

Towards Promoting Community Participation in Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

One of the major problems affecting educational development in Nigeria is the common belief that providing education for all and at all levels is the exclusive responsibility of Government. The Government on the other hand is surrounded by many other competing demands such as water supply, electricity supply, provision of health care services and road network. Hence, the sector of education suffers untold hardships in terms of quality and quantity. It is in view of this that this paper presents a discussion on the phenomenon of promoting community participation in education in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper explains the concept of community participation and the rationale for community participation in education and also traces the historical background of community participation in education in Nigeria. Furthermore, the paper identifies some of the problems militating against community participation in the country which include, among others, poverty, ignorance and attitudinal problems. The paper advanced some suggestions on how community participation in education can be enhanced in Nigeria and these include intensive public enlightenment to create greater public awareness on the need for supporting government's effort, involving community in educational policy formulation and all matters relating to the development of education in their respective community and in the country as well as intensification of People Empowerment Programme. The paper was rounded up with a conclusion that government alone cannot shoulder the total responsibility of providing education for all. This is so because the resources are limited and are surrounded by so many competing demands as previously mentioned.

1. Introduction

Education is a social institution and child training is a social and collective responsibility and as such the need for the community to play and provide necessary supportive role to it cannot be over emphasized. This may partly explain why the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) officially advocates for community participation in education. This is an important and necessary gesture especially in the light of the nation's dwindling economic growth and the unprecedented population rise. Presently, however, local communities in Nigeria are not adequately responding to this call because of some obvious constraints such as poverty, ignorance and attitudinal problems. Against this background, this paper presents a discussion on how to promote and encourage the factor of community participation in the development of education in Nigeria.

2. The Concept of Community Participation in Education

In an attempt to explain the concept of community participation in education it may be necessary to define the concept of "community". A community may be generally described as a collection of

people living in a defined area, place or geo-political environment. A community is a group of people located in a given geographical area. In the educational sense, however, the term "community", according to the Federal Ministry of Education (1977) is often used to refer to the people living in the immediate locality in which the school is located. Accordingly, the term community participation in education may be perceived in terms of the various complementary roles that members of the immediate locality in which a school is located should play as contribution to educational development of their wards.

3. Historical Background of Community Participation in Education in Nigeria

The history of community participation in education in Nigeria is as old as the history of man in the country. In the olden days and prior to the introduction of both the Islamic and Western systems of education into the country, the phenomenon of child training and child education depended heavily on the members of the immediate community. This was so because in traditional African Society a child is the child of all and as such Fafunwa (1974) maintains that his education is the responsibility of not only his mother but of everyone in his immediate environment.

The emergence and or introduction of Islamic religion and the Islamic education system in Nigeria through the private effort of Muslim scholars from the Islamic kingdom of Egypt in the 11th Century A.D. also marked another landmark on the community participation in education in Nigeria. An Islamic tradition according to Fafunwa (1974) maintains that the best among you is one who learns the Quran and then care to teach it. Consequently, with the introduction of Islamic education system in Nigeria concerted efforts were privately made by Islamic scholars (who depended for their living largely on charity extended to them by the parents of the children they teach) to establish schools and Islamic learning centres. Through this effort, for instance, Fafunwa (1974) observed that by 1013 there were 10,073 Quranic schools in the north while in the south where the actual number of such schools was unknown, there were 50,000 pupils in such schools by 1012.

The history of western education in Nigeria reveals that the missionaries were the first to establish schools on their own initiatives in the early 19th century. This was dictated by the exigencies of their undertaking that, the converts had to be able to read scriptures. The government at first encouraged the missionaries and later enacted education ordinance to control, regulate and partly finance education under the management of voluntary agencies.

Community participation in education did not end with the Christian missionaries efforts as some other efforts were also directly coming from the local communities, for instance, assisted schools were according to Taiwo (1980) partly financed from a special contribution from the local community cutting across religious barriers.

Another evidence of community participation in education in Nigeria was according to Fafunwa (1974) witnessed between 1830 and 1950 when some Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio communities as well as private individuals in the southern part of Nigeria offered scholarships to their indigenes to go for higher education in Britain and Ireland.

Although a comprehensive and precise data regarding the current level of community participation in education in Nigeria may not be easily established, it is reasonable to state that, the factor of increasing public awareness on the importance of education coupled with the inadequacies that characterize the learning conditions of most of the public schools have, among others, given impetus to the phenomenon of community participation in education in Nigeria in recent years. This, for instance, is evident in the way many parents and communities support the educational pursuit of their wards through provision of learning materials and payment of others levies to and for the latter respectively. The relative increasing rise and patronage as well as the establishment of private and community schools in the country further confirms the phenomenon of community participation in education in the country. It is however pertinent to note that the level of community participation in education in the country is still not adequate and thus the need for strategizing ways of enhancing it.

4. Rationale for Community Participation in Education

Education is a social institution and as such its sustenance and success depends on the complementary roles of different social forces, one of which is the community. The basic purpose of education is to among others, prepare individuals for service and social acceptance. It is therefore logical to state that the community is the direct recipient of the benefits to be derived from the social functions of schooling. In view of this, the need for community participation in education becomes undisputable.

As indicated earlier, education is a capital-intensive project and thus cannot easily and adequately be taken care of by the government alone. Nigeria is the most populous African nation and like many other under-developed nations she has according to Bolarinwa (1987) a high fertility rate of about 2.5% and moderately low mortality rate due to improved medical services. This according to Nigeria's Department of Population Education (1988) informs the large increase: in the size of school age-going population and which partly and subsequently gave rise to the phenomenon of high demand for education. This issue of rapid students population growth is also met with uncertainties (resulting from the oil boom which began from the early eighties) surrounding the nation's oil-based economy. Some available data about the student population dynamics in Nigerian schools according to Bolarinwa (1987), for instance, maintains that enrolment figure rose from 3,515,820 in 1970 to 12,749,403 in 1980 (four fold increase) at primary school level while that of secondary grammar and commercial schools rose from 310,054 in 1970 to 746,369 in 1981 (over a hundred percent increase). In polytechnics the student's population rose from 11,993 in 1975 to 57,772 in 1980. It is now over twenty years when these drastic students population dynamics in Nigerian schools were recorded and the fact that Nigeria's population growth rate according to Ajaegbolu (1985) increases by 2.5% simply and partly explains why many schools in Nigeria are suffering from the phenomenon of students over population. It is thus not amazing that the Federal Government of Nigeria has officially admitted its inability to continue to shoulder full financial responsibility of the nation's education sector when according to the N.P.E. (2004) it stresses that the financing of education is a joint responsibility between the Federal, State and Local Governments and the Private Sector. By this arrangement the government requests for the participation of local communities. Individuals and other organizations in the development of the nation's education sector. This situation justifies the need for community participation in education especially in the light of the current deteriorating condition of the nation's education system.

Every educational institution whether public or private may be regarded social subsystem existing and related to a larger social system that can be called the community. The child is the bridge between the school and the community because he belongs to both. Therefore both the school and the community should work hand in hand to educate the child. This helps to promote school - community relationship as a necessary basis for providing good quality education for the Nigerian child.

Education is a value-laden enterprise and as such it is a medium through which the people's cultural values are transmitted to the younger ones so that they (the latter) can grow as useful and acceptable members of the society. As a social institution, education also helps to prepare people for various social roles as may be required by the society. Thus education can be accordingly described as a basis on which meaningful social, economic, cultural and scientific development of the society depends upon. All these points suggest the social relevance of education and, in a way the need for community participation in education.

It is however, regrettable to state that despite all the rationalities surrounding the need for community participation in education in Nigeria, an enabling environment has not yet been set for this to succeed. This is against the background that the social realities on the ground appear to present some repelling forces antagonizing effective participation of the community in the development-of the nation's education sector. For instance, Nigeria is the most populous African

nation but according to Momoh (2002) more than fifty percent of its citizens are poor and live on daily subsistence of less than one American Dollar and as such cannot meaningfully and effectively complement the government's factor in the enhancement of the nation's education industry. The fact that Nigeria the seventh largest oil producing nation in the world and is blessed with abundant natural resources, it is deducible to state that the level of poverty in the country is artificial and may largely be traced to the problem of bribery and corruption that characterize the nation's polity and which according to Dazang (2010) explains why Nigeria was recently rated as the most corrupt nation in the world. It is thus not amazing that in the year 2005 for instance, an education Minister according to Daily Trust (2005) lost his ministerial seat for attempting to bribe some members of the National Assembly to inflate the budget allocation to his Ministry. The role of private entrepreneurship in education in Nigeria is also let to achieve a meaningful result because its impact appears to be more confined and fell in the educationally advanced areas and cities; and that their services are mainly meant for the privileged few.

In the light of the aforementioned social realities surrounding the phenomenon of community participation in education in Nigeria, one may be right to say that this factor (community participation in education) is surrounded by numerous constraints and challenges. And until these problems are addressed, the government's conceived policy of enhancing community participation in education in Nigeria shall continue to remain a big night mare.

5. Constraints of Community Participation in Nigeria's Education

In spite of the importance of community participation in education and, despite the government's formal invitation for community participation in education as indicated previously, the factor of community participation in education in Nigeria is still surrounded by a number of obvious constraints which include poverty, corruption, government's policy with regards to the award and execution of contracts, low literacy level, unemployment etc.

Nigeria as an oil-producing nation and as a country bestowed with abundant human and non-oil resources is often described as the giant of Africa. Ironically, however, Akpa (2000) observes that about 80% of the Nigeria populace lives in the rural areas where such social amenities as portable drinking water, electricity and motorable roads are not adequate. Worse more and as indicated earlier Momoh (2002) sadly notes that 67 million Nigerians are poor and live on less than one American Dollar per day. It is thus logical for one to accept that majority of Nigerians just "exist" but not "living". How can then a poverty stricken society of this type afford to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the nation's education sector? Thus until this situation improves, the issue of poverty will continue to remain a major constraint to the phenomenon of community participation in education in Nigeria.

Another impediment to the community participation in education in Nigeria is corruption. Nigeria, as previously discussed has according to Dazang (2001) been recently described as among the most corrupt nations in the world by the Transparency-International, It is against this background that just last year (2005). For instance. Some National Assembly members and a Minister of Education were trucked and dealt with in the hitler's bid to bribe the National Assembly earlier to inflate the budget allocation to his Ministry. In Nigeria, it is often a common thing for one to see school properties being sold illegally in the open markets after being stolen by some government functionaries This situation is detrimental to the factor of community participation in education in Nigeria because many people may have the feeling that their material and or financial contributions to the schools may eventually be sold or diverted to private use by the nation's educational managers.

The government's policy with regards to the award and execution of contracts for schools may also be regarded as yet another impediment to the community participation in education. It is a common practice especially in the current democratic dispensation for different contracts to be executed in our schools to be given to individuals or groups without consulting the communities

where such schools are located. Although certain contracts may require the services of an expert if it were to be effectively executed, yet there are many ways by which the local communities can be involved in the contract executions in schools located in their localities, this may prevent the school from becoming an alien to its community and also provide opportunity for the surrounding communities where such schools are located to directly benefit from the establishment of such schools in their immediate social environment.

Low literacy level in the country also does not help matters with regard to the issue of community participation in education in Nigeria. According to Nwagwu (1985). Nigeria is the most populous African nation whose many of its citizenries remain illiterate and uneducated. This claim is further confirmed by Oyebola (2000) who says that Nigeria is currently rated among the nine countries in the world with the largest population of non-literates. The illiteracy rate in the country by 1996 was according to the federal Government of Nigeria (1996) put at 45%. Although there may be some

improvement over the period of time it may still be reasonable for one to believe that the level of illiteracy in the country may still be relatively high. It is also equally reasonable to state that the factor of community participation in education is constrained by the enlightenment level of the country's populace because both Sule (2003) and an official report by NTI (1990) conclude that there is relationship between the people's educational background and their attitude towards school, the elites, according to them tend to be more sensitive to issues pertaining to the schooling process of their wards. Hence it is logical to state that quite a reasonable number of parents in Nigeria are less likely to show commitment to the issue of community participation in education.

From the preceding points raised and discussed, it becomes obvious that, the factor of community participation in education in Nigeria is being confronted with a number of constraints. And that the government factor may to a very large extent, be held responsible for these problems. Hence for the government's perceived policy of community participation in education to achieve any meaningful result, an enabling social environment must be provided for this.

6. The Way Forward

Against the background of the aforementioned constraints to the community participation in education in Nigeria, the following suggestions are deemed necessary:-

- a. The Peoples Economic Empowerment Programme should be given a boost especially in the rural areas so as to raise/improve the economical status of the majority of Nigerians, This is with a view to enabling the Nigerian populace to actively and meaningfully contribute to the educational development of the Nigerian children.
- b. The issue of fighting corruption and the corrupt individuals or groups should be taken more serious. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission's (EFCC) efforts should be redoubled and more objectively deal with the corrupt individuals,
- c. The local communities should be fully involved in the educational policy formulation and execution of educational projects in their localities. The recent introduction of School Based Management Committee (S.B.M.C.) to replace Parent Teachers Association is a welcome development as it encourages and provides wider scope for community participation in educational development.
- d. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education and all its locally based agencies in the country should redouble their efforts in fighting illiteracy in the country.
- e. There is the need for government to make concerted effort to curb the phenomenon of unemployment in the country. At this juncture, emphasis should not only be given to theoretical knowledge but functional and practical skills should equally be encouraged

- f. There is the need for intensive public enlightenment that will help to create better public awareness on the importance of education and the need for community participation. The local community and religious leaders need to be fully coopted and used in this crusade.

7. Conclusion

This paper identified poor community participation as a major draw back to the development of education in Nigeria. And in view of the fact that Government alone cannot shoulder total responsibility of providing education for all and at all levels, the need for strategizing ways of enhancing and encouraging community participation in the development of nation's education sector cannot be overemphasized. To this end some important suggestions on how this could be achieved were provided.

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