

Community Involvement/Participation In Nigerian Educational System: The Role Of Adult And Non-Formal Education

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Abstract:

The deplorable situation in Nigerian educational system has made policy makers, educators and others involved in education to seek for ways to utilize the limited resources efficiently and effectively in order to provide quality education for children. Their efforts have contributed to realizing the significance and benefits of community participation in education and have recognized community participation as one of the strategies for improving educational access and quality. This paper, therefore, explores the background information, conceptual framework, policy framework, community participation in education, implication for adult and non-formal education, challenges and way forward. The conclusion was also drawn based on the nature of community participation in education.

Key words: Community, Participation, Education, Adult and non-formal education

Introduction:

Education is a lifelong process of human intellectual growth and the bedrock of any nation's development. One of the goals of education in Nigeria according to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2009) is the development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individuals to live in and contribute positively to the society. Similarly, Education for All (2002) succinctly x-rayed the relatedness of education and development, improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life, such as child labour.

The present trend is that Nigeria is finding it increasingly difficult to finance her educational systems. Available recourses are scarce and education is getting more and more expensive.

According to Ogundele (2000), the combination of high growth in population coupled with the

world economic crises has made matters worse. Hence, the Ninth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers held in Cyprus in 1984 discussed and recommended additional and alternative funding for education, particularly in developing countries. The Cyprus conference focused on how extra resources could be generated by communities towards better funding of education. It was recommended that the resources cannot be generated by school administrators without a positive, cordial relationship between the school and the community which the school is meant to serve. Furthermore, Ojedele (2000) argued that working with the community has become increasingly more important in our changing society. Creating public interests in education has increased the principal community's involvement.

There has been a growing debate on the need for partnership in all national development endeavours. The educational system in Nigeria is no exception. Besides, the over-dependency on government for the provision of educational services through funding and infrastructural development (without a complementary support from the community) has been faulted by experts who noted that the community as an institution defines the existence and sustainability of any educational system in operation (Olaniyi, 1999). Therefore, in a discourse on community involvement in any educational system, especially in Nigeria, one must not underscore the role of the community in such a system as well as the reciprocal influence which the educational system impacts on the community. Community in this context is a group of people living in a geographical area and united with common interest, goal, culture, tradition, among others.

The above background information showed that communities are not adequately involved in education which is meant for them. There is, therefore, the need for repositioning our educational system using adult and non-formal education to re-awaken the consciousness of the communities on the need for their full participation in the provision of education in their respective communities, hence the need for this paper.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following terms are defined for clarification purposes.

I. Community

A community may be defined as a group of people living in a geographical area, who have identical culture, beliefs, values, traditions and are united with common interest. It is this common interest that brings them together to share a territory. According to Anyanwu (1999), a community is a social group, occupying a more or less defined geographical area, and based on the feeling that people have for one another. Such feeling can

accommodate: the facility to identify a common sentiment, the ability to share a recognized way of life and the possibility of living wholly within such groups.

Bray (1996) presents three different types of communities applied in his study on community financing of education. The first one is geographic community, which is defined according to its members' place of residence, such as a village or district. The second type is ethnic, racial and religious communities, in which membership is based on ethnic, racial, or religious identification, and commonly cuts across membership based on geographic location. The third one is communities based on shared family or educational concerns, which include parents associations and similar bodies that are based on families' shared concern for the welfare of students.

II. Education

Education is defined in different ways. Wikipedia (2016) defined education as the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. Educational methods include story-telling, discussion, teaching, training and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal setting and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. According to Okoro (2006), education is conceived as the process of acquiring skills, knowledge, understanding, attitude and values in problem solving. In other words, education is the process by which a person acquires knowledge to live well in his society. It is leading out somebody into new knowledge and experience for his growth and development. It is all man's activities which enable him to realize himself and live fully as a human being. Education, therefore, is the process which develops the individual mentally,

physically and socially for adaptation to his environment.

III. Participation/Involvement

The term “participation” can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the context. Shaeffer (1994) clarifies different degrees or levels of participation, and provides seven possible definitions of the term, including:

Involvement through the mere use of a service (such as enrolling children in school or using a primary health care facility);

- i. Involvement through the contribution (or extraction) of money, materials, and labour;
- ii. Involvement through ‘attendance’ (e.g. at parents’ meetings at school), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others;
- iii. Involvement through consultation on a particular issue;
- iv. Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
- v. Participation as implementers of delegated powers; and
- vi. Participation “in real decision making at every stage,” including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Shaeffer stresses that the first four definitions use the word involvement and connote largely passive collaboration, whereas the last three items use the word participation instead, implying a much more active role.

Participation in other words refers to taking active part in an activity of a group. It is the process during which individuals, groups and organizations are consulted about or have the opportunity to become actively involved in a project or programme of activity.

IV. Adult and Non-formal Education

There are many definitions of this term, each author according to his/her perception. According to Olagunju (2008), adult education is the education provided for people considered as adults by their community, while non-formal education is the education provided outside the formal school system. Adult and non-formal education, thus encompasses education for children of school age, youths and adults. There are children and youths who have never attended formal schools before, there are those who have once attended but withdrew and are now interested in continuing with their education. Adult and non-formal education therefore, provides literacy, numeracy, life and vocational skills among others, to adults, children and youths.

Merriam and Brockett (2007) defined adult education as virtually any activity for adults designed to bring about learning which according to them, include, the work of aerobics instructor, nurse, private consultant, literacy worker and community activist. Equally, the National (Nigeria) Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education (2010) defined adult education as any organized learning activity for people considered to be adults by the society. The criterion/criteria for the determination of the adulthood may be the constitution, social responsibility, physical maturity, economic/social status or any other one. The learning activity gives priority to age or adulthood but the teaching-learning activity may be for literacy acquisition, skill acquisition of information dissemination in form of workshops, seminars or conference. The important thing is that the activity is meant for people considered to be adults by the society.

Policy Framework

The educational system is a social institution which cannot be separated from its existing community (Olaniyi 1999). Government policies on community involvement in educational system is informed by the creative and innovative

attributes of the private sector in the planning, organization, funding, supervision, maintenance and evaluation of development programmes. Also, the involvement of the mission system in the educational systems is informed by the decentralization of educational provision by government as far back as the colonial era. This decentralization which today is classified as deregulation is re-emphasized by the defunct Universal Basic Education of 1998. In all these policies, it is evident that community involvement is theoretically and physically underscored. For instance, in the UBE, the philosophy is that, "education for all is a responsibility of ALL" (UBE 2000). For the responsibility to be for all, the community has to be fully involved in areas such as mobilization of learners, maintenance of infrastructural facilities and supervision. All these are done under the auspices of the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA). Thus, in the UBE Bill (2000), it is evident that the community must not only participate in the educational system, but also, ensure compliance with the required standards in terms of educational services provided.

In an international forum, UNESCO (2000) Educational For All (EFA) policies document shows that achieving the six EFA goals rests mostly on community involvement. In fact, it is in response to these goals that the UBE places serious emphasis on the involvement of community in its delivery system.

Community Participation in Education

Education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities, and societies. Parents and families cannot be the only group of people for childrens' education as long as their children interact with and learn from the world outside their families. Communities and society must support parents and families in the upbringing, socializing, and educating of their children. Schools are institutions that can prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the

society in which they operate, by equipping them with skills important in society. Schools cannot and should not operate as separate entities within society.

Many research studies have identified various ways of community participation in education, providing specific channels through which communities can be involved in children's education.

Colletta and Perkins (1995) illustrate various forms of community participation: (i) research and data collection; (ii) dialogue with policymakers; (iii) school management; (iv) curriculum design; (v) development of learning materials; and (v) school construction. Equally, Heneveld ad Craig (1996) recognized parent and community support as one of the key factors to determine school effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. They identify five categories of parent and community support that are relevant to the region: (i) children come to school prepared to learn; (ii) the community provides financial and material support to the school; (iii) communication between the school, parents, and community is frequent; (iv) the community has a meaningful role in school governance; and (v) community members and parents assist with instruction.

Epstein (1995) seeks ways to help children succeed in school and later life, and focuses on partnerships of schools, families, and communities that attempt to: (a) improve school programmes and school climate; (b) provide family services and support; (c) increase parents' skills and leadership; (d) connect families with others in the school and in the community; and (e) help teachers with their work. She summarizes various types of involvement to explain how schools, families, and communities can work productively together:

- (1) *Parenting* – to help all families to establish home environments that support children's learning at schools;

- (2) *Communicating* – to design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication that enable parents to learn about school programmes and their children’s progress in schools as well as teachers to learn about how children do at home;
- (3) *Volunteering* – to recruit and organize parent help and support;
- (4) *Learning at home* – to provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with home-work and other curriculum-related activities, decision, and planning;
- (5) *Decision making* – to include families in school decisions, to have parent leaders and representatives in school meetings; and
- (6) *Collaborating with the community* – to identify and integrate resources as well as services from the community in order to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and student learning.

Furthermore, parents and community members can contribute to teachers’ teaching materials by providing them with knowledge and materials that are locally sensitive and more familiar to children. Community participation in education can also be a powerful incentive for teachers. Teachers’ absenteeism and lack of punctuality to show up in classrooms on time are serious problems in many places. Among many other reasons, lack of monitoring system is one of the critical factors contributing to these problems. When teachers are monitored and supervised for their attendance and performance by communities, they tend to be more aware of what they do. Feedback from parents and the community about their teaching performance can be a strong tool to motivate teachers, if schools are also collaborative. In other words, the community can participate in education by maximizing limited resources, developing relevant curriculum and learning materials, identifying and addressing problems, promoting girls’ education, creating and nourishing

community school partnerships, realizing democracy, increasing productivity, ensuring sustainability and improving home environment.

Implications for Adult and Non-Formal Education

The future policy thrusts in community involvement and effective participation in Nigerian educational system have a lot of implications for adult and non-formal education. This is because most of the strategies for realizing these could only be achieved using the methods of adult and non-formal education. Since community participation in the educational system would involve carrying along all sectors of the society, adult education through its rural literacy project could be employed to mobilize and actualize the dream of the rural poor.

More so, the concept of participation entails the issues of power, decision-making and access to resources. Participatory approach to development facilitates the redress of inequalities through empowerment of the poor and the powerless. Adult education programmes such as community education, democracy and governance, civic education, empowerment, income generating and functional literacy programmes run in the communities would help to realize this.

Adult education strategy of needs identification would also help people to identify their needs and realize these for them in the context of effective community participation. Community education as embedded in adult and non-formal education programme would be highly beneficial to adults who are community members as they make use of school resources and community resources centres for their adult literacy classes and town meetings among other uses. Hence, community education programme is a virile strategy for making community members more alert to their responsibilities, notably on educational delivery and the entire system.

Furthermore, community members have to be exposed to general or basic education to enhance

their participation in educational delivery. Most scholars including Anyanwu (1999) and Omolewa (2001) have noted that exposing members of the community to basic literacy, numeracy and elementary knowledge of science and environment in the context of lifelong learning would facilitate unhindered community development and participation in educational delivery. Young and adult citizens who were exposed to the aforementioned training and non-formal education would be fully armed with skills to explore their environment, develop a sense of cooperation, and participate meaningfully in development and social services such as education.

There is also the need for adults to improve the quality of their lives through essential learning tools, such as literacy for livelihood and other aspects of learning that are geared towards developing their full capacities, live and work with dignity, participate fully in development, take informal decisions, express opinion/voice and continuing learning.

Challenges of Community involvement in Education

Involving communities in the education delivery requires facing and tackling a number of challenges. In general, as Crewe and Harrison (1998) articulate, participatory approaches tend to overlook complexities and questions of power and conflict within communities. They are designed based on the false assumption that the community, group, or household is homogeneous, or has mutually compatible interests. Differences occur with respect to age, gender, wealth, ethnicity, language, culture, race and so on, even though marginalized or majority groups (such as female, landless, or lower-caste people) may be physically present during discussion, they are not necessarily given a chance to express their view to the same degree as others.

In attempts to understand factors that prevent communities from being involved in formal education, Shaeffer (1992) found that the degree

of community participation is particularly low in socially and economically marginal regional. This is because such regions tend to have the following elements: (a) a lack of appreciation of the overall objectives of education; (b) a mismatch between what parents expect of education and what the school is seen as providing; (c) the belief that education is essentially the task of the State; (d) the length of time required to realize the benefits of better schooling; and (e) ignorance of the structure, functions, and constraints of the school.

Again, not all teachers welcome parents' and communities' participation in education. They tend to feel that they are losing authority within schools, as power is taken by community and parents. At the same time, they are encouraged to involve community members who sometimes are not willing to get involved in any school activities. Gaynor (1998) analyzes the complex relationship between teachers and parents in her study on teacher management with a focus on the decentralization of education. She argues that many parents in many countries would like to be more involved in selecting and monitoring teachers. However, analyzing impacts of the El Salvador's EDUCO project in which parents are responsible for school management and monitor teachers, Gaynor stressed that the teachers feel threatened by parental involvement, believing that it will diminish public regard for their professional status.

Not all parents and community members are willing to get involved in school activities. Some have had negative schooling experiences themselves, some are illiterate and don't feel comfortable talking to teachers, and getting involved in any kind of school activities. They feel they don't have control over the school. Some parents and families are not willing to collaborate with schools because they cannot afford to lose their economical labour by sending their children. Even though they see the benefits to send children

to schools, opportunity costs are oftentimes too high to pay.

A World Bank study of social assessment in EDUCO, community managed-schools, in El-Slavador (Pena, 1995) reveals that even though the parents valued education and had a positive attitude regarding the teachers, they were suspicious about the government. This wariness, combined with lack of communication, fostered the fear that education would be privatized and parents would have to pay for education services. Parents are optimistic about the economic value of education, but their optimism decrease when they are asked to think about the role of education in their own lives. Furthermore, because of parents' relative lack of education and the way the traditional school systems are structured, parents and teachers perceive their roles as separate from one another, without substantial parental interaction with teachers or involvement in the schools themselves.

Way Forward

It is an established fact that government would need to reinvigorate and as well make community involvement and participation effective and efficient. The communities put in place in schools such as the School Based Management Committee (SBMC), which is an expanded form of Parents Teachers Association should be allowed to thrive practically in our formal educational system and institutions. Also, reflect circle in adult learning where the community decide their educational directions should also be encouraged in the non-formal sector. This would make the communities to be more involved in the educational sector with a view to achieving a holistic education that would help us to handle the challenges of this 21st century.

All stakeholders in education should encourage community participation in our educational system, in terms of private initiatives, resource

generation, policy formulation, administration and organization among others.

More so, policy makers should study various models of community-school relations in different parts of the world, with a view to adopting or adapting it to our own situation in Nigeria. This is very germane, since education is a social service which has to be adequately taken care of by all and sundry in the interest of overall national development.

Finally, government should be encouraged to establish community resource centres where community members can pick up one skill or the other, and as well use them for other activities. This would strengthen community members' commitment to social services such as education.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the foregoing that community participation in education is a process that facilitates the realization of improving educational quality and the promotion of democracy in the society. This will be strengthened if adult and non-formal education is utilized in awakening the consciousness of various communities which the schools are meant for. This is because adult and non-formal education adopts strategies through which both the community and the school should intensify efforts in realizing the set objectives. The partnership will also engender the expected standard of education in Nigeria.

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