TEACHERS’ QUALITY FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHILDREN’S PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of teacher quality in effective children’s primary school education. It describes teacher quality as the most important key to improving learning achievement. In fact some scholars are of the view that teacher quality is more strongly related to academic achievement than such variables as reduced class size, funding or increase in teacher salaries. It argues that teacher quality is so central to the academic achievement and that lack of it is detrimental to the achievement of functional primary education in Nigeria. The paper also revealed research evidence of teachers’ lack of necessary competences such as pedagogical skills for teaching literacy, number and basic science, managing diverse needs in the classroom, using alternative assessment tools to assess pupils’ learning, using a range of approaches to facilitate learning and working in team. This lack of competence among teachers, especially in this Universal Basic Education era has led to the production of pupils who acquire certificate without knowledge. The paper observed that improved teacher preparation will lead to greater teacher effectiveness and ultimately improved pupils’ achievement. Against this background, the paper examined the relevant components of teacher preparation and proffered suggestions for improvement. The paper concludes by stressing the importance of improved teacher preparation in effective pupils’ achievement.

Introduction

Education is an instrument for individual and national development. Thus Okafor (1988:236) perceived education as a potent instrument for national development. According to him “no developing nation will develop fast enough without placing its ultimate priority on education”. Continuing he adds that even developed nations will begin to develop backwards as soon as educational priority is swept under the rug. Primary Education is the education given in an institution for children aged normally 6 – 11+. It is the foundation for other levels of education. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system (FRN, 2004). The general objectives of Primary education include:

i. The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;
ii. The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
iii. Citizenship education as the basis for effective participation and contribution to the life of the society;
iv. Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
v. Developing in the child the ability to adapt in his changing environment;
vi. Giving the child the opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capability;
vii. Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparations for trades and crafts of the locality.

To achieve the objectives above, a number of factors must be taken into cognizance. Major among them is the teacher factor. The teacher is at the centre of instruction. Lassa (1996) observed that education is the key to national development and it is equally a truism that the teacher holds the key to sound education ipso facto. Studies abound that support the maxim that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers and no nation can rise above the level of her teaching staff. James (2003) sees teachers as pivot on which every educational development hangs. Ipaye (2002) describes the teacher as the spinal cord of educational system at all levels. Mkpa (2002) avers that the teacher is incontrovertibly
the fulcrum on which the education system stands. Ukeje (1991) opined that if the child is at the centre of education system, the teacher is the pivot of the education process. Buttressing the above, Darling-Hammond (2000) pined that teacher quality is more strongly related to achievement than such variables as reduced class size, funding or increase in salaries. Ukeje (2000) noted that the UPE program of 1976 failed in Nigeria majorly because of teacher factor. Aghuogu (2003) noted that profession like teaching naturally requires people with best brains and aptitudes so as to improve productivity, quality and functional education. In an empirical study carried out by UNICEF (2001) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, they found that of all inputs that go into education provision none was probably more important than the teacher. Lack of quality among primary school teachers is linked to teacher preparation (Okon, 2008). According to him, teacher quality is enhanced by the quality of preparation given to teacher trainee. The paper raised some questions around teacher preparations designed to direct the discussion. These questions include: Do teachers have adequate knowledge on the pupils as learners? What skills do teachers have on instruction and assessment? Are communication techniques issues in teaching and learning clear to teachers? Do teachers understand the place of the profession and community in effective teaching and learning? The paper attempts answers to the questions and make recommendation for improvement.

**Do Teachers have Adequate Knowledge of Pupils as Learners?**

Central to effective teaching and learning is the teachers’ knowledge of pupils as learners. The child is at the centre of education system. The teacher needs to understand the pupil development and the learning process. The implication of the above is that teachers should have mastery on theoretical foundations about how learning occurs. That is she should master how pupils construct knowledge, acquire skills and develop habits of mind. Consequently, the teacher should be familiar with theorists like Albert Bandura, Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, B. F. Skinner, Howard Gardner, Abraham Maslow, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan and so on. The teacher should understand and have in-depth knowledge of each theory and its major ideas. She should not only be capable of comparing and contrasting one theory with another but should be able to apply the theoretical ideas to teaching and learning (Publication of education testing service, 2004).

The teacher should in addition to the mastery of developmental and social learning theories, master differences in the way pupils learn. This is important in this Universal Basic Education (UBE) era where every child of school going-age is supposed to register in the regular schools. This means that teachers should understand learners/pupils as diverse learners. Consequent upon the above, the teacher should be aware of the differences in the way pupils learn. She must consider pupils learning styles, multiple intelligences and performance modes. Pupils’ motivation and the learning environment should be understood by the teacher. The teacher should not be alien to concepts like co-relational and causal relationships, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, extrinsic motivation, operant conditioning, positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, learned helplessness, shaping, extinction, continuous reinforcement, intermittent reinforcement, punishment and so on.

The teacher preparation program should be able to equip teacher trainee with the enumerated skills and competences above. Unfortunately, research evidence and experience have showed that the teacher preparation program lacks the vigor to equip teacher trainee with the skills and competence they need for effective teaching and learning. Thus Okon (2008) observed that every year teachers are churned out of training institutions either as full time or part time throughout reach programs that are deficient in content and methodology. A recent World Bank Report on Nigeria observed that in spite of the curriculum review of the NCE program published in 2002, that there are still some concerns which is that the gaps remain wide between the content and structure and the specific needs of the primary school teachers.
Recent classroom research in Nigeria revealed that primary school teachers need:

- Pedagogical skills to teach literacy, numeracy and basic science concepts
- Lack the knowledge of the importance of language to learning across curriculum and for children to gain access to their culture
- Lack knowledge of managing children’s learning needs during the transition to English as the medium of instruction in upper primary classes
- Lack the knowledge of the use of a range of techniques to check what pupils are learning and to provide the right kind of help when it is required
- Lack knowledge on how to work with other teachers to develop teaching lessons and materials and to share ideas (Adeyanju, 2006).

Regarding the inadequacies in teacher preparation program the Centre for Education Reform (n.d) in the United States of America observed that:

Currently, alternative certification program are proliferating across the U.S. Alternative certificate ranges from quality from University based programs and rigorous requirements and yearlong student teaching to internet businesses that require zero course work, no practical teaching and no contact with student. Such a difference in quality is also evident among traditional University-based programs. Unfortunately some of the largest teacher education programs in the country also provide some of the weakest preparation program around.

What Skills do Teachers have on Instruction and Assessment?

Instructional approaches are important tools in effective teaching and learning. The diverse nature of the classrooms requires teachers to choose and combine instructional strategies that can best meet the needs of all learners. Major categories of instructional strategies are cooperative learning; direct instruction; discovery learning; whole-group discussion; independent study; interdisciplinary instruction; concept mapping; inquiry method; questioning; play; learning centers; small group work; revisiting; reflection; and project approach. These instructional strategies can be used to assist the teacher to accomplish major cognitive processes (such as critical thinking, creative thinking, higher-order thinking, inductive and deductive thinking, problem structuring and problem-solving, invention, memorization and recall, social reasoning and representation of ideas) associated with pupils’ learning.

The pertinent questions are do teachers have knowledge of the central advantages of each of these strategies? Can teachers describe the kind of goals and objectives for which each of these strategies is appropriate? Do teachers understand the kinds of information about pupils’ learning style and achievement levels that will warrant the use of each strategy? Do they know when not to use a particular instructional strategy?

Twentieth-Century philosophers like John Dewey believes that learners create knowledge by applying their own life experiences to new situations. This is in contradistinction to the traditional factory-industrial notion or approach which perceives students as blank slates to be filled with facts. According to Dewey learning requires that the learner be exposed to activities (Halvorsen and Neary, 2009).

Brain based research such as that of Reis, Kaplan, Tomlinson, Westberg, Gallahan and Cooper (1998) as well as investigation on knowledge and skill acquisition in general and special education has moved the field to a “constructionist” interpretation of knowledge (Gronlund, 2006) in which students build on their previous knowledge. Thus we learn through the combination of active participation and “scaffolding” on prior learning. Research based instructional practices and differentiation is interested in meeting students’ varying needs in the classroom. Differentiated instructional (DI) approach was originally used for the gifted in general education classrooms. DI is now seen as a multilevel approach application to our increasingly diverse learners. It is a proactive approach recognizing a given student’s diversity, rather
than a post-hoc adaptive model, with special education modifying a given lesson to meet the needs of a small number of students with IEPs (Halvorsen & Neary, 2009:3). DI theory is characterized as “... a way of thinking about the classroom with the dual goals of honoring each student’s learning needs and maximizing each student’s learning capacity”. It is a multilevel approach which affords students the opportunity to work with different goals and objectives and still maintains standards. Tomlinson further outlined five classroom elements that can be differentiated in order to increase all students’ efficient access and achievement within the curriculum. They are:

- Content (what we teach)
- Process (how students come to understand and obtain knowledge and skill)
- Products (how students demonstrate what they have learnt)
- Affect (how students link thought and emotion in learning) and
- Learning environment (how the class is structured and functions) (Tomlinson, 2001).

Discussing on classroom instruction that works McREL in 2006 reviewed the research on instruction that was conducted over the past 30 years, using a research technique known as meta-analysis. A meta-analysis combines results of many studies to determine the effects of a given technique or strategy. The results of the meta-analysis are expressed as an effect size, which is measured in unit of standard deviation. The effect size indicates the increase or decrease in achievement between the experimental group and control group. The instructional strategies identified in McREL’s research have average effect sizes that range from .59 to 1.16. The nine categories of instructional strategies with strong effects on student achievement are shown on the table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Average Effect Size</th>
<th>Percentile Gain</th>
<th>No. of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying similarities &amp; differences</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing &amp; note taking</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing effects &amp; providing recognition</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home work &amp; practice</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlinguistic representation</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting objectives and providing feedback</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating &amp; Testing Hypotheses</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cues, Questions &amp; Advance Organizers</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Okeke-Oti (2010)

The question is how many of the teachers employ these strategies that work in the classroom teaching and learning and to what extent?

Educational Assessment is part and parcel of teaching and learning. Assessment of pupils’ achievement emphasizes the principles and practices of assessment that contribute to more effective classroom instruction and improved learning (Gronlund, 2006). Effective teaching and learning involves (1) clarifying in performance terms what students are expected to learn (2) planning instructional activities that provide for assessment procedures that are in harmony with the intended learning outcomes and the instructional activities. The cardinal importance of assessment in the achievement of school objectives calls for caution on the part of educators and assessors in the selection and use of assessment tools.

In dealing with assessment issues, a teacher should be conversant with types of assessments (such as standardized tests, achievement tests, aptitude tests, structured observations, anecdotal record, assessment of prior knowledge, student response during a lesson, portfolios, essays written to prompts, journals, self-evaluations and performance assessment). She should also have information on the characteristics of assessment tools such as validity, reliability, norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, mean, median, mode and sampling strategy. Scoring assessment information is critical. She should be knowledgeable in ways
of scoring assessment such analytical scoring, holistic scoring, and using rubric. She has also to understand how to report assessment results using percentile rank, mastery levels, raw score, scaled score, grade equivalent score, standard deviation and standard error of measurement. Knowledge on the uses of assessments (such as formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and diagnostic evaluation) and the interpreting and communicating results of assessment is relevant.

A close examination of many of the teacher preparation programs revealed that they lack content and vigor to effectively equip teachers for the skills they need in instruction and assessment. Thus an evaluation of primary school in Nigeria by the Nigeria Primary Education in the Century in 1999 revealed that: Even at this time the NCE curriculum needs revision in order to prepare teachers for primary education in the new century. Many of the Colleges of education offer courses which are not relevant or appropriate to the level and needs of most primary school teachers. In addition, teachers who have acquired the minimum academic education require in-service training for the skill improvement and career-development type rather than further academic type.

Are Communication Techniques Issues in Teaching and Learning Clear To Teachers? Communication can be verbal and nonverbal. The ability of the teacher to combine verbal and nonverbal communication effectively can in no small measure impact positively on teaching and learning. The way a teacher raises her voice might be interpreted differently by pupils from different backgrounds and culture. She should be aware that some gestures and specific body language have different meanings in different cultures, for example looking at someone directly in the eye, disagreeing openly during a discussion, putting one’s hands on the waist while being interrogated and so on.

The teacher should understand the type of questions that can stimulate discussion in different ways for particular purposes in the classroom. The teacher should assist the pupils in probing for understanding, articulating their ideas and thinking processes, promote risk-taking and problem-solving, facilitate factual recall, encourage convergent and divergent thinking, stimulate curiosity, and encourage pupil to question. She should know how to raise a question in a particular content area that probes for pupils’ understanding and articulation of their ideas. She should be able to make a comment that would promote risk-taking and problem-solving. She should also be able to encourage divergent thinking as well as encourage pupils to ask questions among themselves and to the teacher.

The way the teacher communicates with pupils in the case of feedback from assignment and interaction during class should be such that can build the self-image of pupils. The teacher should show respect to pupils and teach them to respect others. She should not talk down on pupils. Experience shows that many Nigerian primary school teachers do talk down on pupils. Many call them names and label the pupils. This perhaps can be linked to the deficiencies in teacher preparation program.

Do Teachers Understand the Place of the Profession and Community in Effective Teaching and Earning? The teacher should be a reflective practitioner. She should be aware of her environment. She should have information on the resources available for professional development and learning. In other words information on the professional literature, colleagues, professional associations and professional development activities should be at her beck and call. She should be able to read, understand and apply articles and books about current research, views, ideas and debates regarding best teaching practices. She should understand that the community is a resource and develop active partnerships among teachers, parents/guardians and community leaders. This is important because where there is cordial relationship between the school and the community; the community supports the educational process. The teacher can effectively carry the community along through respectful/reciprocal communication, using parent volunteers during a lesson and encouraging parents to actively participate in their children’s education. The above arrangement of using parents as volunteers has very low practice among teachers in Nigeria.
Some teachers do not feel parents reserve the right to have full information about their children’s education. As a result, information on children is put far away from their parents. Most teachers lack information on the rights of children and parents. The lack of information can be linked to the deficiencies of the teacher preparation program.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- Teacher Training Institutions should ensure that their teacher preparation programs are revisited to remove all the irrelevant content, add current and relevant content and modify relevant components to ensure the production of quality teachers and eventual functional education for all children, disability notwithstanding.
- Government regulating bodies and teacher training Institutions should ensure uniform standard in teacher preparation for outreach, sandwich and regular teacher trainees. In fact, the medical approach model requiring high grade point averages in the major, intensive preparation in subject-specific method courses, extensive teaching practice and semester-long or year-long internships should be adopted for all students whether regular, sandwich and outreach.
- Teacher trainee should be encourage to attend the association’s and other related conferences. This will assist the teacher trainee to gain access to professional journal, read articles and books on current research, views, ideas and debates about best practices.
- Teacher preparation program does not emphasis the principles, techniques and methods associated with various instructional approaches. Now that the emphasis in education is on meeting diverse needs in the classroom, non pro active approaches cannot assist a teacher in meeting diverse need. Consequently, it is recommended that teacher preparation program should be modified to emphasis different active instructional approaches, their major strength and when they can be used and when they cannot be used.

**References**


