Student Engagement: Issues and Concerns for Nigerian Schools in Achieving Mellennium Development Goals

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Abstract

Education is one of fundamental rights of individuals. In Nigeria a lot of problems are militating against the achievement of basic education, like poor student engagement, high dropout rate, poor retention, teachers being demotivated. This study therefore tried to highlight the problems militating against the achievement of basic education in Nigeria and proffered possible solutions to these problems. In this study analysis of anecdotal records show that government spend less than enough on education; teachers do not make extra effort to engage the students as such there is poor learning achievement. There cannot be holistic development if there is poor students' engagement. Nigerian teachers and governments should value student engagement and work together to   achieve it in schools.

Keywords: Engagement, Issues and Concerns, Achieving, Mellennium Development Goals.

Introduction

Education is a broad field, a science and a national social sector investment area, and a system. It is a lifelong process which changes over time and must be updated as realities and knowledge evolves (Obanya, 2008). Millennium development goals cannot be realized if there is poor student engagement. But there are some constraints to the realisation of these goals in Nigeria. Examples include teachers expecting students to come to school on their own; making no effort to encourage them; there is also the problem of increased population of students in the classrooms – some classes have about one hundred and fifty students – this makes it impossible for teachers to know students by name and cultivate one to one relationship. With the above background, the author therefore wants to constructively explore ways to engage Nigerian students; for realisation of goal of education for all by 2015.

The Concept of Student Engagement

State Education technology Directors Association (2008) defined student engagement as ''demonstrating self- direction and accountability involving immersion, passion, enthusiastic individualization and exploration and an investment in the individual learning process''. It is also students sense of ownership for education –autonomous, self-direction, differentiated, students self - directed assessments (Yazzie – Mintz, 2006 cited in State Educational

Technology Directors Association, 2008). The association further defined student engagement as ''students relationship with the school community, the structures, the curriculum and content, the pedagogy, and the opportunities. Wikipedia' the free encyclopedia opined that student engagement occurs when ''students make a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn what school offers. They take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success (grades), but in internalizing it in their lives''. It emphasized that student engagement is increasingly seen as an indicator of successful classroom instruction, and a valued outcome of school reform. Students are engaged when they are involved in their work. It also refers to a student willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in the learning process promoting higher level of thinking for enduring understanding. It is students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending class, submitting required work and following teachers' direction in classroom, very recently the term is increasingly used to describe meaningful students' involvement throughout the learning environment, including students' participating curriculum design, classroom management and school building climate (Wikipedia). Oftentimes it is also referred to as students' involvement in extracurricular activities in the campus life of a school/ college/ university which are thought to have educational benefits. But there is little consensus among scholars as to how to define student engagement but it is different from motivation.

Statement of the Problem

Education in Nigeria is faced with a lot of problems. Igbuzor (2006) has observed that there are drastic reductions in spending on education due to severe decline of oil market in early eighties. The impacts of these on education include unpaid teachers' salaries in most states, degradation of education facilities at all levels, strikes in universities. The end result is declining literacy rates in the country. According to the scholar, the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. The national literacy rate is estimated at 57 percent; some 49 percent of teaching force are unqualified (Igbuzor, 2006). There is acute shortage of infrastructure and facilities at all levels. Access to basic education is inhibited by gender issues and sociocultural beliefs and practices. Wide disparities persist in educational standards and learning achievements. Theoretical knowledge is emphasized at the expense of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education. Most reviews on school curricular have not been relevant to needs of the people or practice oriented (Igbuzor, 2006). There is poor monitoring of innovative policies and programmes.

In this scenario, most students in Nigeria lack interest in education. Forty – seven percent of students drop out of school because of lack of interest according to State Educational Directors Association (2008). The 2009 West African Examination Council result showed an overall poor performance with only 26 percent obtaining a credit pass in Mathematics and English. Moreover the National Examinations Council (NECO) November/ December (2009) result showed 98 percent failure in English and Mathematics. Only 1.8 percent got five credits including English and mathematics. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2009) ''it was the poorest result in the history of the examination body''. At the primary school level, things are not much better; the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2009) observed that ''in an international study reported by the World Bank in which 22 countries in sub-Saharan and North Africa are compared, the learning achievement of students in Nigeria's primary

schools were the lowest with national mean score of 30% compared with 70% in Tunisia and 51% in Mali.

A lack of student engagement is a predictor for poor achievements and dropping out of school (State Educational Technology Directors Association, 2008). The association believe that engaged students learn more retain more than students who are not engaged. It is unfortunate that the vision of student engagement is too rare among students and teachers; and in many institutions of learning insufficient thought is given to the notion of student engagement, many see it meaningless platitude (Markwell, 2007).

Recommendations / Ways to Engage Students Within and Beyond Classroom

Bishop (2000); Jones (2008) have proffered ways to engage students for meaningful classroom interaction. They include:

1. Teachers should design collaborative tasks by giving students clear, explicit instructions related to goal of the course and subsequent tests.
2. Group learning should be highly valued and encouraged.
3. The teacher should cultivate one to one relationship so as to motivate students to higher levels of engagement in academics and school life.
4. Teachers should take responsibility for student engagement rather than expecting students to come to class naturally.
5. Teachers should call students constantly to answer questions. Students should be called by name first without asking for volunteers.
6. Teacher should encourage students to speak; protect the soft – spoken and encourage shy students to speak.
7. Teachers should encourage peer review when students make presentations which they should do frequently. Students' should do networking exercises by allowing students meet themselves and know each other.
8. Ask for early feedback from students by allowing students suggest how they learn best and always report back to the class what you learned from the feedback changes.
9. Nigerian government should place high premium on improving the conditions the students study; they should also motivate teacher so as to be in good frame of mind to motivate the students.
10. There should be continuous professional development of teachers on the use of technology in the classroom.

Discussion, Implication, and Conclusion

Education is a broad field, a science - field of inquiry - and a national sector investment area, and a system. It is a lifelong process which changes over time and must be updated as realities and knowledge also evolves (Obanya, 2008). There cannot be holistic development if there is poor student engagement. This is because most students will drop because of mere lack of interest, thereby constituting nuisance in other sectors of the economy. According to the scholar there is education in every other sector of the economy. There is need to have strong love and attachment to education so that students will be able to engage and motivate others. When there is proper interaction among different target groups in the society- early childhood, school age children- the goal of universal basic education would be realized.

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