

John Onyemauche Oparaduru

Quality Education and the Nigerian Dilemma: Imperatives for Counselling

Abstract

In this paper the researcher aimed to investigate the counsellors' perceptions towards the quality of education and the Nigerian dilemma as well as its imperatives for counselling. The qualitative analysis of the answers followed to identify the aspects that represent the content of formal education, quality of teaching, curriculum, and personal characteristics of the teacher, funding, staff remuneration, control and evaluation/examination. This also cuts across the educational implications of the essentialist theory, the progressivism as well as the reconstructionism. Another aspect centered on the counselling as a necessity for quality education to thrive. The paper concluded by suggesting that counselling should be seen as a tool to make the quality of education to thrive by giving it all supports by all educational stakeholders and ensures that adequately trained counselors should be posted to all levels of our educational institutions that will stand in the gap of the rising challenges in our educational system.

Keywords: quality education, Nigerian dilemma, imperative for counselling

Introduction

Learning according to English Learners Dictionary is the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something. It can be in any form, in other words, it usually comes from what we may term 'education'. There are various kinds of education ranging from: formal, informal, and semi-formal education. Therefore, the purpose of this paper will focus on quality education as a derivative of formal education and the Nigerian dilemma looking at its imperative for counselling. Formal education is the type of education that takes place in an established system known as the school. It is structured and categorized into pre-school, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary institutions as well as higher education. Formal education as an institution, is systematic, carefully deliberated, planned with rules and regulations, funded, staffed, graded, accredited, and awards certificates (Ekwueme & Igwe, 2001). Formal education having been charged with the responsibility of preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of the people by showing knowledge and its appreciation as well as adherence to its norms, it is usually rigid in admission requirements and standards, in philosophy, curriculum (purpose, content, method and evaluation), and administration. Specific features of formal education system are discussed hereunder:

- Formal education is controlled and regulated at all levels by government agencies, proprietors and others.

- Formal education is guided by a curriculum. These are prescribed systematic groups of courses for every level. In the past, the curriculum has been centered on various systems such as: 6-5-4 in the 1970s, 6-3-3-4 system of education in the 1980s. Presently, the 9-3-4 system of education is in practice. All these have not actually in totality addressed the challenges of education in Nigeria. This could be as a result of the gap created in the aspect of counselling which has not been enforced in our curriculum even though it has been noted for action but not fully enforced to the later. This has made the whole system not to be effective to actualize the dream of the desired curriculum.
- A prescribed standard of qualified staff is maintained.
- Evaluation/examination take central position in the formal education system. There is periodic assessment of learning and programmes. Every formal educational programme in conventional tertiary institutions, universities or in an open distance learning programme has their various modes of evaluations/examinations along with their periodic time for such. This in which ever form it may be, should be able to assist the teacher be able to test the learners and place values and judgment on the outcome of their learning process.

Quality education

A quality education is one that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing.

Sequel upon these, quality education must be based on the following objectives if met. The aims of education, irrespective of the culture, perform the following functions:

1. They give direction to the educational system.
2. They are especially important for curriculum changes, planning, designing, and development as well as instruction.
3. They motivate actions.
4. They provide guidance for the learner, the teacher and the school administrator.
5. They provide the basis for assessing and evaluating the entire educational process in order to determine the success or failure of the educational programme and how well the educational system is working towards achieving educational goals.

Be it as it may, there are certain factors that would be considered relevant in the course of this presentation on quality education. These are discussed as follows:

Infrastructure / learning environment

Environment has a vital role in facilitating learning. The environment includes both natural and artificial environment. These include the tone of the school, the rules and regulations, the teachers' style of classroom management, the classroom furniture, equipment and teaching aids, the amount of ventilation and fresh air

available in the classroom, the distance of the school to busy road or to industrial establishment and many others. All in one way or the other affect learning.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is always attributed to the teachers' technique of teaching. Generally, there is no best technique or method of teaching. However, there are certain fundamental principles which cut across all methods of teaching. These principles emanate from various psychology and theories of learning. These are:

- A student teacher must possess enough and accurate knowledge in his/her subject so that he can impart it confidently.
- Teachers should be able to come down to the level of the pupils/students in terms of explanation and language. Other areas he/she must take care of include improving the learning environment, planning his/her lesson well, adopting adequate and appropriate methods bearing in mind the age of the pupils, time, teaching aids/materials and the subject itself. Hence, without a teacher, learning will not take place in the formal classroom setting. This is why the quality in teaching is always being determined by the quality of teachers. The quality of the teacher affects the quality of the pupils/students.

The teacher

The teacher can be examined in two perspectives as follows:

Personal characteristics of the teacher

Generally, it is believed that students are the best judges of the personal characteristics of their teacher. Studies by various scholars have also confirmed that students are best judges of their teachers. Some of his/her characteristics which make for good and effective teaching are sympathy and kindness, helpfulness, patience, a pleasing personal appearance and manner, emotional stability and self-control. Others are fairness, impartiality, a sense of humor, honesty, enthusiasm, creativeness, resourcefulness, simplicity, adaptability, and humility.

Professional characteristics of the teacher

There is no gainsaying that teacher's qualities can hinder or promote good teaching. Most of the time, a teacher who lacks the listed qualities may constitute a problem to himself. However, no matter how kind, amicable and well-meaning a teacher is, he cannot succeed unless he possesses adequate and thorough knowledge of the subject matter. Apart from that, a teacher also needs to acquire some general knowledge. This will enable the teacher to be more efficient in the discharge of his/her task which is teaching (Ekwueme & Igwe, 2001). There are certain professional characteristics which the teacher must combine according to Ekwueme and Igwe (2001) with his personal characteristics to promote effective teaching. Those qualities are:

- A mastery of the subject to be taught

A teacher must be very knowledgeable on whatever topic, he/she wants to teach. He should read wide about the topic to ensure good understanding and good grip of the subject matter. This makes teaching simple and easy for the pupils/students.

- An understanding of the basic principles of children's growth and development

This is crucial, such that the teacher is exposed to the various ways by which the pupils learn their emotions and other characteristics, which can affect teaching. As a result of the variety of demands by the pupils/students and the subject matter, the teacher adopts various suitable techniques and methods to make the learners learn with ease.

- A positive attitude to the work

A teacher must have and demonstrate interest on the job. If the teacher does not like the job, obviously, he/she will not teach well, he/she will be quarreling with his/her tools, the students and in fact the environment as a whole. But if he/she likes the job, he/she puts in his/her best and uses all avenues to make the lesson interesting so that the pupils/students are motivated to learn.

- Willingness to adapt his/her teaching to local needs taking into account the materials available

A good teacher always endeavours to improve his/her teaching aids. The importance of using teaching aids is to facilitate learning. For a teacher to teach successfully, he/she must make adequate and proper use of teaching aids. Most of the time, the teaching aids are not available or they are costly to be purchased. The teacher is left with no other option than to improvise. However, the teacher should be very careful when selecting the teaching aids. Always make do with what is available or can be locally produced to minimize use costs.

Funding

Funding is another essential ingredient that guarantees quality education. From the perspectives on the issues of educational funding, education has been described as "a solely budget devourer, a barrel which is never filled" (Onyene, 2002). If therefore, education takes his shape in terms of finance, the enterprise requires huge input in form of material, labour and working capital. Considering the fact that investment in education does not take cognizance of economic situation of the nation due to increase in population and rising demand for education, a lot of finance hindrances tend to thwart educational progress. The effect of inadequacy of fund is mostly felt in administration of schools. Nevertheless, the general input factor always forms the major manifestation when calculating the achievements of a society via its educational system.

At the school level one discovers that school plant managers and administrators of pupils/students and personnel complain about running cost as the single most-pinching problem. This is not peculiar to any society (Garrett, 2013). Furthermore, education consumes more money than its result (Onyene, 2002). Ironically it is not economically approved as the most lucrative venture people can embark upon. Many factors could be responsible for the insufficiency of fund for internal school administration.

Staff remuneration

The teaching profession is one of the least respected professions in Nigeria today as it is the case in most developing countries of the world. Teachers from all ramifications are the builder of a nation hence they educate the youth that will later sustain the growth of the nation. This important role which the teachers play is not adequately compensated. If not for recently when the federal government had introduced some fringe benefits or remunerations such as the new salary structure called “elongated salary”, housing and transport, utility, rent and leave allowances for all workers in the country, teachers would have remained very poor. These remunerations are added incentives to motivate and encourage teachers to put in their best for a better attitude to work, which will lead to high productivity and efficiency (Garrett, 2013).

Unfortunately, these remunerations are not so regularly paid to teachers as their counterparts in other employments. This usually leads to incessant strikes in the school system. According to Mbipom (2012), both staff and students have lost much time due to strikes for better conditions of service. Accordingly, as long as the hydra headed examination malpractice is around nobody seems to mind. The resultant effects are found in the half-baked and ill- equipped products turned out from the school system annually.

Curriculum

The totality of all the learning experiences offered to the learner under the auspices of the school, is very pivotal to quality education. Curriculum is one of those fundamental areas to be emphasized in any worthwhile teacher-training programme (Igwe, 2005). It provides us with the essential road map to achieving the specific objectives that are usable and realizable in a teaching-learning situation. Curriculum is very important in that it provides an opportunity for us to know the processes and techniques of content selection. The problems of what to teach and how to teach are central to the training of any teacher.

Some schools of thought and their influence on the quality of education

The implications of the various views on curriculum could be traced to the various views expressed by different schools of thought vis-à-vis essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructions have tremendous impact on the type of curriculum to be developed. As their views, thoughts and understandings differ so also the type of curriculum emanating from any of them. The implications of these various theorists to curriculum are seen below.

Educational essentialism is a theory that states that children should learn the traditional basic subjects and that these should be learned thoroughly and rigorously. An essentialist program normally teaches children progressively, from less complex skills to more complex. The implication of the essentialist theory could be seen that in developing any given curriculum, there should be a thorough study of the cultural heritage of the people. Knowledge should again be the focus of all educational activities. The essentialist thought will serve as an excellent source of both curriculum objectives and curriculum content.

The progressive school of thought on curriculum is based on the students' interests. Teachers have themes and objectives, but they do not just design a course of study for their students; they design it with them, and they have to be prepared to welcome unexpected detours. From the progressives view point the educational implications of their theory include among others:

- In developing a curriculum, there is the need to understudy the learner as an individual. There should be time for extensive inter-personal relationship on one-to one basis between the teacher and the learner.
- Curriculum planners and teachers should keep clear the distinction between curriculum goals. For learning to occur it is essential that students pursue goals that are their own, rather than artificial goals set by the curriculum.
- Curriculum content and activities should be designed to reflect the learner's interest, needs, wants, desires, problems and aspirations.
- Curriculum development will need to take special account of the psychology of the child and adolescent development.

Reconstructionism / critical theory is a philosophy that emphasizes the addressing of social questions and a quest to create a better society and worldwide democracy. Reconstructionist educators focus on a curriculum that highlights social reform as the aim of education. The implications of reconstructionism in educational curriculum can be seen as follows:

- In developing a curriculum, the emphasis should not only be on what to offer the learner to make him adjust or fit into the society but what the students, having gone through specific instructional programmes, can offer the society to bring about a desirable change.
- Attention has to be paid in the all-round education of the learner namely: the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domains. The emphasis should be on comprehensive education that will make learners not only self-reliant but also instrumental to societal change and development.

Nigerian dilemma in education

Education in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. These include: lack of trained and qualified counsellors in our schools, poor funding and thus poor educational infrastructures, inadequate classrooms, teaching aids (projectors, computers, laboratories and libraries), paucity of quality teachers and poor/polluted learning environment. In addition to these inadequacies, our school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption. For meaningful development to take place in the educational sector, the governments need to re-address the issue of funding. Private educational investors, teachers, parents and students/pupils need a reorientation towards achieving the goals of education.

Counselling as a necessity for quality education to thrive

The National Policy on Education (1981) made it clear that counselling in our schools is essential, paragraph 83 (1) of the policy document declare this in these words:

In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, Career officers and Counsellors will be appointed in Post-Primary institutions. Since qualified personnel in this category are scarce, government will continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and Counselling will also feature in teacher education programmes. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p. 30)

Olayinka and Omoegun (2003) asserted that guidance and counselling services should be an integral part of our educational system especially if we want education to be functional, child-centered and job oriented.

However, counselling as a necessity for quality education to thrive is a major point of note in the sense that, education is a formal teaching and learning process aimed at improving knowledge and the development of skills from elementary to higher education. Counselling through its wide array of quantitative services could be seen as an indispensable tool for reviving and sustaining the standard of education by making educational objectives meaningful and attainable to its beneficiaries. Counselling if well administered adds value to the education system as it enhances productivity of all the stakeholders; the students, teachers, parents, administrators and a host of others. No wonder, Awokoya (1983) rightly stated that without counselling services, the objectives of education would not be fully achieved. Counselling has the services that will accommodate and manage all these problems so that the students can function, adjust and react appropriately to these challenges. The services are orientation, informational, appraisal, counselling, placement, follow-up and referral services. These should be carried out on regular basis.

According to Mallum (2015), the counselor can use counselling to facilitate quality education in the following ways:

1. Helping the students to engage meaningfully in curricular and co-curricular activities so as to realize their potentials and talents.
2. Helping students to remove barriers that may inhibit learning.
3. Assisting students to make appropriate and satisfying educational, vocational and personal-social choices.
4. Assisting the students to develop career awareness through understanding of career opportunities, lifestyles that are reflected in different types of work and job openings.

Conclusion

It is clear that counselling occupies a rather special place in raising the standard and quality of education. However, consequent upon the observed fall in its standard, there is need for a reform that ensures a functional and vibrant system of education with respect to the present socio-economic and political demands of the citizens of Nigeria. The implementation of educational policies has suffered lots of setbacks and challenges, in other words, it has some constraints contending with it. If these problems are not checked, they can render the attainment of the objectives of education impossible. Therefore, for the achievement of educational quality through its objectives, it is necessary to incorporate the services of professional counsellors because it has the highest index of effectiveness as a way of promoting the overall growth of students. Consequently, all the stakeholders in education industry should

give extensive supports to school counselling programmes for it to succeed and achieve the desired impact. Parents, students, teachers, counsellors and other stakeholders of education should co-operate as close partners in the school enterprise to achieve a conducive atmosphere for learning in our schools.

Suggestions

For the purpose of this work, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counselling should be seen as a tool to make the quality of education to thrive by giving it all supports by all educational stakeholders.
2. Counsellors must be adequately trained and posted to all levels of our educational institutions especially in the public schools. Whereas private school owners must be mandated to employ professional counselors in their schools who are very verse in knowledge concerning the curriculum, job prospects of the students after graduation so that, our Nigerian education would be able to meet up with its standard in all ramifications of life and as such becomes relevance in the world of work at large.

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Dr. John Onyemauche Oparaduru, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi-Abuja, Nigeria