of education in the face of dwindling resources. The author adopted a library research approach to the study. The study reveals that in addition to the issue of insufficient intellectual ability on the teachers' part, their understanding of assessment tasks, sources of students' errors, and strategies for improving them should be considered important features of instructional effectiveness. The paper suggests that monitoring programmes should be undertaken in a non-threatening context and the issue of building quality should be addressed from the outset.

Introduction

The educational system is confronted with many problems in Nigeria and this is as a result of the growth in the demand for education. This has led to frantic efforts to look for a suitable educational development model that will help in realising the long term national objectives. Much of the attention which is given to the planning of education in the country appears to be a response to some political, economic, cultural and administrative pressures on the education enterprise (Bentley, 1998). One of these is the idea that formal education holds the key to national development and economic growth.

Nigeria has been confronted with the problem of the growing complexity of the education enterprise. These complexities are mainly in relation to the population of the schools, which grows at an increasing rate every year. The increase in enrolment also implies an expansion in the number of schools, types, experience and qualification of the members of staff. These structural and contextual expansion create problems which pose serious limits to educational policy makers' administration (Eisemon and Schwille, 1991).
The economy has been on the decline in Nigeria. The education sector generally is receiving its own fair share of the drubbing as a result of the economic predicaments of the past twenty years, along with the fact that public confidence in the product of schools is decreasing. This is the reason why effort is being made to apportion blame for the perceived fall in educational standards. Students, teachers, the homes and administrators have at one time or the other been blamed for the standard of education and now the blame has also gone to the society's economy within which education is placed. As a result, the conclusion has been drawn that all educational research and planning are of no use (Odum and Massy, 1992).

Another serious problem is that the products of secondary schools learn very little (Lockheed and Komênan, 1989). Students lack proficiency in reading, writing and computational skills and also lack the skills required to apply what has been learned to new situations and this is partly because they often only successfully memorize and repeat what is written in their textbooks or on the chalkboard. This is a problem because it is the cognitive skills students develop in school and not their exposure to schooling which determines their subsequent productivity in the labour force (Bentley, 1998).

There is also the serious problem of resources. The resources that are allocated to education are inadequate for meaningful change to improve effectiveness. Per pupil expenditure, when adjusted for schools cannot meet the most basic resources needed for education such as qualified subject teachers, facilities and textbooks. The number of days in the school year has been reduced by too many holidays and strike actions. About 70 to 75% of the school budgets are spent on personnel, so there is little left for school textbooks and other instructional materials (Uzoka, 1997). Accordingly, the search for solutions on how to improve secondary education must begin with the attempts to provide at least minimum levels of essential school inputs.

Given the crisis of resources and quality affecting schools in Nigeria, the policy challenge is how to expand available resources and how to raise quality within existing resource constraints. The improvement in secondary school quality has not kept pace with successive expansion of the secondary school system. The problem of school quality is especially more for students from impoverished and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
For example, in rural areas student malnutrition and high dropout rates continue to be a severe problem. Secondly, school enrolments have no doubt grown substantially but this increase has not been supported by larger increases in expenditure. Thus, enrolments are growing faster that the economy in general. The result is large quantitative expansion at the expense of qualitative improvement in education.

This paper highlights the issue of how to raise quality in the public schools. Efforts are made also to highlight the causes of the financial crisis facing education in general and secondary education in particular. The paper is concerned as well with what contributes to effective instruction by looking at some indicators of instructional effectiveness. It also suggests strategies for improving school effectiveness.

**Issues of Quality in Public Schools**

Efforts to improve quality in education are not new, but over the past decade, have received increasing attention. Quality is the watchword among educational professionals, politicians and the myriad individuals, groups and organizations that claim to have a stake in the education service. Although quality in education has become frequent, it is difficult to define (Preedy, Glatter and Levacic, 1997). A major OECD report on schools and quality has argued against providing one simple definition of quality in education. It suggested instead that there is need for a clearer understanding of how context – curriculum, school organization, resources and facilities, and evaluation of students, teachers and system – can contribute to quality (OECD, 1989).

Some issues have been raised for schools seeking to enhance educational quality. These issues range from the nature, purposes, focus, content, and control of attempts to improve quality. These issues came about as a result of the fact that there is no single yardstick for measuring educational quality. There are many factors which interact with each other to contribute to quality in education. Some of these factors are students and their backgrounds, staff and their skills, institutions and the structure, and ethos, curriculum, and social expectations (OECD, 1989).

The nature of educational quality is contested (Doherty, 1996), even though there are controversies that quality improvement should centre on learning and teaching and providing room for these activities to take place effectively. This is because the main purpose of schools and colleges is to facilitate students learning and as such the needs of t
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learner must be of utmost importance. The development of the quality of curriculum is as a result the main task. On the other hand, emphasizing learning quality brings about some thorny questions about defining and prioritizing multiple needs of individual learners which range from academic, social, spiritual and moral development, to preparation for working life, for citizenship and parenthood.

Similarly, there is the issue of whose definition of quality to put into consideration. This is because schools have plural stakeholders such as students, parents, employers, funding bodies, local and central authorities, and each with differing quality definitions and emphases (Nixon, 1995). Many parents, for example, may be mainly concerned with examination results, employers of labour with work-related skills, funding bodies to some extent with cost-effectiveness and staff/student ratios.

Also, decision makers at various levels in the educational system and in the institutions are likely to have various quality concerns. Thus the issue of quality entails mediating between various quality agendas. Similarly, if schools wish to maximize control of their work, then they need to set their own quality agendas (Freeman, 1994).

School quality is poor and educational expectations are low, resulting in educational achievement that is so low as to provide little hope of escape from poverty. The crucial point to be made here is that man is so dynamic in nature, and accordingly, every individual Nigerian constitutes the supreme economic potential which the country possesses. It is undisputed that man cannot create anything. But by an intelligent and purposive application of the exertions of his body, and mind, he can exploit natural resources to produce goods and services for immediate consumption, and for capital outlay. Other things being equal, therefore, the healthier his body and the more educated his mind, the greater will be his morale and the more efficient and economical he becomes as a producer and consumer (Awolowo, 1971). Masses of children from impoverished homes are relegated to an inadequate system of public schooling. Moreover, these public schools do not provide the education and social mobility that is associated with the popular image of education as a liberating force.

Thus, the education service has become imbued with the language and concepts of quality. Those concerned with educational matters have striven to develop the mechanisms and processes of inspection as an essential way of validating quality. The fundamental principle is that these people must have a view about quality. The
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inspectors' role is to authenticate that view. It is essential that schools have an objective evaluation of quality.

For these you need procedures and competency (Riley, 1992a). Effective institutional arrangements for monitoring, maintaining and improving quality require the allocation of human, material and financial resources.

Causes of Financial Crisis

The over-reaching theme of this section is relating financial resources to the attainment of educational quality. Finance is a major requirement of schools. It is needed to procure materials and equipment, to build physical facilities and to pay salaries. Funds allocated to schools are ever enough to run schools. For any institution to perform optimally, there is need to provide educational resources that are commensurate with the needs of the institution. This was stressed in the Bagauda Seminar Report (1980) which explained that to achieve good academic quality a number of factors need to be given priority attention. Among these factors are the provision of adequate funding to meet the magnitude of capital and recurrent costs by the state and federal governments. It is clear from the above report that adequate provision and allocation of resources to schools is likely to constitute a contingency actor to improving the quality of education.

Budget proportion is one of the ways of determining financial flow to education and this is done by looking at the total budget and determining priority scale so as to see where education belongs, when compared with other sectors of the economy. Even though states have constantly increased their allocation to education, what is available is grossly inadequate.

Inflation has further aggravated the situation by reducing the purchasing power of money available and escalating the salary bill. It is important to note that the total cost of education in general and secondary education in particular has been on the increase, even although the increase is in fact negated by inflation. As a result of the serious impact of inflation, the total cost of secondary education is on the increase, even though the purchasing power of the Naira continues to wane.

Another inflationary factor is salary cost which typically constitutes approximately 80 to 85% per cost of the educational budget (Oguntoye, 1987).
Some Indicators of Instructional Effectiveness

Education is not like a manufacturing production process where inputs are clearly linked to output by means of an explicit and well-understood technology. In contrast, knowledge is the link between the quantity and quality of teaching time, deployment of materials, size of class, curriculum coverage and other inputs on the one hand, and the amount of learning achieved by students on the other hand (Preedy, 1997). However, it is difficult to conceive of an educational activity that does not require time. Indeed, pure contemplation takes time, even if it takes place in the absence of any other identifiable resource.

Research has addressed directly the relationship between allocating time to instruction in a subject and gain in student learning. Brown and Saks (1986) measured time allocated to Mathematics and reading instruction in a sample of second and fifth grade classes and found that it correlated positively with test score in Mathematics. They went further to show that even among classes with the same quantity of time devoted to Mathematics instruction, systematic differences in learning gains occurred across classes. This suggests that what teachers and students do with the allocated time has important productivity implication. These findings are encouraging because of the importance of the quantitative dimension of allocated institutional time.

For some teachers and students, the curriculum moves too fast and is highly diversified. Again it could be very difficult for their level or there may be lack of purpose. Although all secondary schools have a common curriculum to follow, there is still opportunity for alteration of the programme of studies, especially in JSS 3 and SS 3 when students are preparing for JSCE and SSCE respectively. For instance, school authorities may increase the length of instruction by beginning classes earlier or ending later in order to make up for the too many holidays and strike actions.

The management of schools and the supervision of teachers relate monitoring instruction to ensure compliance with Ministry of Education policies. It is important for teachers to be visited, observed in their classes and provided guidance. This is the process of bringing about improvement in instruction by working with teachers. The primary aim of supervision of instruction is to recognise the inherent worth of each individual and to ensure that the full potentials of all are realised. This is the philosophy underlying supervision of instruction (Nwaogu, 1980).
It is like stating the obvious to say that the curriculum represents ideally the distillation of man's most important experiences, ideas, attitudes and hopes. This life wire of educational institution, demands more careful study and decision making today in Nigeria than ever before. Instructional practices that may be effective in increasing learning outcomes include some that involve adherence to ministry policies and others that require deviations from them. Successful implementation of the school curricula depends on the teacher's guidance provided for academic subjects and to the schedule for teaching them.

**Strategies for Improving Effectiveness**

Budgetary allocation to schools is generally poor. The allocation to the education sector both in the national and state budgets hardly makes any positive impact at the level of individual schools. There is need for government to increase to a larger extent budgetary allocation to schools.

There is need to direct attention toward curriculum issues particularly planning, maintenance, development and review of curricula and programmes within the schools. The organization and strategies for the effective use of school resources should include staff training and development and the management and review of development schools.

There should be less emphasis on paper qualification since it is not enough to determine suitability for a teaching job. The people who are willing and who have the potential to teach well should be employed as teachers.

Emphasis should be laid on the importance of teacher supervision. Now that the Federal Government has launched the Universal Basic Education Scheme, it may be useful to consider more effective means of supervision. Conventional approaches to in-service training should focus on improving the knowledge of subject matter and effective methods of lesson presentation. Good teaching also involves understanding of what is expected of students, where students make mistakes and how to improve their performance.

The monitoring programme should be undertaken as part of school review programme that would provide direct assistance to schools in assessing their performance and areas for further development. The monitoring programme should be undertaken in a non-threatening manner.
It should also provide continuous feedback on a wide range of aspects of performance. This will provide further opportunity to continuously research into the impact of a wide range of practices in schools on the improvement of student outcome.

Conclusion
This paper, has tried to examine how best to achieve quality education in the face of dwindling resource allocation. There is no doubt that education is the biggest industry in the country taking a chunk of the budgetary allocation of the various governments. This is the reason why the present economic downturn has adversely affected the system. The paper suggested some strategies for improving secondary school effectiveness.

It is the view of the writer that quality of education can be improved. Allocation of more funds on the part of government is very necessary and efforts should be directed towards curriculum issues like planning, maintenance, development, and review of curriculum programmes in the schools. Finally, it is high time we outline the monitoring strategies which will be adopted in the school as the means of implementing the teaching and learning policy and monitoring quality.

References