

CHALLENGES THAT BESET PRIMARY EDUCATION STUDIES IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges that stall the positive advancement of primary education studies in Nigeria. A number of factors were identified which included; the students of primary education studies teaching only in the nursery and primary schools, reading so many unrelated course, lack of specialist teachers, lack of employment, paucity of universities offering the programme, among others. It was enunciated in this paper that, the department that produces the teachers that will teach at the base of the educational ladder needs all the attention it deserves. This is because when the trainee teachers receive all the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and competence, they would be very effective in the classroom interaction, provision of the necessary infrastructure for teacher effectiveness becomes sacrosanct for positive national development. All hands should be on deck to provide the necessary stimulating environment for the department to be functional and respond to the demand of the time. Both the government, stakeholders and the community should lend support for the survival of the department, recommendations were made for better output.

Introduction

Education is the panacea for national development. It is a potent factor that transforms a nation into a scientific and technological new world order. The transformation will translate, to a large extent, into a stable economy; political, social educational well being of the people, laying appropriate foundation for this breakthrough begins in the nursery and primary schools. This would be accomplished when specialist teachers teach in both nursery and primary schools. It becomes very apt when government advocates for specialization in every section. Specialization will enable the person to respond appropriately to the demands of the profession. This underscores government directive that, those that read primary education studies should teach in the Basic Education Pre-primary – JS III (FGN, 2000).

Primary education studies is a course of study that is designed to train teachers that will teach in the basic education. The

teachers would be at the base of the education enterprise. It is, therefore, a very important course of study that will prepare the teachers that will give the pupils the solid foundation needed to train them for future education. It is imperative that when qualitative education is inculcated in the pupils early enough, the children would be well equipped and ready for development. It explains the clarion call made by participants in Education for All (EFA, 2000) held in Dakar as presented by Obunya (2000). The participants advocated for the establishment of a comprehensive early childhood education and a quality primary education. In support, Maduewesi (2005) presented that, early education is one of the best ways for the transmission of a child from primary education to other levels of education. It is equally a critical factor in the pupil's subsequent transition to adulthood, influencing both social skills and behavioural choices. Primary Education Studies, as a department, should be given

the attention it deserves in order to provide quality education to the pupils.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to:

- a. Identify the problems that beset primary education studies as a course of study.
- b. To offer possible solution to the problem.

Problems that Beset Primary Education Studies as a Course of Study

There are numerous problems that plague the department of primary education studies that need urgent attention for the survival of the course. These problems include:

- a. Teaching only in the nursery and primary schools.
- b. Reading so many unrelated courses
- c. Lack of specialist teachers
- d. Lack of employment
- e. Paucity of universities offering the course
- f. Lack of infrastructure.

Teaching only in the nursery and Primary Schools

The department of primary education studies trains students that will teach in the Basic Education (Nursery – JS III). This means that they are qualified to teach in JS I – III classes. The prevailing situation is that, even during their teaching practice, they were made to teach in the nursery and primary schools. This is a negation of the policy that stipulates that, they are qualified to teach in the lowest secondary school. Their counterparts that read other courses are posted to other higher sections because they feel they are helping the department and not part of their job (Ezema, 2009). This is a precarious situation the Head of Department has to run after these lecturers to ensure that they do their job. This is not

an easy task as the HOD has to employ different strategies to get the borrowed lecturers to do their work. This is the dilemma the department has to face as a result of lack of teachers to teach in the department.

Lack of Employment

Most of the students that read primary education studies are roaming the street without job. It is obvious that, there is little or no job opportunities in the country coupled with the fact that, the economy is dwindling as a result of decline in oil price.

It is evident that, when post-primary school management board advertises for jobs, only those that read other courses rather than the students of primary education studies would be offered jobs. This implies that, they are confirmed to teach only in the nursery and primary school which is not what the policy stipulates as observed earlier. This situation makes others read other courses to have an edge over them. Those of them that read other courses can teach both in the primary and secondary schools (Eze, 2009).

Worst still, the Universal Basic Education is slow in creating job opportunities. In Benue State, for over one decade, the Board has not employed people. Those that read primary education studies are at disadvantage position. Some of them are teaching in the private school where they are paid little or nothing. The students put in so much, to get so little. They go to school from 8am and dismiss by 4pm. They spend most of their time in the school in exchange for meager salary that cannot solve their basic needs. This situation may lead to anti-behaviour of some of our youths exhibit, which include, armed robbery, kidnapping among others.

Paucity of University Offering Primary Education Studies as a Course of Study

The importance of primary education studies department and the appropriate cannot be over emphasized. It is sad to note that, very few universities offer primary education as a course of study especially at the undergraduate level. For instance, in Benue, Uyo, Abakaliki, Anambra, Delta States, no university runs the programmes, students have to travel as far as Ibadan, Calabar, Sokoto and other far distance to study the course. Some of the students who desire to read the course may decline as a result of the cost of transportation. More so, some of the students may not have any relative around the university whom they may turn to in time of need. Some of them may be tender and their parents may not allow them to travel far distance. They may be asked to choose other courses.

Moreover, the risk involved in travelling a long distance is another case in point. Traveling from Benue State to university of Ibadan is quite a distance and any mishap may happen in transit. Some of the drivers are so reckless and drive without obeying the traffic rules. This results in a lot of carnage on the high way. Many students have serious injury or have lost their lives in transit to the university.

Lack of Infrastructure

In the department of primary education studies, many courses are practical oriented. Such courses include Agricultural Education, Home Economics, Basic Science and Technology, Nigerian languages, among others. These courses cannot be effectively taught without their corresponding practicals. It implies that, necessary infrastructures must be in place for effective service delivery. Infrastructure according to Dike (2012), refer to facilities that enable the workers to perform their

work effectively. They include functional classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, home economics laboratories, studios, technical education workshops, play grounds, school farms and other necessary equipment. All the above mentioned facilities are dire need in the department.

It is sad to note that, most of these facilities are in short supply in most of the higher institutions. Dike (2012) observed that, even in the higher institution in Nigeria, there are paucity of infrastructure. The shortage of infrastructure definitely has direct effect on the output of the teachers. The teachers have no option than to teach the theoretical parts of the course leaving out the practical aspect. The result is that, the students will pass out “half-baked” because they will have knowledge of only the theory but will be deficient in practical aspect. Definitely, the students cannot be efficient in the classroom for they cannot give what they do not have. According to Esu (2005), when teachers are ignorant and cannot give correct information in the classroom, they are not only useless but dangerous.

These are some of the problems that stall the progress of the department and needs urgent attention for the survival of the department.

The Way Forward

Considering the central position basic education occupies in education enterprise, it is pertinent for proper attention to be given to the teachers training institutes that produce these teachers. Certain factors that prevent the optimal performance of the teachers should be jettisoned. Some of the factors that will enhance the survival of department of primary education studies are hereby elucidated:

Teaching in Junior Secondary and in the Primary Schools

As observed earlier, the students of primary education studies should be allowed to teach in the segments of basic education. The discriminatory attitude during teaching practice and employment should cease forth with, as they are qualified to teach at the junior secondary section. The implementation of Universal Basic Education is very clear on this. This discriminatory attitude has made many people to lose interest in the course. They rationalized that, they are not employed by Post Primary School Education Board while the State Universal Basic Education are not forth coming with job opportunity (Ezema, 2009).

Paucity of Universities Offering the Course

The Basic Education which its part is the starting point of formal education (nursery and primary education) needs a firm base so as to prepare the pupils for subsequent education. According to Eze (2004), education of both nursery and primary school children should be viewed with every seriousness, since right steps now will ensure greater success in the years ahead.

The government, having adopted education as instrument par excellence for national development (FGN, 2004), has emphasized the need for specialization. Primary Education Studies was specially established to train specialists that will teach in the basic education. This crop of teachers deserves all the encouragement and supports needed to enhance their effectiveness. It is rather sad to note that, very few universities offer the course in their programme. The fewness of the universities offering the course will limit the number of candidates that will read the course. This situation will give rise to unspecialized teachers to teach

at the base that needs specialists that will give the pupils the head-start that will carry them through their education endeavour. Research has shown that children between the 3 – 8 years learn rapidly and retain what they have learnt for a long time (Maduwesi, 2004). The specialist teachers will instill in the pupils the love for schooling. It is obvious that, when the children desire to go to school and apply most interest in learning experiences, the nation is preparing the ground for human resources in every field of human endeavor. “Catching them young” is a sine qua non for future national development.

It is, therefore, behooves on the Federal government to legislate that, every university must establish the department of early childhood and primary education studies. The government is trying to re-organise at the NCE level to include the above department, but it is only on paper. The implementation is yet to come. It is obvious that when many universities offer the course, it will attract many candidates to choose the course.

Availability of Infrastructure

The importance of infrastructure in teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. According to Imonu, Ekpo & Abita (2012), school infrastructural facilities are very necessary as they provide the physical setting in which instructional programmes are conducted. It is important to note that, for teacher effectiveness, the school facilities and educational goals should be viewed to be closely intervention and inter-independence. The quality of education given bears direct relevance to the available infrastructure becomes a pre-condition for teacher effectiveness and proper management of the school programme. As asserted by Alamance (2004), school facilities should be provided

to the teachers and students for effective teaching and learning process.

As observed earlier, most courses in primary education are practical oriented, there is no way the teacher can perform well in teaching a particular course when corresponding practical is left out. The teachers only teach half of the course and the students cannot be effective as they barely learnt part of the course. This is the problem in our school system. Our universities teach mechanical engineering but their product cannot build cars or even repair bad ones. The theory and the practical are not in tandem. That is the bare of our educational system. Provision of infrastructure becomes very necessary in our school so that the theory will match with the practical (Ekpo & Bessong, 2007).

Making Primary Education Department Self-sufficient

It has become very pertinent for primary education studies to be a full-fledged department with its own staff for efficiency. As observed earlier, there are various disciplines in the department that requires various lecturers. When these lecturers are available in the department, it will pave way for proper coordination and efficient management of the affairs of the department. This will give the head of department the full control of the department. The issue of running after the borrowed lecturers and the attendant problems will cease. The head of department will have firm grip and can strategize and now beset to move the department forward. All the staff will work within the time frame of the department. This will enhance productivity and efficiency.

Conclusion

Primary education studies department that trains people that will teach in the basic education needs all support and attention to make the department functional for quality service delivery. According to Esu (2005) and Eke & Bessong (2007), the basis for superior programme of education and the most critical determinant of quality education is the teacher.

The guidelines for Universal Basic Education FGN (2000) recognized specialist teachers as the critical factors in the programme. It states that, no education can rise above the level of its teachers and notes further that, many notable educational initiatives have failed mainly because they did not take into account the trained teachers factor. It is equally important to note that the kind of teacher trained and posted to the school may well determine what the next generation would be.

It is therefore very pertinent for both the government and stakeholders to lend support by providing appropriate resources for the positive advancement of the department. No resource put for human development is a waste. Rather, it will produce the appropriate manpower needed for national positive transformation.

Recommendations

1. Students that read primary education studies should be employed and allowed to teach at all the levels of basic education.
2. Only specialist teachers should teach in the basic education.
3. Government should legislate that all universities should have departments of primary education.
4. Both the government and the stakeholders should provide necessary infrastructure for proper service delivery.

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