

School Supervision and Performance Enhancement Devices at the Local Education Authority Level

O. S. Elegbeleye

Department of Psychology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The paper focused on educational service delivery at the community level. It contended that the manner in which educational services are packaged, managed and delivered at the local authority level determines whether a nation will succeed in building for its polity a robust and virile educational system that would span all the cadres of the nation's educational tiers. What therefore need to be done to facilitate the interactive and direct participation in the administration and management of schools and communication networking within the local authority sphere of influence were highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

To borrow from a relevant portion of the Nigerian National Policy on Education, there is no gainsaying that the success of any system of education is hinged on proper planning, efficient administration and adequate financing. Proper planning so as to be able to define an operational philosophy that would place the educational objective in its proper position in history, review the factors that motivated the formulation of the objectives by tracing the historical events for the birth of the idea for formal education, and provide rationales for the new effort. Putting all these observances in place would serve certain positive ends which include, the facilitation of proper and dependable evaluation criterion, that is, providing an ample opportunity to compare completed tasks with the primary objectives that set it in motion and judge whether progress has been made through the achievement of the set goals. If set goals have been achieved, then the opportunity is also provided for the setting of new goals by formulating new hypotheses to complement the new heights reached. But where the set goals have not been achieved, proper planning provides the opportunity again for a fresh review of factors and weak inputs likely to be responsible for poor results.

School system and by extension, their management and day-to-day administration should grow out of the life and social ethos of the community, which they serve. The reason being that whichever ultimate end the school system is fitted to serve is bound to have a ripple effect on the local community. Therefore when well administered, a school system benefits the

local community by boosting the local economy through interactive service provision such as providing employment for local hands by hiring them as food vendors, security hands, clerks, cleaners and any other such service that can only be cost-effective when obtained locally. Where a school system is poorly administered, the immediate community stands to reap the bandwagon effect of such poor handling. A poorly managed school system would breed reckless students who would constitute all sorts of menace, including occasional violent rampages, which might leave in its wake a lot of material loss for the local community. There is also the danger of poor academic performance on the part of the students as their teacher, out of poor work motivation, may deliver their professional service of information dissemination very poorly.

The third factor that was cited as impinging directly on productive school system is when inadequate funding is made available for the smooth running of the daily affairs of the school system. The self-defeating consequences of not paying workers that service the system as and when due cannot be over-stretched. Moreso when facilities that were put in place to enhance proper service delivery become dilapidated and of no profitable relevance to the learning environment, then the enviable goal that teaching and scholarship are adapted to achieve will come to nought. Adequate funding also underlies the enabling strength required to properly do justice to the psychomotoric domain of human development that should be the concern of the school system. This is achieved through organised sports and games. Anybody who

knows anything about what goes into organizing games and sports events would realise it is a money-gulping venture. Hence the need to up the financial supplies to the school system so as to meet with this all-important responsibility.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY

The administrative machinery likely to enhance optimal performance within an organized school system at the community level can be premised on the following three factors namely; interactive and direct participation in the administration and management of the available schools that fall within the jurisdiction of the local government, effective lines of communication and authority flow that would clearly differentiate the policy making arm from the policy execution arm and also take cognisance of the service receivers, and thirdly, the processes of devolving functions that may not fall clearly within the function specification of either the policy makers nor the policy executors

Interactive and Direct Participation in the administration and Management of Schools

At the local level, the local education authority has the responsibility to interact with service providers at the community level. Service providers as it is contextually referred to here, are stratified into various cadres, which denote the ramifications along which intimate interactions must be forged. These cadres embrace such levels as the parents who are required to provide a home background conducive for the cognitive and affective development of the children who will populate the schools. There is the likelihood that indigenous professionals would constitute the bulk of the teaching staff of the school, hence another good reason to use the workers' background as a predictive validity criterion that can come handy during recruitment exercises and informal disciplinary instrument when such workers err. Such an interactive exercise as this is bound to produce quality support staff in the manner of cleaners, food vendors, gardeners, the security outfit, the artisans etc. are all complementary to the smooth take off of a school establishment as well as its sustenance in the subsequent years of its operations.

Direct participation as it obtains at the level of the local authority include a spate of unabridged supervision of not only the academic content of the school curriculum but also the extra-curricular activities that, though are tangential to the direct goals expected to be achieved through academic delivery, but integral to the all round development of the learner. Other areas that require constant monitoring and supervision are the facilities required to be provided to enable proper learning to take place. The questions that would guide what is appropriate to be done in this dimension are; are there enough classrooms to accommodate the student intake without a need to take a recourse to making do with make-shift arrangements? Are the staff offices spacious enough to be befitting of the status of the professional service providers hired to use them? What of the infrastructure provided, such as the available seating conveniences for students and their teachers, are they enough for their target use? are classes demarcated in a manner that would allow for non-friction among students owing to congestion, are classes partitioned in a way to allow for the least inconveniences likely to arise from noise infiltration through makeshift partitions? What of the open space required for games and sports and the facilities that come with them, are these provided in a way that would allow them to be optimally used in achieving the goals they are designed to attain?

The answers to these questions are supposed to keep the officials of the Local Education Authority on their toes. But a cursory observation will benumb the mind with shock, as so much confusion appears to have overtaken the natural attitude of assertiveness that is the peculiarity of authorised inspectors. There appears to be a disparaging lopsidedness in the school/student population and inspector ratio. Students outnumber the available schools, and the available classrooms come far short of the ratio that could foster a conducive learning environment, the numbers of schools outrageously outnumber the whole workforce of the inspectorate division of the Local Education Authority. Infrastructure comes far short of the expected standard, most school buildings are dilapidated and crumbling, school administrators hardly know where to turn to for funding. Most often they are desperate to have the salaries of their workers disbursed. Things are hardly better with the Local Education authority personnel.

Communication and Authority Flow in the Educational setting at the Community level

Communication is the process of transmitting and receiving ideas, information, and messages. The rapid transmission of information over long distances and ready access to information have become conspicuous and important features of human society, especially in the past 150 years, and in the past two decades it has become increasingly so. This however, has not left the Local Education outfit unaffected. In as much as there is a linkage between the operations of the established schools and the authority that gives them direction in terms of policy issues, a form of communication technique that will aid authentic information flow need be in place. Information flow is required in the following areas of school operations:

- Total number of school-age children in the community.
- Total number of actual school enrolment.
- Percentage of eligible school age children who are denied enrolment for no fault of theirs.
- Overall number of functional classroom buildings in the community.
- The adequacy rating and state of learning–aid infrastructural facilities.
- Availability of Sport and Sporting facilities in sufficient quantity
- Adequacy rating of Learning software such as books, diaries, school registers, continuous assessment materials, students' cumulative record folders etc.
- School accessibility rating, i.e. Road network connecting schools with community centre.
- Performance evaluation of academic staff members for promotion exercises.
- Developing instruments for evaluating the performance of the school curriculum.
- Salary disbursement technique that is fraud-proof.
- Periodic headcount and certificate verification of the workforce
- Setting the modality and preparing students for State or National examinations.
- Performance evaluation of schools at state or national examinations.
- Determining disciplinary measures for erring staff members
- Periodic educational policy review exercise. Communication must be able to produce the

dimensions of the sender and the receiver, the medium and the message. As it is, the kernel of all messages to be dispensed with are highlighted above, now leaving us with the sender, the medium and the receiver.

The Sender of policy, implementation, and supervisory messages in this case is the personnel of the local education authority whose major role could be said to be supervisory. In order to determine the direct and tangential effect, which the conduct of the sender has on the message and the receiver, there is a need to do a review of the following criteria:

- Academic qualification of the personnel
- Experience
- Commitment Level
- Remuneration
- Development opportunity on the job
- Expertise

The question to ask in the Nigeria of today is; is there anybody who is mindful of fixing round pegs in round holes in matters that have to do with public good? How many of the personnel saddled with discharging the huge responsibilities at the local authority level have qualifications in Educational Administration? Or how many have been exposed to on-the-job training? How many job-relevant workshops and seminars have these personnel attended over a period of one calendar year, and how frequently are the opportunity made available to them? The direction in which these questions are answered will paint the correct picture of what the nation and the polity have to contend with at the local education authority level. But a casual observation would favour a negative verdict concerning the questions.

Experience is no doubt an integral factor in public administration of any sort, be it school or in governance. Whether experience is utilized fully and compensated in the Nigerian public space is an academic question. However, evidences abound that point a finger in the direction that too much red-tapeism and bureaucratic bottleneck have combined to stifle the positive effects of experience, which is discharging one's responsibilities with the technical know-how that feeds on intuition and confidence

The best way to measure commitment level is by first determining what it is that sustains people's commitment profile. Is it the immediate gains that come in terms of pecuniary benefits, or the ostentatious and bullying opportunity that

the job provides? Is the job used as a launching pad to attain a more lucrative outcome? Or there is a deep-seated people oriented desire to make a success of the venture? etc. These considerations will easily provide identification parameters to distinguish committed professionals from mere opportunistic jobbers.

The remuneration regime of the sender, i.e. the local education personnel, comes under scrutiny so as to determine whether it is commensurate with their workload and the sensitive nature of their responsibility. What development opportunities are available to benefit from as a local education authority personnel? Are they promoted as and at when due? Are their retirement benefits paid as stipulated in the appointment contract letter? Are they encouraged to go on annual leave within the work-year by having their leave entitlements disbursed at the appropriate time? Are they encouraged to go on working trips to job-relevant locations outside the country? Etc.

The sender must be imbued with a sense of achievement and a determination base through the kind of feedback that is communicated to him by his employers. In the case of the local education unit, one would like to know what type of performance evaluation criteria are put in place to take care of the feedback angle that is being alluded to here. Of a fact is the point that the kind of civil service we inherited from our British colonizers made provision for performance evaluation schemes, but no one knows whether this has survived the travails of the downturn in national consciousness that has been the lot of Nigeria in her recent history. When there is a paucity of feedback measures a worker's sense of personal efficiency is allowed to whittle in a drought created by lack of adequate motivational efforts

Expertise is all about creating fields of specialization. This is a process in which assigned tasks are divided among different groups of workers, each of whom has a specialized task to perform. The major advantage of the technical division of labour is greater productivity, which results from several factors. The most important are a marked increase in individual and collective efficiency due to specialization and the increase in skill that specialization provides; economy in training of workers, especially with respect to time and the economy resulting from the continuous use of tools that would otherwise remain idle

during part of the working time as workers move from process to process. Within the rank and file of the local education authority personnel, are there lines of specialization that could have spawned professionals and experts over several years of operation? Are there authorities within the larger macrocosm that can be consulted to provide solution to knotty policy implementation issues? These and other questions relating to the issue of creating experts and making optimal use of their expertise need be answered.

The Medium: The kind of medium referred to here has to do with the technique of information dissemination adopted by the sender, in this case identified as the personnel of the local education authority, in communicating policy issues to the receivers. Standard means of communication include, television, radio, and newspaper. How do information get to the community schools. In most cases it is observed that the crudest means of communication devices are still used in networking the schools under the jurisdiction of the local education authority. When it is time to distribute bulky materials, school heads are invited to clear their share of the bulk. It is obvious that such school heads are left to their own devices. Where they have cars they dispense them to the task of conveying goods from the office of the local education authority head. One then can imagine what happens when the school head has no means of conveying the goods to the user's end point.

As integral as periodic inspection of schools is to the responsibility schedule of the LEA personnel, lack of suitable means of conveyance at times do forestall a smooth discharge of this duty. There is hardly a school in most of the LEA schools that can boast of the modern day gadgets of speedy and mass communication facilities like telephone, fax machine, etc. This is not to talk of having an elaborate Internet facilities installed. Therefore, the existing medium of communication which at best can be described as crude, between the message sender and the receiver follows the following cumbersome path; the inspector of education through the secretary to the inspectorate would send an endorsed written directive, despatched by an assigned messenger to school heads. From the school head the substance of the directives are handed down to the teachers or non-teaching staff as the case may be, who would effect the implementation. It is often not as neatly cut as it is presented here. Most often the

inspectorate secretary does not bother to contact the receiver of the directive by raising a messenger. He would just paste the information on an openly displayed notice board and expect the school heads, to whom it has been made mandatory to pay routine visit to the inspectorate division for random information tips, to pick the information. All that is required is for just one of them to pick the information; the others through the words of mouth would within a short space of time be apprised of the information.

The lopsidedness of the medium may account for the reason why Inspectors of education are hardly seen performing their duty of visiting schools for the on-the-spot assessment of educational progress as frequently as it is desired. *The Receiver* is subdivided into two major categories, which are; the professional staff and the scholars. The categories can further be compartmentalised into components. For example; the professional category covers the academic staff and the administrative outfit. While the school head and his deputy belong to both categories, others belong strictly to their branch of the equation. In the school head, assisted by his deputy, are reposed much of the authority of implementing the policies that emanate from the LEA. For the school head to be able to discharge his duties of maintaining decorum in the school, he is imbued with the authority to initiate disciplinary actions against any erring member of the school community including the students. He is also the chief accountant of the school, meaning that he is responsible for how money is disbursed and how salary is paid to various categories of workers. He, assisted again by a network of sub-administrative hands such as the HODs and the school psychologist or counsellor, supervises learning activities and ensures that the school curriculum is properly interpreted and teaching delivery services well executed.

Against the backdrop of these awesome responsibilities is the fact that the school head still has to play the errand boy connecting his school with the LEA for periodic briefings. The efficiency of this category of receiver can be evaluated to the degree to which the following questions are answered in the affirmative; Are the wherewithal to perform the responsibilities of his office provided in sufficient quantity and quality to justify any high expectation from his evaluators (i.e. the LEA)? For example; are

materials designed for record keeping in the school supplied in sufficient quantity and on time? Are teachers posted to the various schools according to need? Is student enrolment commensurate with available facilities in the schools such as classrooms, seating spaces, school furniture, sporting arena complemented with game and sport equipments? Convenient office spaces for the staff? Is there a convenient linkage, such as modern gadgets for communication such as telephones and faxes, between the schools and the LEA? Are the disciplinary measures recommended by him to the LEA in respect of an erring member of staff treated in a manner that will leave him with some modicum of respect from other staff members? Is his opinion sought in matters relating to transfer of teachers to and from his school? Are the accounts of the school audited in good time to prevent loss of supporting documents and misappropriation of funds meant for the development of the school? These and other question need to be answered affirmatively for this particular receiver to be adjudged well equipped to perform the duty of a good receiver.

The teachers and the students play complementary roles in the business of learning, without one the other cannot function, as it should. Teachers are saddled with the responsibility of teaching their courses as scheduled in the school timetable. He is expected to be punctual in the school and in the classroom. He is expected to have an above-average mastery of the course he teaches his students. He is responsible for the performance of his students in the various examinations conducted in his subject area whether internally or externally. He is expected to be an epitome of moral uprightness to be emulated by the students he teaches. He is supposed to liaise with the school counsellor and students' parents to monitor the progress of his students both in academic and moral matters, and both within and outside the school. He is expected to keep an up-to-date record about the class he is advising. He also should be answerable to the school head in all spheres that concern the discharge of his duties as a teacher.

Again, for this second category of receiver to be evaluated on the above-mentioned criteria, some questions need be answered in the affirmative; are his salaries and benefits paid as and at when due? Is he encouraged to go on a paid annual leave within one calendar year? Are

the welfare schemes attached to his job contract executed to the letters? For example; does he enjoy free medical service with a specified number of his family members? Is he given research grants to further assist him to keep abreast of new developments in his field of specialization? Are there well-equipped library that he can use as a back up for his research activities? Is he encouraged to attend conferences at least once in a year? Does he have a say in the readiness-and-fitness-profile of the students that he teaches, i.e. does he have a say in the enrolment procedure of the students he is hired to teach? What about his workload, is it such that would allow him a deserved respite from time to time? What of his pay packet, is it commensurate with his workload and qualifications? Is he made to teach what he trained for? Is he remunerated for introducing novel ideas into his teaching? Is he encouraged to take study leaves to better his lot as a professional? These and a lot more questions pertaining to his welfare and the paraphernalia of his schedules need be answered in the affirmative before it could be safely concluded that he is a superb receiver.

The students constitute the third leg of the receiver categories. As it is with the first two categories, they too, have their responsibilities and obligations. It has been said that without them the learning process is not complete. In terms of responsibility, they are expected to make themselves available in the classroom at the scheduled lecture hours, to be punctual in school. To conduct themselves in a decorous manner both in the classroom and within and outside the school premises. To obey orders that are lawfully given by the school's learning agents. To know, imbibe and obey school rules and regulations. To conduct his learning activities within the stipulated school schedule and cultivate a robust study habit that is examination-friendly. He is expected not to default in the payment of whatever learning subscription that may be recommended for payment by the school. To distance himself from examination malpractices and cultism of whatever hue. In general he is charged with the duty of carrying the banners of his school aloft. But with these come obligations that must be put in place by the education facilitators, such as the LEA, the school authority and his parents for the educational partnership to yield fruits, the following questions therefore becomes pertinent.

Is the school administrative machine run with near perfect efficiency such that discipline is made its watchword? Are all the school service providers (teachers, and the administrative cadre) alive to their responsibility towards the students? What condition of goodfit are the laboratory and the library? Are they well stocked in a manner that meets with the students' academic requirement? Are there well-equipped recreational facilities that can relieve study related fatigues? Can the school boast of the kind of record keeping expertise that can account for the whereabouts of students at all times when school is in session? Is the conduct of examination appropriately managed such that examination malpractices are reduced and students' performance in examinations properly assessed? Are students prepared and presented for external examinations in a stress-free manner? Are indigent students assisted with bursary by the state and the local governments? Is the school academic curriculum delivered in a manner to make students become self reliant after school? These and several other questions need be answered in the affirmative before this category of receiver can be adjudged as being fit to properly reflect the laudable policies put into effect by the sender.

From the fore going it can easily be deduced that all the stakeholders in the educational sector has a role to play to boost the fortunes of education particularly at the community level. The third area of concern that needs to focus attention upon is the general funding of the existing schools at the community level. Among the services that fund is required to enhance are provision and up-dating or repairing of existing facilities in schools. Expansion of the existing schools and the building of new ones. Subventing schools in the area of supplies that cover school record books, publication of up-to-date syllabus. Assisting with funds in the arrangement of sports tournaments. Payment of workers in accordance with the substance of their contract. Providing funds for the recruitment of new professionals. Making funds available for the payment of bursary to students so as to provide an opportunity for the indigent ones to benefit from educational service delivery. Funds should also be supplied in adequate measure to take care of training on the job for teachers etc.

However what we have on the ground is a far cry from the ideals of what a modern day school

that would produce progressive students and by extension able citizens should look like. Teachers are not paid as and at when due. Facilities are supplied in insufficient quantity. Libraries are a shadow of what ought to be where they are available at all. Laboratories only go by the name and not by the substance for which they are designed. They are largely empty and equipped with antiquated chemicals and equipments.

RECOMMENDATION

To discharge the responsibility of supervising schools in a manner that would enhance productivity, Funds must be made available to run the LEA in a functional way. Policy issues concerning educational development at the community level should be reviewed from time to time for updating so as to be current and computer-age compliant. School heads and the teaching hands who will directly be involved in dispensing the learning ideals to the students

should be motivated to do their jobs by being treated with respect by both the supervisory agents and the students parents. Sourcing for funds should not exclude the community members who themselves are stakeholders in the education of the community children. Existing schools should be expanded to accommodate more schools. And as the community population of inhabitants increases, number of schools newly established should also increase to accommodate the spill over of students from the existing schools. Inasmuch as it is said and is confirmed to be true that education is the vehicle of development and that a nation is made up of a conglomeration of communities hence, running a virile educational system at the local level is a precursor to building a virile and upwardly mobile nation that would be a celebrated motherland.

REFERENCE

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