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PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AS SPECIALISTS FOR QUALITATIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of primary education and the significance of primary school teachers as specialists for qualitative education in Nigeria. The primary school, being the bed-rock for all the other levels of education in the country must be built on a solid foundation to enhance quality education. It must also be strong, reliable, viable and sound, so that effective learning can take place. In order to achieve this, the quality of our teachers must not be taken for granted. Specific efforts must be made to improve the educational level of our primary school teachers, bearing in mind the edge that "no educational system can be higher than the quality of its teachers". In this regards specific recommendations were made in the paper.

Introduction

Oderinde (1999) described primary education as the key to the success or failure of the entire educational system. According to him, the hall-mark of educational system in a given country is to maintain an effective quality control as a measure to foster qualitative education to the citizenry. The Federal, State and Local Governments have proclaimed the significance of formal education as a tool for national development.

In the same vein Adamu (1999) maintained that formal education has been recognised as a means through which political, economic, social change as well as religious sector can be fostered. It is interesting to note that most children have their first contact with formal education at the primary school level. In order to give a solid and unshaken foundation to these children, well-qualified and professional teachers who are specialists in their various fields of study should introduce them (the children) into the school system. Formal education is one of Nigeria's biggest industries and it touches on every human endeavour in any given society. Formal education is regarded as an investment that later germinates good fruits for the society.

The Development of Primary Education

An historical tour of the development of formal education in Nigeria is important to start with, to know the measure of qualitative primary school teachers for effective pedagogy in the classroom.

Formal, western type education was part of Christian Missionary efforts in mid 19th century (Okebukola, 1999). However, the first primary school was established in 1842. Since then, there is a rapid development both in enrolments and establishment of primary schools.

Maduewesi (1999) gave an elusive historical development of primary school in Nigeria. For instance, 1842 – 1880 was regarded as a period for intensive missionary activities in Southern Nigeria, using primary schools as an avenue for converting Africans to Christianity. At this epoch, education policy, educational activities and uniform standards such as syllabus, textbooks, school hours, supervisions, teachers' qualifications and salaries were not adequately taken care of.

In 1952, the colonial government formed Education Codes, one of which specified the certification of teachers through the Inspectorate of Education. The Inspectorate was empowered to conduct Teachers' Certificate Examinations. Furthermore, the protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria was created in 1900 and a Department of Education was established in 1903 in accordance with the Education

codes.

Maduewesi (1990) stipulated that new ordinances were enacted and one of the ordinances specified "classifying teachers' certificates and teachers into grades such as School Master (SM) Assistant Teacher (AT) and Pupil Teacher (PT)" Between 1920 and 1922, the Colonial Government allowed the Phelps Stoke Foundation to send an Educational Commission to West Africa. The Phelps Stoke Foundation's report revealed that facilities and teachers' provision were very poor.

At that time to become a full-fledged primary school teacher (PST) the teacher needed to obtain primary school leaving certificate (Komolafe and Adeniyi 2000). In the same vein, Abdullahi (1992) gave vivid account of different qualifications, which a teacher needed to qualify in the primary school system. One was the Elementary Teachers Colleges (ETC) which was also referred to as Grade Three Teachers College; the duration for the qualification was two or three years. Also the Higher Elementary Teacher College (HETCs) was for candidates with Standard Six and 2 passes; the duration was four years. In the 1940s, students with Cambridge School Certificate were qualified to obtain the Higher Elementary Teachers' Certificate. This later on became the Grade Two Teachers' Certificate in the middle of 1950s.

With the introduction of Teachers Training Colleges, Grade Three Teachers spent two additional years to obtain their Grade Two Certificate. Interestingly, after several years of effective classroom teaching and learning at the primary school level, the teacher programmes were phased out and the least qualification desired for a teacher to teach at any primary school in Nigeria is now the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). With this qualification (Nigeria Certificate in Education), emphasis is now laid on specialization of the chosen career. It is pertinent therefore to note that with the least teaching certificate now which is the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), primary school teachers (PSTs) are trained as specialists as opposed to generalists teachers of the past years.

Primary School Teachers and Subjects Taught

A primary school teacher plays a significant role in imparting knowledge and transmitting acceptable norms and values of the society to the children. Komolafe et al (2000) viewed the primary school teacher as a role player who take solemn responsibility at foundation stage for the survival of the individual and community. In other words, the teacher instills discipline, gives knowledge as well as courage for a life time of discovery and achievement of the children, so that they can become useful members in the society.

A primary school teacher therefore can be described as a facilitator who prepares a child to become active and direct children activities along the lines of the prepared educational experiences called "the curriculum" which is provided by the school. Primary education is referred to as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) section 13, Sub-Section 16, the goals of primary education are to:

- a) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy ability to communicate effectively.
- b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child
- e) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment
- f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his locality.

The above goals could be successfully achieved if teachers in the primary schools have been clearly defined as specialists and not generalists. At this point of technological advancement, primary school

teachers should be addressed as specialists as this will enhance effective classroom teaching and learning.

Musgrave (1979) explained that in the nineteenth century, science subjects in the public schools were very low. Even those who taught such subjects were of lower status. Although this situation has changed but such low expectations on the part of science subjects could be attributed to the concept of 'Generalists'. It is worthy of note that primary school teachers are general practitioners because most of them have the same qualification, teacher's certificate and therefore status cannot be accorded by the subject taught (Musgrave 1979). It is imperative therefore that such general practitioners could lead to the destruction of other education ladder for the child and his/her life chances. Musgrave (1979) argued that:

"Primary teachers must be academic generalists and approach child as whole persons, whilst secondary school teachers must usually have specialist knowledge and take a less diffuse approach to their pupil."

It should be noted that the ideology of Musgrave (1979) will not help developing countries to have technological know how. In other words, a well trained and qualified teacher will teach the subject matter effectively rather than 'struggling' with other subjects he/she cannot teach but must teach it because he/she has been looked upon as generalist. The idea of generalist will cripple the education system and mar the life chances of the learner.

The Concepts: Specialist, Qualitative and Quantitative Education

Oxford Dictionary of current English (1998) aptly defined a specialist as 'the person trained in a particular branch or person who specially studies a subject or area'.

Qualitative as defined in the dictionary is 'quality, degree of excellence or a general excellence'. On the other hand, quantitative

has been defined as of quantity as opposed to quality.

The three concepts examined therefore showed that towards improved literacy delivery in primary school for qualitative education, primary school teachers should be trained to become specialists in their field or teaching profession. Both specialist and qualitative concepts would give better chances to effective and improved educational system in any given society. Significantly, education of primary school teachers would serve as a sound basis for the education of young children (Abdullahi, 1992).

In the same vein, Abdullahi (1992) explained that emphasis on teaching, thinking as well as creativity with the framework of the regular curriculum of the primary school teachers should be revamped, since instruction for thinking and creativity is the hallmark of specialised skills, which most teachers in primary schools lack since they have been grouped as generalists of knowledge. However, to maintain a viable and solid foundation of primary school education; and for effective implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system in contemporary Nigerian society, there is need for the primary school teachers to become specialists as well as authorities on their chosen career.

The need for primary school teachers as specialists for qualitative education

Education plays an important role in the development process of a nation. In other words, the development of formal education is the overall development of the nation which continues to play a major role in economic development and in social transformation (Olumide and Okebukola, 1990). The need for primary school teachers as specialists should be hall mark for effective educational system.

The primary school education is the foundation of formal learning of a child. Such a foundation must be firm and strong to cater for other educational ladder for the child. Primary school teachers should be encouraged to become specialists since teacher education is a 'sine-quanon' for quality education. It is imperative therefore that 'specialists'

in primary school should be encouraged and thus will lead to qualitative education.

Also, primary education programme should be given the adequate attention it deserves because of its importance to the individual and society. Similarly, adequate attention should be given to primary school teachers since primary education is the root of education system upon which other systems rest in its entirety; otherwise the entire educational system would crumble (Ayo Sobowale 1997).

However, primary school teachers as 'specialists' would be able to demonstrate sound degree of professional competence and a good knowledge of the subject matter for them to teach effectively. In all, the act of specialization would greatly assist the specialists teachers (Primary School Teachers) to relate the course content of the subject to the basic needs and lives of the learners and society (Ugodulunwa, 2000).

Conclusion

The teacher's reason for being in the classroom is primarily to educate the pupils. It is imperative to prepare a well trained personal who is specialist so as to impact the knowledge effectively for the purpose of qualitative education and implementation of other educational system. The quest for qualitative education in primary school is a task to be provided to the child for the enhancement of national development. A solid foundation in education enhances a solid educational system for national development. In other words, a nation cannot develop economically, politically, socially, culturally and religiously without laying a solid foundation for education. It is in furtherance of this that primary school teachers (PST) should be trained to become specialists in their chosen careers.

Recommendation

In ensuring qualitative, solid, viable and reliable educational system for our children, the following recommendations are made:

The National Policy on Education should be revisited so as to

- emphasize the need for primary school teachers as specialists.
- Since education in Nigeria is an instrument 'par excellence' for effecting national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) the Federal Government should, as a matter of policy ensure that all primary school teachers become specialists by the year 2015. This will enhance qualitative educational system and effective teaching and learning in Nigerian Primary schools.
- The Federal, State and Local levels should encourage 'In-service training' as this will enhance an effective pedagogy in schools.
- To further enhance the performance of school teachers as specialists, late payment of teachers' salaries must be discouraged as a matter of urgency as this will have negative effect on their classroom performance.
- The Federal, State and Local government as well as philanthropists should collectively provide educational materials such as textbooks, working tools and instructional materials for the purpose of active learning in schools.
- Government should also provide special allowances to each primary school for the purpose of improvisation and for active participation of the child. This will enable the school to be child-friendly.

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