

Parents' and teachers' perception of selection as a factor of quality in the curriculum process in Nigeria

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This study was motivated by the need to redress the problem of decline in the quality of education in Nigerian schools. Although there are several factors that influence success in the learning situation, it is contended in this paper that the provision of the other conditions of learning may not have marked impact on successful learning if the learner is not intellectually prepared and fit for studies at that particular level. Selection is required in order to identify suitably qualified candidates for admission or promotion. In Nigeria, everybody wants to go to the university and earn a degree, including those who do not have the capacity to do so. The issue of selection therefore, seems to be controversial. This study sought to find out the perception of Nigerian parents and teachers of selection as a factor of quality in the curriculum process. A 13-item four-point scale questionnaire was administered to a sample of 2000 parents and 1000 teachers on this subject. While parents and teachers were to a large extent in agreement on the importance of quality education in any society as a guarantee for the effectiveness of that education, they disagreed on selection as a means to it. The teachers were better disposed to the practice of selection in the curriculum process than the parents. The paper recommends the need for the government to insist on standards in the admission and promotion processes in the schools.

Selection, curriculum quality, Nigeria, promotion processes, quality in education

INTRODUCTION

Decline in the quality of education in Nigeria has become too glaring and alarming in the past 20 years to the extent that the issue can no longer be glossed over by anybody who is aware of the key role of education as an instrument of social transformation and development in any society. A reference to specific indices according to Disu (1996) and Malik (1997) provides a convincing picture of the extent of decay and decline in the quality of education in Nigeria. Urevbu (1997) identifies the poor performances of students in the senior school certificate examination as an indicator of the falling standards in the nation's education. In addition, the inability of most school leavers to communicate effectively in written and spoken English Language is an obvious sign of decline in the quality of education. Foster (1999) shares the view that Nigerian schools have continuously failed to prepare the youth for effective and productive living and contribution to the society. In a study of the quality of Nigerian secondary school leavers, Foster (1999) found that the youths fell below the acceptable level in measures of creativity and problem-solving abilities. Accordingly, it was concluded that to a large extent there are indications that the quality of secondary education received by these youth was questionable. It suffices to say that these findings are still being corroborated by public commentaries on the declining quality of education in the country. For instance, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) carried out a nation-wide assessment survey on the effectiveness of secondary schools in the country. It found out, among other things, that subjects performed reasonably well in tasks

that required narration and very poorly when confronted with tasks requiring interpretation, inference, explanation, argumentation, and problem solving. It concluded that the potency of the education or preparing the youth for productive living was in doubt. Investigations have also shown that employers' rating of the creative abilities of school leavers and graduates is rather low. Today, a number of employers in the private sector give preference to applicants holding a Second Class Honors (Upper Division) Degree as a minimum qualification for employment. However, even these graduates have had to be given additional orientation and on-the-job training to help them to develop the appropriate skills and competencies related to the job. It is assumed that the schools no longer equip them adequately enough to fit into employment. However, it needs to be clearly stated that, the issue of decline in the quality of education does not necessarily mean that the content of education has been watered down. The point is that the quality of instruction has been generally low due to inadequacies and irregularities in the school system. According to Urevbu (1997), the Nigerian school system in the last 20 years has been overtaken by monumental crises. These include the endless closure of schools due to workers going on strike and students' restiveness; poorly trained, poorly paid and poorly motivated teachers; inadequate instructional materials and facilities; lack of basic infrastructure support; examination malpractice; and under funding of education by the government.

Admittedly, there has been eagerness on the part of the public and the government to provide education for the citizens. Politicians alike have always echoed the need for high quality education in the country. Unfortunately, this has remained rhetoric as no dynamic efforts have been made toward its realisation. Nevertheless, it would appear that the government seems to have a very vague and hazy notion about the curriculum process as well as how schools are created, organised and made to function (Apple, 1990, 1992; Urevbu, 1997). It is therefore high time to recognise the fact that schools do not function automatically, but have to be made to function. A lot is yet to be done beyond mere policy statements on high quality education in Nigeria as the expected quality does not evolve naturally from such statements of intention. Could it be that the government does not know what to do? Or could it be that it does not have the political will to bring about some dynamic and radical approaches to enhance quality in the school system?

Of course, not only do opinions differ on the concept and measures of quality in education, the political dimensions and implications of the means to it, make the subject more controversial and scaring. Akindele (1999, p.62) stated that:

if we are thinking of how to make our educational system to be qualitative, let us first, find out or think of what has made the system to lose the quality it once had and turn the table around by re-introducing and re-emphasising those missing variables for the needed results.

To this end, many observers and critics have attributed the decline in the quality of education in the nation's schools to poorly trained and poorly paid teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and outright neglect of schools by government due to their vague notion about the schooling process. Other contributory factors include dwindling economy, shortage of specialist teachers in most of the schools, shortage of basic instructional materials, evolving negative societal values and youth's lack of interest in schooling in preference for the pursuance of money-yielding ventures, as sources of decline in the quality of education in Nigeria (Azu, 1999; Enole, 2001).

Acknowledging the above factors as the critical sources of the decline in the quality of education in Nigeria, Iyamu (1998) argued that education involves the input-output equation. The quality of educational output such as equipping school leavers with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for effective and productive living as individuals and members of the society is largely dependent on the quality of the educational input. Such inputs include the number and quality of teachers, the teachers' motivation in terms of a meaningful living wage and sense of

professionalism, relevant teaching and learning materials, instructional leadership and more importantly the quality of learners at the different levels of education. In the bid to make education available to as many citizens as possible in realisation of the unparalleled role of education as a tool for national development, Nigeria seems to have lost sight of quality education and the variables leading to it. Again, this is as a result of the notion the government has concerning the schooling process. There is the misconception that once school blocks are built and a few teachers made available, children can be pushed through the system and come out educated without providing several other conditions for effective teaching and learning. At the end of the day, the children leave school certificated but not educated. Today, it is common to find a good number of graduates of Nigerian universities who can neither express themselves well in the English language, nor demonstrate reasonable mastery of their subjects. The issue here has to do with the quality of the learners as a critical factor in the educational production function. Though the school is expected to help in moulding character and develop in the learners, relevant knowledge and skills, the extent to which this can be achieved is perhaps subject to the entry behaviour of such learners. Learners with a reasonable levels of maturity and readiness are likely to benefit more from a given school program. The questions here are: What is the quality of learners admitted to the different levels of education in Nigeria? What is the quality of students who are promoted from one class to the other in Nigerian secondary schools?

As part of the problem in Nigerian society and its education system, there is an apparent loss of value for excellence and merit. Student admissions to university generally, and to more highly esteemed courses (university programs) are not entirely based on merit. Class influence and economic power are critical conditions rather than merit. Though the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is expected to moderate and ensure compliance to admission regulations, it is distressing to note that a very insignificant proportion of students admitted each year is based purely on merit. This results in the preponderance of students who are neither mature nor ready for university education. It follows therefore that such students find it difficult to cope with their studies. They are also not likely to benefit maximally from the learning opportunities provided. The above phenomena prevail in the university system today because the authorities have negated the selection culture that ensured high quality in the past (Malik, 1997).

However, this author acknowledges the fact that selection is not the only variable that influences successful learning. Studies including those of Imogie (1990) and Iyamu and Aduwa (2004) have shown how the various components of the learning system interact to facilitate learning. These include personnel, facilities, materials, equipment and the learners. Besides, researchers have also recognised the impact of the home environment, the learners' cognitive abilities, their self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation as important determinants of success in the learning situation. It is the belief of this author that the adequacy of the learning environment may not contribute much to successful learning if the learner is not intellectually prepared and fit for learning at that particular level. This is where the relevance of selection comes in.

The negation of selection in the nation's primary and secondary schools is manifested in obvious learning ineffectiveness and difficulties. According to Blumende (2001), secondary education in Nigeria has become a routine to the extent that people are more interested in attendance than learning outcomes. In the past, entrants into primary and secondary schools were expected to meet certain qualification requirements. Similarly, pupils were promoted to the next higher classes if they were found qualified. The weak ones were asked to repeat their classes. Today, there are no strict conditions that guide admission and promotion. A pupil is admitted or promoted if the parents have the money to pay. The proliferation of uncoordinated and unregulated private primary and secondary schools and corruption among school heads have compounded this problem. It is easy to find pupils transferring from Class 2 in School A to Class 4 in School B provided they can pay the fees. This has resulted in lack of quality control at the formative stage.

On the implications of this phenomenon, Blumende (2001) holds the view that schools face the serious task of teaching children who do not have the needed capacity to learn at that level. No matter the zeal and commitment of the schools, their ability to make the best out of the so-called 'unselected students' is grossly limited.

The negation of selection in the nation's schools seems to have the tacit support of the governments that have continued to politicise education through its policy of a quota system that is meant to equalise educational opportunities for the citizens. The problem here is the confusion between equality and equalisation of educational opportunities. Over the years, governments have been caught between mass and populist education and qualitative schooling.

THE PROBLEM

The central role of education as an instrument for social transformation and national development is globally acknowledged. That education will perform this role more effectively if it is of high quality is indisputable. That the quality of education output is a function of its input is also not disputable. There is also no dispute over the fact that selection is needed to have high quality input of learners to produce high quality output. In the views of Imogie (1990), however, emphasis should not be on educational input as an end in itself but as a means to an end. Such input becomes meaningless unless the input is well organised and utilised to achieve the desired educational goals. As part of educational input, selecting the suitably qualified candidates for admission or promotion has to be complemented with other important educational variables for effective results.

Though selection plays a critical role in ensuring students' successful learning, there appears to be no agreement on the issue of selection as a factor of quality in education in Nigeria. Neither are Nigerians in support of strict selection in the curriculum process as a result of political, social and ideological considerations. Against this background, is it not necessary to find out the perception of parents and teachers on the issue of selection as a factor of quality in the curriculum process?

Research Questions

The following questions were asked to direct the investigation.

1. Do Nigerian teachers perceive selection as a factor of quality in education?
2. Do Nigerian parents perceive selection as a factor of quality in education?
3. Do Nigerian parents and teachers differ significantly in their perception of selection as a factor of quality in education?

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The main purpose of this investigation was to find out the perceptions of Nigerian parents and teachers of selection as a factor of quality in education. A study of this nature is needed as a basis for re-orientating the thinking of the government and public on the need to emphasise quality in the selection of candidates for admissions to the various levels of education according to their abilities and not necessarily their aspirations. Parents would need to know that it is better for their children to be educated instead of just being certificated. The government needs to know that unless quality inputs (including selection of qualified students) are fed into the educational process, the society will continue to lack quality products of schools and the capacity to use education as a radical instrument of change. The findings of this study will help to promote this awareness.

Definition of Terms

Selection is used in this context to mean the consistent tradition and process of setting minimum standards in terms of intellectual ability, aptitude, interest and disposition for the admission of candidates to the various levels of education or promoting students from one class to a higher one.

PROCEDURES

This study employed a survey method. It used a random sample of 1000 secondary school teachers and 2000 parents drawn proportionately from the north, south, east and western parts of Nigeria.

The instrument used for the collection of data was a 13-item structured questionnaire designed to seek the opinions of Nigerian parents and teachers on the issue of selection of students for admission and promotion as a major means of ensuring high educational standards in Nigerian schools. The questionnaire was based on four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SA).

The four-point scaled questionnaire was weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Accordingly, the mean and standard deviation scores of the weighted responses were calculated. For the purpose of decision making, the mid value of the scale (2.5) was taken as the cut-off point, obtained by adding the exact upper limit (4.5) to the exact lower limit (0.5) of the scale and dividing by two. Thus, any mean score of 2.5 and above was considered significant with respect to Research Questions 1 and 2. For the third research question, the significant difference between the overall mean scores of parents and teachers was determined by using the Z-test statistics. This was carried out at 0.05 Alpha levels. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.68 calculated through the split-half method. Largely the author's postgraduate students who came from these parts of the country carried out the administration of the instrument.

RESULTS

The results of this investigation, the parents' and teachers' perception on selection as a factor of quality in education, are compared in Table 1.

From the analysis of the data in Table 1, 11 out of the 13 items were significant for teachers. The teachers were of the view that Nigerian schools needed quality students to produce quality graduates. They were also of the strong view that Nigerian schools should emphasise selection if they sought to produce the quality of graduates capable of making meaningful contributions to national development.

While they considered selection as a factor of quality in education, they recognised the complementary role of other variables in the educational process, and hence were of the view that entry qualities and qualifications of students did not necessarily predict their quality at graduation. Also, they did not see selection as a way of preventing the less qualified from attending school as they could be pushed into areas for which their abilities fitted them.

On the other hand, only four out of the 13 items were found to be significant for parents. It is only with regard to these four items that parents perceived selection as a factor of quality in education. Accordingly, while they felt that schools needed high quality entrants to produce high quality graduates and that the quality of school was high in the past due to the high quality of entrants, they did not subscribe to the need for schools to emphasise selection. They believed that no matter the weakness of students, the school could still enhance their quality. There is therefore a contradiction among the parents on this subject. This may have been so because of the eagerness of parents to send their children to school without hindrance.

Table 1. Comparison of parents' and teachers' perception on selection

S/N	Item	Subjects	Responses	
			Mean (X)	Std Dev (SD)
1.	Entry qualities are predictive of quality at graduation	Parent	1.96	1.39
		Teacher	2.42	1.55
2	Schools need high quality entrants to produce high quality graduates	Parent	3.1*	1.77
		Teacher	3.36*	1.83
3.	The quality of school entrants in Nigeria today is generally low	Parent	2.23	1.74
		Teacher	3.4*	1.84
4.	Low quality education in Nigeria today is largely traceable to low quality school entrants	Parent	2.27	1.5
		Teacher	3.35*	1.82
5.	Nigerian schools should emphasise selection in the admission process	Parent	1.56	1.39
		Teacher	2.78*	1.66
6.	Quality of school learning was higher in Nigeria in the past due to effective selection of students	Parent	2.65*	1.78
		Teacher	2.87*	1.83
7.	Students should be selected into school programs according to their ability regardless of their ambitions or aspirations	Parent	2.18	1.47
		Teacher	3.17*	1.76
8.	Unless Nigerian schools admit quality students, the quality of school learning will continue to be low	Parent	2.5*	1.58
		Teacher	3.06*	1.74
9.	Education cannot make meaningful contribution to national development unless its products are of high quality	Parent	2.42	1.56
		Teacher	2.92*	1.7
10.	Teaching and learning are more effective when students are well selected	Parent	2.4	1.56
		Teacher	3.52*	1.87
11.	There is nothing schools can do to academically weak students to transform them into high quality graduates	Parent	2.03	1.12
		Teacher	2.63*	1.62
12.	High quality educated few is more meaningful to national development than low quality educated masses	Parent	2.15	1.45
		Teacher	2.14	1.46
13.	Selection limits educational opportunities in the society and should not be emphasised	Parent	3.01*	1.73
		Teacher	2.15	1.46

* = Significant

Following Z-test analysis, there is also disagreement between parents and teachers on the subject of selection as a factor of quality in education, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Z-test Analysis of overall perception of selection as a factor of quality in education

Category	N	X	SD	Cal. Z	Crit. Z	Decision
Parents	2000	2.38	1.54	12.6	1.96	Significant at the 0.05 level
Teachers	1000	3.01	1.7			

The analysis of data in Table 2 shows that there is significant difference between the parents' and teachers' overall perception of selection as a factor of quality in education. With a mean score of 2.38 for parents and 3.01 for teachers, it shows that the teachers were more supportive of the need for selection as a factor of quality in education. The difference between these means is found to be statistically significant with a calculated Z of 12.6 and a critical value of 1.96.

The foregoing result reveals that there are differences in the values and views of Nigerian parents and teachers. While both of them may be the same in their need for high quality education of the students, they seem to differ with regard to the means to this end. The teachers seem to be concerned with having good quality students to teach in order to produce good results. They do not want to be accused of inability to produce quality graduates, a condemnation which they have faced over the years. For instance, Temi and Theo (1999) attributed the falling standards in education in Nigeria to the gradual decline in the commitment and dedication of teachers. According to them, the quality of school instruction has dropped significantly. On the other hand, the then President of the Nigerian Union of Teachers countered this view by saying that teachers were the least to be blamed for the decline in the quality of education in the country. The view of Imogie (1990) that teachers as facilitators of learning are primarily responsible for organising and manipulating the available educational variables and the environment to make learning possible.

Thus, the result of their activities depends largely on the quality of such variables and environment.

On the other hand, parents seem to be ideologically disposed in their perception of selection in the educational process. They are of the view that it limits educational opportunities. Yet, they believe that the school system needs quality entrants to produce quality graduates. Their contradictory position on this issue is understandable. Every typical Nigerian parent would want his or her children to go to school and graduate with a certificate as a mark for employment and social status. They are not so concerned about the actual learning that takes place in the school. This probably explains why most of these parents indulge in aiding and financing examination malpractices to help their children pass examinations.

In addition, parents are of the view that teachers, in their professional training, have the potency and capability to help children learn, despite their weak entry behaviour. This also explains why most Nigerian parents insist on the admission of their under-age and unqualified children into school. They also offer bribes to school authorities to admit their children who fail to attain the cut-off mark for admission. Their belief is that when the children get to school they soon overcome their deficiencies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study can be summarised in the following statements.

1. Nigerian parents and teachers are of the view that quality education is necessary and that selection is necessary in the educational process as a factor of quality.
2. Although Nigerian parents recognise selection as a factor of quality in education, they do not favour the practice. On the other hand, the teachers would like Nigerian schools to emphasise selection in the process of admission and promotion of students.

Based on the research conducted and that data analysed in this study, the following conclusions can be reached:

1. Since parents and teachers do not agree on the practice of selection in Nigerian schools, the schools are most likely to continue to admit unqualified entrants.
2. Since Nigerian schools are constrained and handicapped in selecting entrants, the quality of school learning is likely to continue to be low.
3. Consequently, the prevailing decline in the quality of education in the nation's schools is likely to continue.

In order to get out of this quandary, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. The government should put in place appropriate policies that stipulate minimum standards for the nation's schools in terms of conditions and guidelines for admitting and promoting students. These are not effective at present, especially among private school proprietors.
2. The government and schools should actively inform parents that selection does not necessarily limit educational opportunities. Rather, it places a child where the child is most qualified to learn.
3. Issues related to selection as a factor of quality in education should frequently dominate the agenda of Parents' and Teachers' Association meetings.

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