

LITERACY INTERVENTION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION: EXPERIMENTING WITH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN UPGRADING SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

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ABSTRACT: *This is a report of an on-going project. It is a base-line survey. It captures the initial efforts of the researcher who leads a team of secondary school senior teachers as a volunteer in a community work that involves intervention for an upgrade in the school certificate examination of a group of Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools. This is to be done with a focus on the core subjects of English and Mathematics. This first stage of the report is like a sensitization campaign for fellow teachers and researchers keen on providing solution to the epileptic state of learning at the secondary education level. It is a clear position paper that takes Nigeria education system from where it was then to where it is now. Attempt is made to provide a brief but rich and clear historical background to the golden era of Nigerian literacy up to the period of a lacuna that sets in to cripple development in the education sector. It also reports how the community intervention is being conducted and the envisaged outcome.*

KEYWORDS: Literacy Intervention, Secondary Education: Community Participation, Senior Secondary School, Certificate Examination

INTRODUCTION

The pride of a nation is her level of development. What are the indices for measuring development and developmental purposes? One major investment hub agreed by stake holders all over the world is Education. Education provides the literacy template for planning, researching and executing developmental goals and objectives. Through Education, visions are generated for all areas of national needs: economy, politics, commerce, human management, school system, manufacturing, religion etc., According to Lawal (2013), education is believed to be an instrument for self reliance, social reconstruction and economic development. Developing nations have to contest with the much quest for education; visible in increase in school enrolments. Much as this has great predictive validity for future growth, the corresponding attention it needs in terms of human and non-human resource application seem to be a mirage in a country like Nigeria.

Components of Education as a source of National Development.

Orji and Job (2013) present Education as a launching pad for development in Vocational, Science and Technology being a source for identifying the entrepreneurial skills for present investment

that guarantees future windfall in a nation that is forward – driven. Education should provide what stabilizes the individual and corporate bodies in a moving nation. It is assumed that education should guarantee components such as sustenance, self esteem and freedom. No one is looking for a kind of education that would not provide food on the table of a graduate, that would not generate self – respect or self esteem and that would not assure protection for the vulnerable like women and children.

Teachers: their roles and societal expectation

Teachers of whichever subject and in whichever country of the world play a very critical role in meeting educational objectives as set by the National policy of the country. So much is expected from teachers that more often than not, make them act the heroes (which most often they are not) and must, of course, not be villain in any form. The reason for putting so many premiums on teachers is not unexpected. It is assumed that they determine the destiny of the learners and the future of the nation. Thus, successful teachers have been found to put so much emotion into their work hence teaching has been seen as “emotionally taxing and potentially frustrating” (Lambert, O’Donnell, Kusherman, & McCarthy, 2006, p. 105).

While some literature (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Roger D. Goddarda,*, Yvonne L. Goddardb (2001) and Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2010).) bend towards teacher’s conditions (health, attitude, availability ethics, qualification and experience) as important requisites for teacher’s best practice and classroom effectiveness, it is worthwhile to consider strategy as correspondingly important in taking learners to their goals.

Education in Nigeria today

The privilege to read about other nations – developed or developing, the opportunity to study in such nations and the further chances of participating in international conferences in countries other than ours give us a clear impression of a nation in comatose when it comes to assessing the government’s response to the National need of an average Nigerian child. Neither the failed Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that targeted 2010 nor vision 20-20-20 that has less than five years more to go hardly promise anything visible to the power players in education industry. Offering various suggestions with reference to improving the ailing standard of Nigerian education system in the areas of quality control, scholars have not been able to really agree on a common solution to best practice:

- What the needs of Nigerians really are?
- Which of such needs can be met through education?
- Can education really address Nigerian needs?
- How much efforts have been applied in the past and what have they really, objectively, produced?

- What is responsible for our failure?
- What keeps the influence of politics on education strong and ‘permanent?’
- What can we do to move forward?

The golden era of Nigerian Education

Nigeria is 55 years old. By October 1, this year (2016) she will be 56. Independent came in 1960 with a lot of challenges for a fragile nation. How did all start? In 1955, Professor Awokoya, was the majority leader, Western Region House of Common. With Chief Obafemi Awolowo at the helm of affairs, the need for reviving or rather laying a foundation for a future modern Nigerian was apparent. Of course, it has to be done with the instrument of Education. Primary Education must be free, compulsory and common to all families. Professor Awokoya declared:

“Education is Imperative and urgent. It must be treated with emergency, second only to war. It must move with a momentum of a revolution”

What followed this declaration was indeed revolutionary as there was massive construction of primary schools in the West and establishment of teacher training colleges as well. Teachers were recruited in large numbers majority of whom had gone through either the three, two or one year intensive courses basically on the teaching of pupils at the primary school levels. It should be reported as well that education at this level was also free – free tuition, free food, free accommodation and school uniforms including stationery and selected books of core subjects. Teacher trainees were also paid a monthly salary in the last three months of their final year. I am a recipient of all these. So I am sure it happened; all in this country. Colleges of Education were established in diverse areas of Yoruba states in the 70s and 80s to train teachers for massive graduates of primary schools – to handle, specifically, the first three levels of Secondary education popularly known today as the Junior Secondary Schools. Products of Colleges of Education, therefore, are middle man-power graduates awarded with Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). While in the College, NCE students had free tuition and were paid teaching practice allowance. Teaching Practice allowance was as handsome as N100 per student per term. This was in the days when university graduates earned less than N400 per month in the first two/three years of their employment. We must hasten to add that university students studying education had handsome scholarship (bursary awards), enjoyed free meal and earned field trips allowances. Putting all these together, graduates from all of the three levels of education highlighted in this paper – TCII, NCE and Bachelors put their best into applying the skills and experience associated with their new qualifications in their places of primary assignment. The summary of the gains of education in the golden era are:

- Best Practice in Teacher Training
- Effective classroom teaching

- Teacher Commitment
- Students' Healthy Competitions
- Robust students' scholarship (academic performance and attitudinal change)
- Fantastic Inspectorate
- Brain drain

Then something went wrong

It may be difficult to sort out what went wrong. What was apparent was the consequence of the missing gaps – a full scale decline in teachers' productivity and learners' achievement measurable especially in the abysmal failure in the core subjects of English and Mathematics at the School Certificate/Senior School Certificate and GCE levels. Initially, students and their parents faced the reality on ground with moral courage to seek genuine academic helps for their wards in emerging Continuing Education Centres. This development served less than a generation of students. Blame the events that followed possibly on successive military regimes and the nescient democracy of the first and second republic; that accounted for government paying lip services to demands of teachers and university staff thereby culminating in strike actions that left universities or colleges of education closed for weeks or months at regular intervals! Of course, bursary awards to teachers in training faded out. Somewhere along the line, National Examination Council (NECO) emerged to compete with WAEC to conduct SSCE and GCE (should I say Nigeria limited?). Not a few people in the education sector today believe that NECO exams are of lower standard compared to WAEC. We could argue this back and forth.

Unusual solution to failure at SSCE/GCE

The first reaction to the problem of mass failure by students and their collaborators was bribing their ways into WAEC offices to buy original examination papers in virtually all the subjects but especially in English, Mathematics and Sciences. As if this was not enough, and indeed it was not enough, because this practice was not systemic but the consequence, also, of a failed system, with moles on parade as saints undetected. To cover her face, WAEC normally cancelled leaked papers or results of such papers eventually. It was not enough! What is highly disturbing is what followed - the trend chosen by parents and students and perhaps teachers and school managers – private and public, to get credit 'pass' for their children/students at all cost. New terms started emerging - special centres, pari – ise (finish and go), settle the teachers, the invigilators or WAEC/NECO supervisors etc,

For roughly fifteen years plus, this scenario had overplayed itself into Nigeria education system such that majority of the products of secondary education with, between, six and nine credits/distinctions gaining admission into Nigerian universities could hardly know why they are in the university let alone what to do with their admissions. Consequently, the quality of response

expected from them to the strong curricula of university education was not there. Without prejudice, we could extend our search light to the quality of teachers from National Teachers' Institute (NTI) which took over the "rebuilding of the demolished Grade II Teachers' programme", the products from the colleges of education and part time programmes of some universities all of whom found their ways into universities before or after earning a Masters' degree. It is a sorry case to note that the situation instead of improving is yet deteriorating. No wonder, there is clear mismatch between certification and job performance in industries, schools and establishments. So as at today, an a sincere average Nigerian could summarize our problem in the education industry to include:

- Good Curriculum, bad implementation
- Faulty Teacher recruitment processes into Universities
- Politics and political influence on policy making and execution
- Ill – equipped 'raw materials' admitted regularly into Tertiary Institutions
- Finished Products unbaked
- Society shift in paradigm in the area of value clarification
- Bad influence of technology

The Way Out

The concept of community participation in this content is the burden of a university teacher who went through all the levels of education and taught at all levels of education ever conceived through Nigeria National Education Policy. The dream of the researcher with the team is to bridge the gap and supply the missing links in the areas spotted above while waiting for the government to act right.

The objectives were as follows:

- Restoring the golden era of Standardization in education
- Rebuilding the powerful effect of Communication – Spoken and Written on education
- Restoring the dignity of learning and success through the Core subjects of English and Mathematics

Procedure

The project is ongoing. The first stage lasted six weeks and involved the following steps:

- Training the trainers in skill acquisition for intervention project. The trainers in this case are the teachers – the first one week
- Providing recommended books that address identified gaps. The books were funded by the schools in association with the candidates' parents. – the first one week
- Providing specific demonstration hours of contact for/in schools and colleges. This is done with the teachers in attendance. – the next two weeks
- Teachers providing intervention directly to learners – the next three weeks
- Providing the required supervision of teachers while the project lasted – all the six weeks
- Providing required formative and summative evaluation of the intervention project through feedback from the teachers, students and members of the community. This was done through qualitative and quantitative measures like interviews and questionnaire to be reported in the second stage.

Observations

The initial observation (not yet backed up with data except a few interview reports) is that quite a number of learners are excited at the innovation. Learners believe that they can learn better if dynamic approaches that involve all round; all inclusive interaction in these core subjects are encouraged. Few students have the following to say:

“I never have found Mathematics as much fun as it is now”

“This is grammar made easy, honestly. Thank you sir, for coming to our aid”

“If our teachers could go on this way, we would certainly make rapid progress”

“Skills in English give us quick understanding and techniques to answering our Science questions”

“This is practical. We have been calling for it for a long time. This is great”

These observations, no doubt, promise fantastic outcome as long as the learners' interest is sustained and their participation is allowed to flourish.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

This is a continuous report. The study is in progress. This paper, has, however, succeeded in opening our eyes to the unlimited possibilities of improving success at the level of students. It shows, as well, that teachers can be assisted to be creative – going beyond the run of the mill approach to teaching and learning especially with reference to handling the core subjects of English and Mathematics both of which hold the key to learners' overall success.

While Some researchers associate creativity with concepts that have to do with cognitive abilities such as aptitude, approach, and knowledge (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996), others prefer to see it as providing a means of patronizing conceptual thinking abilities that involve flexibility, fluency, and originality (Leikin & Pitta-Pantazi, 2013). I agree with both dimensions as teaching in any nation today should measure shoulder to shoulder with current trends in global professional practice. Learners might no more be comfortable with “a sit down - to – look” approach with which lecture method is associated. The preliminary recommendation here is that secondary school teachers should tap the resources at their disposal to bring learning nearer to students. Such resources include human and material like online resources, in-born skills of learners and the ever growing interest of students in interactions made much more prominent by the evolution of social media.

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