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THE PRINCIPAL: ASSURING QUALITY IN TODAY'S SECONDARY SCHOOL.

BIVWIERE MARY ASABOR

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration
College of Education, Agbor.*

Abstract

The principal is the head teacher of the secondary school system. He is the leader of teachers as he is both the administrative head and instructional leader of his school who harnesses the human and material resources of the school to make for improved academic performance. School principals have a great influence on the quality of schools because of the principals' impact on the quality of secondary education, much is expected of them in their capacity as professional in assuring quality in today's secondary schools. Hence, this paper examined his orthodox and changing roles in contemporary times in assuring quality in today secondary school considering the input, process, output dimension. To chart the way forward in achieving quality secondary education, efforts should be made by government and private schools to offer appropriate conditions for the retention of experienced principals, comprehensive programme of professional development, training and management required for pedagogical team-work amongst educational actors involved, for optimal principal/teacher relationship and for the transformation of schools into effective learning communities amongst others.

Keywords:- *Principal, Quality assurance, Secondary School.*

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education is the type of education received after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The broad goals of this type of education in Nigeria is to prepare the individual for:

- (a) Useful living within the society, and
- (b) Higher education (NPE, 2004).

Secondary education program is geared towards self actualization. Adiotomre (2002) posited that the individual would be able to engage in self appraisal with regards to their cognitive and social capabilities and use these appraisals to think of the logical ways of solving basic cognitive, social and emotional problems which arise from everyday living. The success of any system of education the world over depends mostly on the quality of the teaching staff amongst other factors. The head teacher in the secondary school system is the principal. He is both the administrative head and instructional leader of his school (leader of teachers). He harnesses the human and material resources of the school to

make for improved academic performance. School principals have a great influence on the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. As a result, much is expected of them in their capacity.

The issue of maintaining quality is of utmost importance in the school system. The role of educational managers in assuring quality at all levels of the Nigerian education system need be emphasized (Adegbesan 2011). Quality assurance is an umbrella concept designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the education system (Okebukola, 2010). It is a way of measuring, improving and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value –be it academic, sports performance, business or economy.

The principal in our context ensures best practices are encouraged in the social milieu or system under his jurisdiction which in this case, is the secondary school system. Assurance defines standard to be followed in order to meet a specific requirement while control ensures that these standards are followed. However, quality assurance activities include a planned system or review procedures conducted by personnel not directly involved in the inventory compilation/development process (Cabrera & Meyer, 2011). In this paper, quality assurance is amplified to include academic, administration and infrastructural quality assurance.

Quality assurance at the secondary school level focuses on the input, process, and output dimensions as they relate to staff, students, programs, finances, facilities, infrastructures, furniture and other resources. The neglect of quality at this level of the educational system is suicidal to acquisition of tertiary education. Hence, this paper examined the complex role/task of the principal in assuring quality, the challenges in today's secondary schools as he carries out his professional duties and concludes by charting the way forward to ensure quality in today's secondary schools.

THE PRINCIPAL

He is the head teacher in charge of the secondary school. He occupies a position which imposes on him a certain mode or standard of behavior, as well as the obligation which society expects him to fulfill. He could be seen as the educational manager who assures quality in the school under his auspices. His role has become a complex web in recent times. As a head teacher, he is between the world of youths and adult world.

He tries to meet the claims of his pupils while reconciling them with the expectations of their parents, and relating both to the needs of the society at large. The principal operates in various capacities in the secondary school system. To assure quality, he acts as a guide, a leader, a psychologist/counselor, a leader of teachers amongst others to effect a harmonious working environment that will lead to the actualization of educational objectives.

The Principal and the School Quality

The secondary school is the immediate operating zone of the principal who is its chief executive. He is the only one in the best position to establish a link between the school and the community. The school as an agent of change is one of the institution that battles with the implementation of the national policies or philosophy on education. A look at the Nigerian National Policy on Education reveals that great emphasis is laid on aspects of national unity, respect and dignity for man and labor coupled with the need for high morals and spiritual values and attitudes. This agrees with the nation's goal of achieving a democratic and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation. The principal is instrumental to its actualization in the school system.

The primordial role of the principal in ensuring quality education in secondary schools is universally recognized; hence the quality of teaching is strongly related to the quality of the school head. The academic performance of pupils according to Okokoyo (2004) is usually seen by people to have a relationship with the principal's ability to committedly oversee the activities of the institution. That is why he is usually blamed for poor academic performance of pupils in his school. He serves as a guide to the teacher and the learner.

Apart from the intellectual development of the child, good moral training is also desirable and so the principal serves as a model for the pupil to emulate through example and instruction. He protects the image of the school at the community and ministry levels. He attends meetings and conferences called by education board and the ministry of education at both state and national levels to represent the interest of the school. He executes or transmits general rules and regulations as laid down by the school authority. He supervises academic instructions and so occupies a very unique position in the school system. As a focal point in the administrative process, he has a lot of functions to perform if he is to actualize the goals of effective academic instruction. The school is a part of the community, so the onus is on the principal to establish good human relations with the community. This he can do perhaps by encouraging cooperation in a democratic procedure.

Challenges of Today's Secondary Schools

The changing role of the school principal in recent times has been recognized. As pointed by Bahri (2005), these changes are due to:

- the education reforms which requires new skills and competences to cope with innovations;
- the decentralization of many education systems;
- the changes in the curriculum with the rapid economic and political transformation (end of communism, emergency of information communications technologies, HIV/AIDS, drug abuses and violence in schools),

- the rapid expansion of secondary education in terms of population explosion cannot be ruled out. About half a billion (492 million in 2002 of adolescents enrolled in secondary education. They were 329 in 1990).

In the past when the schools were small in size, the principal combined teaching with headship. With increase in student population and staff strength in recent times, coupled with great demands for facilities and equipments for effective school administration, the role of the school principal has become more exerting and complex. He does not have time to combine teaching and clerical work with administrative functions. They have several meeting to attend with Chief Inspector of Education, State Education Board, personal from Ministry of Education and other reference group. Their role has evolved from that of a principal-teacher performing numerous tasks to the prototype of modern day principal who usually does little or no teaching and is concerned primarily with administrative, supervisory, & community relations activities.

In today's secondary schools, the principal acts as a mediator of learning not just a curriculum provider. Gone are the days when he was a walking encyclopedia, the only reservoir of facts or the final arbiter in knowledge. The days of talk and chalk when pupils listened and swallowed all facts hook line and sinker is no more. The computer age has given room to the modern child to learn faster than conventional teaching method. The children we have today read more books and magazines, listen to radio, watch television, video, and satellite stations, and have lot of toys to play with, have access to computers and even the internet. They travel through the world in the internet and have sophisticated handsets (GSM) like i-pod, i-pad, i-phone, andriods, blackberry, galaxy and even travel with parents extensively in and outside the country. The child has a lot of pre-knowledge before coming to class. So the teacher and the principal have to be very knowledgeable in order to properly mediate between the learner and the vast world of knowledge. He exchange facts with the pupil instead of spitting out facts and guides the children in their quest for knowledge leading them to the right sources and resources.

As pointed out by Bahri (2005) school leaders have to cope with increasing number of responsibilities such as:

- (a) to ensure implementation of reforms and innovative measures;
- (b) to ensure team work and collaboration among staff;
- (c) to deal with competitions between schools and avoid as much as possible exclusion of "undesirable" students;
- (d) to deal with the curriculum or teaching issues (e.g. dealing with different teaching styles in the classroom) and cope with ineffective teachers;
- (e) to ensure monitoring and evaluation of students outcomes to determine the needs to improve quality of their school and ensure transparency;

- (f) to be an interface between families and the school and between the school and other institutions (from the cultural, health, social and productive sector, etc),
- (g) to deal with some specific problems of the school or of the environment such as drug abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS and value added to the school, amongst others.

ASSURING QUALITY IN THE TODAY'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

As an administrator, the principal is a manager of men, money, material and time. Quality assurance is a function of the continuing review of all part of the framework of standards and accountability that will provide the criteria against which leaders can be identified, assessed and certified (Chapman, 2005). The principal sets standards as a manager or supervisor of his school. This empowers him statutorily to quality assure the secondary school, where he presides.

At this level he focuses on the input, process, output dimensions as they relate to students, teachers, non-teaching staff, curriculum, finance, equipments/facilities, like tables, chairs, desks, textbooks, laboratory facilities, infrastructures and other resources as illustrated in figure 1. We shall examine how the principal assures quality in some of these dimensions.

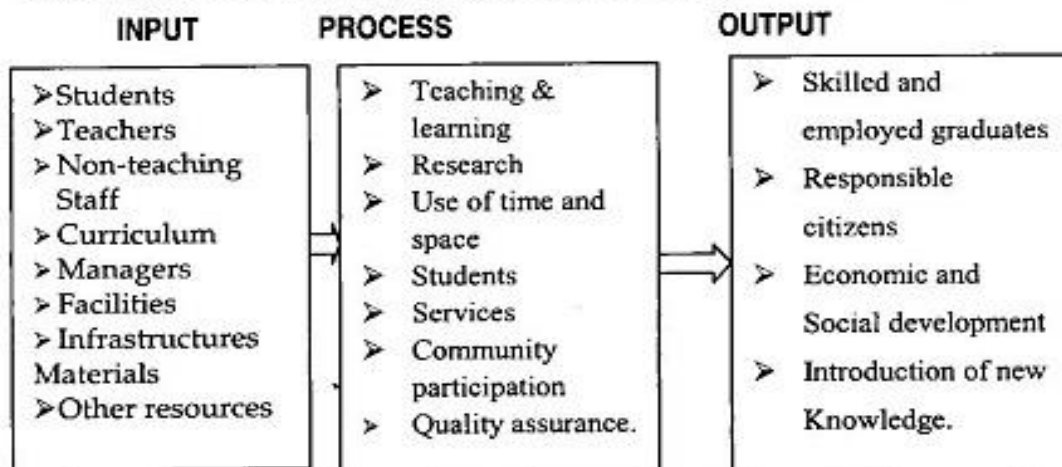


Figure 1: Dimensions of quality assurance adopted from Bandele, 2011.

STUDENT INPUT DIMENSION

The admission process of students into the secondary school determines the quality of graduates to a large extent the requirement for admission should be scrutinized at this point to assure quality. Apart from the primary school leaving certificate, entrance exam should be qualitative and brain storming involving essay test that is followed by oral interviews for successful candidates in order to get the best brain for this system.

STUDENT PROCESS DIMENSION

While foundation of quality assurance is laid at the admission (input) level, concerted efforts should be made to give quality teaching and learning after admission. Standards should be set while direct quality checks of the actual learning process should be done to ensure conformity. The principal should periodically check classroom teaching, student attendance registers, records of continuous assessments (CA), examinations etc. in enhancing the teaching-learning process, the principal should see to it that resources and facilities like instructional materials, infrastructures, libraries, ICT centers meet required specification for the secondary schools.

STAFF INPUT DIMENSION

Quality schools require quality staff and leadership for quality teaching and learning. Recruitment of this should be by merit. Although, the principal at the public school level seem not to be directly involved in hiring and firing of staff, it is obvious in recent times that the staff recruitment process have been ridiculed through political infiltration. The principal therefore, should ensure and give priority in terms of staff qualification, previous experience and actual performance, should he be called to do so. He could also collaborate with the post primary education board to ensure that the right number of teachers for the various subject areas is posted to the school. At the private level, he is directly involved in hiring and firing staff especially if he/she is the proprietor. Hence, he can assure quality in staff recruitment process.

STAFF PROCESS DIMENSION

Here, the principal has the free hand more or less to be directly involved in assessing the staff since his input in terms of report on the staff performance can go a long way to determining whether the staff is promoted, disciplined or transferred. The preparation of the teacher for excellent performance begins after recruitment. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) pointed out emphatically that:

"the success of any system of education is hinged on proper planning, efficient administration and adequate financing. Administration is a function of organization and structure, proprietorship and control, inspection and supervision".

At the private school level, the principal/proprietor is directly involved in assessment of staff for promotion. Objectivity therefore should be his watch word. More so, the principal should make provision for staff training and attendance of professional academic seminars, workshop and conferences to enhance their proficiency.

PROGRAM/CURRICULAR INPUT DIMENSION.

It is the role of the school principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place in a conducive school atmosphere. The program of instruction is already designed by the curricular planners in the ministry of education, the input and process of such programs will determine the quality of output. The school is guided by the vision, objectives, curricular, subject listing and content of such program. The principal who is an experienced professional and curriculum planner translates the policies of government in to practice. In doing this he ensures that the quality of such policies at the formation level meets up with excellent global practices (Bandeke, 2011).

PROGRAM/CURRICULAR PROCESS DIMENSION

If there are no in built mechanism to assure quality inform of formative evaluation, the tendency is for such program not to thrive. The principal should be able to examine the content of each subject area, monitor them empirically, make judgments on their viability whether students are doing well or not and suggest remedial schemes for quality assurance based on formative feedbacks. Hence the implementation stage must march with the original program plans and statements. The extent of adherence to such policy will definitely measure the success or failure of the school operating such policies.

INFRASTRUCTURE, FURNITURE BUILDING INPUT DIMENSION

The provision and utilization of available resources to accomplish stated objectives is one major task of the school administrator. The provision of adequate and standard school plant, therefore, is imperative if the objectives of education are to be actualized (Asabor, 2009). The procurement of quality equipment and infrastructure must be assured. These may cost school administrator so much money, yet it is worthwhile. The principal should ensure that solid structures are built with modern state-of-art furniture, equipment, libraries, laboratories etc.

INFRASTRUCTURE, FURNITURE BUILDING PROCESS DIMENSION

The onus lies on the principal to ensure that tested and proven professionals are contracted when buildings are to be constructed, facilities and equipments supplied. Due process is to be followed if quality is to be assured. The above internal quality assurance measures of the principal will be lopsided if not complemented by the bodies responsible for external quality assurance. That is why agencies like West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), Examination Council (NECO), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Federal and State Ministries of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), post primary education board amongst others, through their various departments pay academic visit, inspections, resource assessment visits to monitor, evaluate and improve standards.

OUTPUT DIMENSION

When the principal is able to assure quality in the above discussed areas of the school, quality assurance is evident in the larger society. Skilled and employable graduates, responsible citizens are produced from the system. There is economic and social development coupled with the diffusion of new knowledge. All these will make for a qualitative assured, crime-free, violent free, security assured and serene society.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recognizing the complex nature of today's secondary school and students, in order to have quality leadership that assures quality in the secondary school system, professional renewal of experienced principal is recommended.

- Government and especially private schools should retain experienced principals.
- Provision should be made of a comprehensive program of professional development by agencies responsible for lifelong learning. If their learning needs are identified, expert practitioners and current thinkers could present papers related to these areas of needs in conferences and seminars where principals are participants in order to improve their skills and professional competence as school heads.
- Networks of learning based on the concept of 'nested learning communities'. This concept views the school as a learning organization, which continually improves its capacity to teach children under its principal's leadership (Chapman, 2005). The principal here leads by creating a culture of learning and by providing the right kinds of specialized professional development opportunity for all members of the school community.

CONCLUSION

Since parents regard their children education as an investment, greater demand for efficient discharge of the principal's professional duties is made. Quality assurance is predictive of assurance. If this becomes real in input dimensions of the admission and process of students and staff, quality will be assured. Our tertiary education entrants will be qualitative. This will output quality assurance in the life-wire of the society in the face of glaring national challenges.

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