Attaining Effectiveness in Primary Education in Kwara State through School-Based Management

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Abstract

This paper on School Based Management (SBM) and attaining effectiveness in primary education in Kwara State has attempted an expository foray on the SBM. It explains the concept SBM, clarifies its model and types and the conceptual framework supporting the innovative management strategy is enunciated. The paper as well examines fundamental functions of SBM wherever it is said to be introduced from the very general functions to the more ambitious and rarely allowed ones. In the same connections, the paper, from interactions with stakeholders where SBM is in operation in Kwara State, attempts an ex-ray of how, what and who of the SBM. A balanced SBM is identified with the type in Kwara and it is observed that the type in operation in Kwara is the very weak type that nearly all components involved in it do not seem to clearly have a good grasp of what SBM should serve. Some recommendations offered in this paper include among others an obligatory need to define and educate various segments in the SBM Committee on the objectives of the management strategy; and to eliminate characteristic Nigerian redtapism, an enabling act of parliament would be necessary to delineate roles and empower the SBM operation in the State as strengthening measures and as a way of curbing manipulations.

Introduction

A major challenge confronting the educational system particularly in the third world nations is the dire need to improve quality of learning and by implication outcomes of learning. One of the calculated steps taken in form of innovations and reforms to attain effectiveness in the school system is the introduction of School Based Management (SBM). School Based Management is commonly explained as decentralization of official whims in the management of school system from a monolithic central government to complex and varied units within schools location milieu. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) describe SBM as the decentralization of official power from the main central seat of authority to the school level. Malen, et al (1990) perceive SBM

as a formal alteration of governance structure as a form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvement might be stimulated and sustained (p.290)

This form of power devolution is described as the transfer of some degree of administrative authority or power to lower hierarchy within the stream of government departments and parastatals by way of handling over workloads to staff and officials outside the central seat of power.

Primary education refers to initial and foundational schooling that every child (school-goer) in Nigeria attends as her point of entrance into the long cadred Nigeria educational system. The primary education has gone through quite too many policy changes. This in form of duration of study at the primary level- 1950-60s, 7years, 1970s-90s, 6years and from 2000, 9years haven been joined with initial 3years secondary education to be called Basic Education. It has been called different nomenclature within the same period; and its mode of management has witnessed numerous changes as well. The most current of these changes is the introduction of School Based Management in Kwara State from 2008.

Kwara State is one of the 36 federating states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Kwara State was created in 1967 alongside 11 others, presently Kwara State has 16 local governments; a State Universal Basic Education agency (SUBEB) in the State capital and Local Government Universal Basic Education in each of the 16. Aside from these echelons of education authorities, each primary school in Kwara State from 2008 has SBMC with complicated and seeming cloudy understanding of the concept by the parents and teachers who constitute the school based managers.

The Goals of Primary Education

The following among others are the broad basic goals of primary education in Nigeria according to Abdul Kareem (1999):

1. To integrate an individual into a sound and effective citizen

2. To give equal educational opportunities for all citizens

3. To provide life-long education to the citizens right from the primary school

4. To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy in the child

5. To inculcate ability to communicate effectively in the child

6. To lay sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking

7. To provide opportunities for further education in life. (p.19)

Bearing these lofty ideals in mind, it becomes imperative to reflect on strategies that can facilitate the attainment of both the saliently stated and silent goals of the primary education. Innovations immediately come to mind when considering alternatives for enhanced students' performance, relevance of the school system to social challenges, attainable educational targets and so on.

The thinking along this line seems more germane now than before when stakeholders in education and government across the three tiers in the Nigerian federation are getting increasingly concerned of the declining dismal performance of the school system. This regrettable trend manifests in unhealthy pupils population in class and students to teacher's ratio; inadequate teaching and non-teaching resources, dysfunctional quality assurance and supervisory measures, instructional deficiency and inconsistent educational policy. All these could be summed up as ineffectiveness in the education sector.

The primary school being the most foundational of the schools strata deserves not just special attention but injection of innovative strategies and inventions so that genuine efforts could be seen as being directed at revamping the many ills of the educational system. The pre-occupation of this paper is on stemming the tide of ineffectiveness in primary education through the innovative school based management strategy as concise moves towards confronting educational challenges as a whole.

The Concept School Based Management

Rondinelli and Cheema (1983) explain SBM as a form of decentralization or shift of responsibility that includes planning, control, fiscal gathering and allocation from a main government and its delegated arms to: (i) outpost of main governments ministries (education authority level or school level); (ii) adjoining units or stratum of government; (iii) quasi-independent public corporations; (iv) state-wide, regional administrative structure; and (v) non-governmental voluntary agencies. This form of power shift goes beyond delegation of authority which usually connotes shielding authority on a specified aspect of governmental activities that demands confirmation or authentication from the source of power. SBM allows a re-organization, discretion to out-post authority to recruit, allocate funds and independently decide on the fortunes and direction of the education system within her jurisdiction/school.

Ibtisam (1999) distinguished between decentralization and devolution of authority in school based management. He submits that devolution refers to the establishment or widening by law or financially sub-divisions of government, the activities of which cannot be controlled by the central government. In this arrangement the created units act independently and they are not legally accountable to the central government. Decentralization as envisaged in SBM is a management issue that concerns decision on transfer of authority that do not require extensive consultation outside the ministry or the government as an organ

and its focus is on ensuring effectiveness in primary education. However, it is more appropriate to use the term decentralization rather than devolution when describing public education (Fiske, 1999).

School Based Management is not just an innovation that is borne out of sheer academic output but a timely answer to the desire for good education. This can be seen to involve not only physical entities like teachers, books and classrooms, but also stimulus that enhance quality teaching and learning. Hanushek and Woessmann (2007) quip that most stimulus that affect students learning outcomes are more of institutional and they identify three stimuli as: (i) choice and competition (ii) school independence, and (iii) school accountability.

The view on choice and competition has to do with the desire of parents to maximize education gain by enrolling their children in schools they are sure of comparatively higher performance (academic result). By implication, this puts pressure on schools to introduce incentives which can lead to realization of significantly higher turn outs in pupils on a comparative basis. So, parents' choice continuously triggers competition among schools. In the same vein, school independence that has to do with the autonomy of many individual schools to plan its learning activities, manage available resources to meet needs, coordinate teaching and non-teaching human resources for optimum learning outcome (students' performance). A part of the synergy is school accountability, which centres on individual school as part of its competitive strategy and independence is being able to explain its stewardship with regards to what resources have been utilized in what manner to achieve what academic height (students' performance/scores)?

It should be noted as Barrera- Osorio et al, (2009) pointed out that the core idea of SBM is that those who work in a school building should have greater management control of what transpires in the building. However, these scholars aptly describe SBM in developing economy as Nigeria as less ambitious, it though affords more community members participation in the school decision-making procedure but not put them in total control.

Different models of SBM exist. The very common ones, according to Barrera-Osorio (2009), include the following:

a. administrative control SBM- in which the authority is devolved to the school principal;

b. Professional control SBM- in which teachers hold the main decision-making authority so as to use their knowledge of the school and its students.

c. Community control SBM-in which parents have the major decision-making authority; and

d. balanced control SBM-in which decision-making authority is shared by parents and teachers (p.5).

Benefits of School Based Management

The innovative SBM portends greater advantages for the primary education in Kwara state and some of these benefits include, as fittingly put by Barrera-Osorio et al (2009) thus:

- additional input and resources from parents;

- judicious and effective resources utilization since those making the decision for each school are closely aware of its needs;

- qualitative education due to participatory and transparent use of resources;

- a conducive and friendly school environment for the fact that the community is actively involved in its control;

- ample opportunity for local stakeholders to be involved in school management which foster town and gown relationship and increase satisfaction; and

- enhanced students learning outcomes due to minimized repetition and low level dropout rates.

In addition, increased objectivity in school management that eventually minimizes corruption; and improved managerial efficiency on the part of stakeholders as efforts is made to improve upon interpersonal relations and so on so that capable participants could be saddled in one SBM process are some other invaluable advantages of SBM (Briggs and Wohlstetter, 1999).

Functions of School Based Management

Depending on the mode and model of SBM enforced, different functions confront the implementation of SBM. Since the rationale behind SBM is ensuring effectiveness, accountability and participation, most SBM perform the following functions:
- oversee the school's performance by way of monitoring test scores and students and teachers' punctuality;

- coordinate fund raising for the school;

- in some more ambitious SBM, they can appoint, discipline and remove teachers and ensure their remunerations are promptly paid; and

- though quite uncommon, consider and approve annual fiscal policy of school, and scrutinize monthly financial accounts (Barrera-Osorio et al, 1999).

Other functions of SBM, according to Rowan et al. (2004), include procurement of textbooks and other educational materials, participation in curriculum development, and infrastructural improvement.

SBM in Primary Schools in Kwara State

The introduction of School Based Management Committee (SBMC) in 2008 has witnessed some developments that have impact on the school system at that level. Each school has its own SBMC which is composed of selected members of the school community and members of the teaching staff of each school. The SBMC of each school perform such functions similar to the task allowed for the type in operation. The type in Kwara State can be called the balanced type of SBM in which members of the community and staff of school constitute the committee. A major function of the SBMC from interaction with stakeholders (schools head, and local government universal Basic Education desk officer on SBMC) is its advisory duty. SBMC as presently constituted is consulted when the schools seek to embark on any project, on modalities for raising fund and appropriation of fiscal assets. The SBMC also unofficially monitor school programmes including teaching and they are highly instrumental in soliciting more staff from supervisory agent of government.

However, the inclusion of school head boy and head girl, an alumnus of each school appear lofty as it encourages more participation of individuals who should not compromise the interest of the school, but the same arrangement can make some members of the SBMC to be underdog. This arrangement makes some members inferior to the others particularly at a time like now when politics seems to becloud sense of determining who is who in most local community.

In addition, a situation where school head appoints members of SBMC for the school may not augur well for objectivity of operations. This is particularly so because most school heads would not want to appoint people who may differ markedly in opinion from them. In fact most of them would appoint henchmen who could be shoved aside when decision on crucial school matter arise. Again, for interactions among members, a lack of enabling document like official guide make the roles of SBMC only to be tolerated at the discretion of the school head. Meetings may not be called and when is convened salient issues may not be put forward, hence the meeting may be a mere formality.

In the same vein, a lack of joint meeting of various schools SBMC at either local or state government level is a major setback to the utility of the management strategy. If such joint meetings hold apart from the inaugural one held at its inception in 2008, basis would be laid to compare notes, share opinion on challenges with a view to attaining effectiveness in school management. Grounds, too, would be level for healthy competition among SBMCs.

Recommendations

Based on the exposition of the SBM and how it is presently in practice in Kwara state, the following are hereby suggested as highpoints of ways of attaining effectiveness in primary school system.

It is highly imperative to clearly define and educate the various components of SBMC on the objectives of the management strategy. This when

well done, would make participants in school management appreciate the roles and pilot their interactions towards realizing the global goals of school system.

Nigeria being a developing nation, where the desire to make innovations work is very low and different redtapism inhibiting progress, an enabling act in form of legal statement recognizing and stating the roles and limit of participants and SBM as an entity would go a long way to strengthen and limit extent of manipulations currently plaguing the SBM committee in the State.

To curb conspiratorial tendency in the relationship of SBMC with school heads, officials of the education ministry and the different hierarchy of the Universal Basic Education offices, a clear objective and transparent selection/ election of SBMC members should be spelt out. This would bring about quality and effectiveness in the workings of the SBMCs, as only deserving men of integrity and wisdom would emerge as school managers for fixed tenure.

More so, unlike the present arrangement where the social mobilization unit of the local government universal basic education superficially is in charge of SBMCs a special and functional office should be saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the SBMCs. This is with a view to ensuring they do not deviate nor compromise from the noble objectives of attaining effective and result oriented primary education.

Furthermore, it is necessary to make it clear to the various SBMCs that their emergence is not a way to license arbitrary increase in tuition and other charges payable by students. Their fund raising technique must not scare away children of particularly the poor from school. So, they should device such means like endowment and donations from philanthropies as means of generating developmental funds for the school.

Nevertheless, the SBMCs should not carve a posture of the committee wielding big stick in reporting misdemeanor of teachers and initiating just disciplinary measures against erring school teachers; each SBMC should institute reward mechanism for deserving members of staff. Such symbolic gesture would further endear the SBMC to the teachers and in a way sustained confidence and respect would exist in the discharge of duties by these key stakeholders in effective primary education.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that the country's educational sector is enmeshed with quite complex challenges. The position of the primary education is the more disturbing owing to its strategic status in the evolution of the educated citizenry. There is therefore the dire need to introduce different forms of genuine innovations that can revitalize the education sector and make students of primary schools those who on completion of that level would have duly imbibed/attained the highlighted goals for that level as contained in the country's National Policy on Education.

The introduction of School Based Management Committee is therefore quite timely and welcomed. However, this SBMC has to be functional, transparent and devoid of undue politicization for it to be real stimulant for excellence in primary education in Kwara state. The result of introduction of such reform in education, as Barrera-Osorrio et al (1999) assert, must be seen in improved students learning outcomes (higher grade from tests) within six (6) years at the most, or else it becomes expedient to review such reform and work out a more functional innovation. This informed view, it is hoped that concerned authorities would see it as loyal line of duty and act courageously and timely for a secured future.

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