

CHAPTER SIX

The Role Of Headmasters In Implementing Functional Education in Nigerian Schools

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Introduction:

The importance of functional education, as a tool for satisfying the social, economic, political and cultural needs of individuals and nations, is increasingly being recognised in Developed Countries (DCs) as well as in Less Developed Countries (LDCs). As indicated by Fafunwa (1980) and Ezeocha (1988), the DCs such as the United States of America and United Kingdom, were able to harness their resources for national development because their system of education were functional enough to satisfy the personal and group needs of their people. The British Government has often tailored her education system to the needs of her citizens. Hence the British colonial educational system was beneficial to the British students but when it was transplanted into the Nigerian educational environment, it failed woefully to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the Nigerian citizen.

In recent times, there has been a consistent call by the cream of the Nigerian populace (Lecturers, Doctors, Teachers, Industrialists, Lawyers, Engineers and Politicians) for a system of education that is purposeful and functional at all levels of educational pyramid. The potent calls for functional education must have arisen as a result of the fact that much of the education hitherto imparted to our learners, have been found lacking in the overall function of making the school product to use the skills and knowledge acquired to meet his daily needs. Education is expected to be functional in a large measure, otherwise it becomes deficient and worthless.

The functional value of education is not absolute, but relative to place, time and circumstances with the ultimate goal of ensuring man's happiness (Okafor, 1981).

What then is functional education? Functional education according to Good (1959) is the "form of education for which there is an anticipated application, one that assumes that the learner has immediate meaning, translatable into action for his learning activities. This means that the type of education offered should be such that will be useful to the learner in the peculiar environment in which he finds himself.

If there is any educational level in which functional education should be solidly developed, it is the primary school. Primary school represents a fundamental institution in which all relevant skills, values, concepts, ideas and knowledge are expected to be imparted to children aged normally 6 to 11 + . According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) an important objective of primary education is "to give the child the opportunities to develop such skills as will enable him to function effectively in the society (NPE, 1981). Since primary school forms the base of the whole educational system, functional education should be firmly established in it. It is when a solid foundation has been laid at this grassroot level that more advanced skills, knowledge and values can be fruitfully acquired at secondary and tertiary educational levels.

For primary schools to be truly functional, the particular needs of the pupils, subject matter and the society, must be met by the teachers, while the headmaster must ensure that he takes proper care of managing all the human and material resources.

Against this background, the objectives of this paper are to:

- a) examine the concept of "Headmaster" and review the historical development of primary education in Nigeria;
- b) discuss the need for functional primary education in Nigeria, and
- c) analyse the role of headmasters in the implementation of functional education in Nigeria.

2. The Headmaster in the Nigerian School System

The Headmaster (or headmistress) is the head-teacher and the chief executive in the primary school system. Since almost every village in Nigeria has at least a primary school, headmasters operate at the grassroot level of the administrative organisation. Primary school personnel, notably teachers

and pupils, have to be co-ordinated in order to achieve the objectives of promoting teaching and learning. An important anchor in the promotion of the attainment of primary school objectives is the headmaster. As a man or woman on the spot, his/her role is that of an educational leader, an executor of educational policies, a father, a counsellor and a decision maker. His role is both complex and demanding for it is by his action or inaction that the educational goals in the primary schools have to be judged, (Awoniyi, 1982).

Headmasters, especially those in rural primary schools in Nigeria, are very important. Apart from the fact that they are well known in the locality where they work, they happen to be the most numerous and widespread of all posts in educational administration (Nwagwu, 1978). The headmaster derives his importance from the role he plays as the leader of a primary institution. The individual school, where teaching learning activities take place and the school environment, which are largely products of the leadership given by the headmaster and his staff, are crucial in the education of the young children who are in their most formative and impressionable years. Headmasters hold the key to the type of learning experiences to which children are exposed in their individual schools. In fact, most parents tend to show more interest in the administration of primary schools in their locality than in any other educational system.

Over the years, developments in the Nigerian nation have affected the status and role of the headmaster. In the past, there were one room, one teacher schools. But with increased demand for education and large pupil enrolments, especially in urban areas, primary schools grew to have many teachers and many classrooms. The need arose for somebody who could co-ordinate the growing activities of the school. This person, usually the oldest and most experienced teacher on the staff, was designated headmaster. Headmasters in the past had a class to teach, usually the highest class. Today, except in fairly small rural schools, the task of managing the school has become a full-time assignment. Most schools have Assistant Headmasters to assist the substantive school head.

In view of the increasing complexity of primary school management, the headmaster has two major responsibilities — Managerial leadership and instructional leadership. He organises and administers the primary school and also ensures that teaching and learning are effectively carried on in the school. Above all, he creates a meaningful learning environment for functional education to blossom in his primary school.

3 Need for Functional Education in Primary School.

More than at any other time in our national history, the recent call for functional education, to be established at primary school, has been unprecedented. The view is hinged on the notion that, if functional education is firmly established at the grassroot level of education, its fruits will spread to secondary and tertiary educational levels. But one may ask: What are the reasons behind the call or demand for functional primary education in Nigeria? A review of the works of Ukeje (1966), Busia (1969) indicates that the following factors are largely responsible for the high demand for functional education in primary schools.

First, the traditional African education, which predated colonial education, was functional in nature. The young ones were taught the local language, codes of good behaviour and, generally, the culture of the society in which they lived. They were taught how to cope with their environment, how to farm or hunt, fish or prepare food or run a home. Through informal methods, the young learnt by participating in activities along side their elders. They learnt by listening, watching and doing. The products of traditional education could live effectively in their environment. But with the coming of the colonialists, education processes changed. Although there are several advantages in the Western formal education, recent developments, such as moral decadence, crime and delinquency, seem to have increased with the growing sophistication of western education adopted in Nigeria. Today schools and the home are no longer as integrated as they are expected to be. The schools do not seem to prepare the child for life in his community. Coupled with this is the unprecedented unemployment rate that has hit majority of the so-called educated Nigerians. In a situation where university graduates roam the streets of urban centres without jobs, there is nothing that can be more realistic and timely than the call for cultural revival and curriculum transformation in such a manner that people will look inwards, go back to their roots and do something practical to earn their living.

Second is the austerity measures adopted by the Federal Government since oil revenue started dwindling in 1981. Nigeria has depended on one major source of revenue — oil for too long. But with the decreasing oil fortunes, researchers, intellectuals and industrialists are asking questions such as this: If Japan is able to adapt western technology to their own environment, and thereby surpass the west, why should Nigerians not adopt an educational system that is relevant to our cultural milieu? The issue is not to condemn wholesale every skill or knowledge got from western education but to adapt the relevant aspects of western education to our own environment. Today a

relatively larger number of people are in favour with Technical education than in the past, because it will prepare them for active life in society.

Third, the cost of buying books, and catering for children, is growing daily. In a system where primary school leavers emerge from school without any relevant proficiency for life, more people are calling for a change. By 1970 the population of primary school children was 3.4 million. This increased to 15.3 million in 1982. But due to austerity measures and economic squeeze, which reduced the economic capability of most families, the enrolment decreased drastically to 12.9 million in 1987 (CBN 1987). The relatively decreasing enrolment is a reflection of high cost of education in the face of low utility derived from the system.

Finally, is the fact that majority of the people, who acquired the liberal art education and social studies, upon which the traditional primary schools were based, are as poor as church rat in most parts of Nigeria. By contrast, the greater proportion of individuals that embraced vocational skills and trades, after primary education, are today millionaires. Some of them are big time farmers and international businessmen. In a country where wealth is an important index of fame and success in life, the tendency for more people is to demand primary education that will emphasize manipulative skills that will provide school leavers with the wherewithal to create jobs or at least take up any job that can yield money in the local community. Since majority of the illiterate but successful businessmen did not benefit from the western oriented primary education, there is a growing feeling by the masses of the Nigerian people that only functional education, which is practical and sufficiently job-oriented, is required in schools, while theoretical education should be given less emphasis.

4. The Role of Headmasters in the Implementation of Functional Education:

This section is intended to examine the role of primary school head teachers (and their assistants) in the day to day promotion of functional education in primary schools. Primary schools are established, first and foremost, to promote teaching/learning activities. Therefore all managerial and instructional leadership provided by the headmaster must be tailored towards efficient and effective planning, co-ordinating and controlling all human and material resources at the disposal of the school, in order to achieve results. To succeed, the headmaster must enlist the full support of teachers and students and give all feeling of belonging. All managerial and administrative duties should be carried out in such a manner to provide a

healthy and interesting school environment within which teachers can teach and pupils can learn effectively. In specific terms, his roles include the following:

- a) Appreciate the National Policy on Education and master its implications for functional education: The headmaster must master the basic philosophy and aspirations of primary education as provided in the 6-3-3-4 educational system. Otherwise he would be incompetent to explain to his staff, pupils, parents and local community members, salient issues that impinge on functional education in the new programme. To be able to appreciate the full import of the new system of education, the head teacher should always strive to obtain and study up-to-date published materials on the new education system. He should inspire and encourage his teachers to study and acquire practical skills that will help them to satisfy the needs of the present day pupils.
- b) Understand his responsibilities as leader and Administrator: The headmaster is both a leader and administrator. As the key administrator, he should use all existing government approved procedures to achieve organisational goals. As the chief stabilising force in the school, he should be thoroughly dedicated and dependable. He should exhibit leadership by example and should conduct himself in a manner that teachers, parents and pupils will have full confidence in him in all matters. He should, as much as possible, be accessible to all in discharging his official duties. He must be honest, God fearing and fair in praise and blame and firm in judgement. He should cultivate good human relations in dealing with people, irrespective of their sex and social status. He should endeavour to communicate effectively to people in the course of his managerial duties.
- c) Promote the teaching/learning of science and technical skills; we now live in an age of Science and Technology. Besides, the National Policy on Education provides that pupils should be taught manipulative skills (as done in Agriculture, Fine Art, Music, Home Economics, and Drawing of geometrical objects in mathematics) that will fit them into active industrial professions in later life. Nigeria is blessed with a diversity of mineral, plant, soil and other resources. It is the duty of the headmaster to ensure that pupils are mobilised for such activities as groundnut and cotton cultivation in Northern areas, yam and cassava cultivation in the South and Middle Belt, wood carving in Benin Kingdom, and metal work in Awka district of Anambra State. Girls, in particular, should be

taught the simple skills of knitting, weaving and cooking. Skills acquired early at primary school are very crucial to choosing careers in later life. As a matter of fact, every local school should, on the basis of available resources, emphasize the teaching of certain manual skills. With dedication the food crops cultivated on school farms can be sold to provide needed revenue and products of Fine Art can be sold for money. If these practical skills are taught devotedly, school leavers who are unable to further their education can engage in meaningful activities.

- d) **Provision of Teaching Aids:** Most of our primary schools lack the essential teaching aids for primary science, mathematics, social studies, music and other subjects. Yet it is clear that no meaningful skills and knowledge can be acquired in primary school where appropriate teaching aids are lacking. The tender age and the stage of intellectual development of the children demand that pupils should be taught with learning materials that they can see, touch or feel. Most primary schools lack science laboratories, art rooms, mathematical and other subjects' equipment. While governments should brace up to equip schools with needed teaching facilities, school heads and teachers should not fold their arms and wait for government to act. An effective headmaster should discuss with his staff the innovative approaches to the teaching of every subject. He should encourage teachers and pupils to improvise some aids from local sources.
- e) **Organisation of the school Time Table and School Calendar:** Time allocation to various activities is very crucial in the administrative planning of every headmaster. Well drawn time-tables should be kept by all teachers. As much as possible supervision should be done in such a way to ensure that activities in the time-table are executed accordingly.
- f) **Create a School Climate that is conducive to teaching/learning.** The headmaster has a duty to establish cordial relationship with both staff and pupils. He should create and maintain a working environment where mutual understanding and respect are the guiding principles. At all times, he should aim at establishing such a school climate that will foster the growth of high morale among staff and pupils.
- g) **Maintaining Discipline:** One of the bane of the Nigerian society is indiscipline. This is very rife among our younger generation, some of whom are in primary schools. Some pupils engage in crime and delinquency through imitation of their peers. Others adopt evil habits through their parents, and others. No meaningful education can be im-

parted in an undisciplined' environment. It will take a disciplined headmaster to maintain discipline in a school. Hence all headmasters should strive to maintain the right social decorum and instil discipline in the staff and pupils. This he can do through leadership by example.

- h) Pupil Personal Records and Reports: In Nigeria, record keeping and data analysis for effective school management are not carefully planned. An effective headmaster must keep adequate record of his staff and pupil activities. Based on accurate records, the headmaster should be able to follow with keen interest the development of his pupils as they progress from one class to another and even when they graduate from his school. Such records are valuable tools for the counselling activities by headmasters on their pupils.
- i) Promote staff in-service Courses: The Headteacher should encourage teachers to participate in workshops, seminars and other in-service courses to up-date their knowledge. Teachers whose highest qualification is not above Teachers' Certificate Grade Two should be encouraged to undertake a course leading to Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) or at least Associateship Certificate in Education (ACE).
- j) Manage school plant and Equipment: The headmaster should manage the school buildings in a way that will present a clean environment (Ogunu, 1989). He should:
 - i) determine the physical plant needs of the school;
 - ii) develop a comprehensive plan for the orderly growth of school plant facilities;
 - iii) develop an efficient programme of operation of maintenance of physical plant;
 - iv) conduct periodic inspection of plant and take steps to effect repairs where need be.
- k) Provision of Guidance and Counselling Services: Most primary schools lack adequate guidance and counselling services. The headmaster has a role to organise his teachers in a way that they will co-operate with him to see that pupils with low aptitude in certain subjects (as mathematics or sciences) are given adequate guidance and counselling.
- l) Regular supervision and Judicious evaluation of teachers: The headteacher should undertake regular supervision of staff to ensure that they teach worthwhile skills that will engender functional education.

Those who teach well should be given high rating during appraisal sessions and those who perform poorly low ratings but encouraged to improve.

- m) **Continuous Assessment:** Every primary school teacher should undergo a training course, no matter how short, on procedures of conducting Continuous Assessment (CA). This training is crucial because of the recent federal government statement on the fact that primary six certificate examination has been cancelled. The statement has it that the assessment had been graduated to cover the work done from primaries three to six in proportion of 10, 20, 30 and 40 percent respectively (Fafunwa, 1990). Since the majority of the existing teachers did not train for C.A., urgent steps should be taken to give adequate training to all the teachers.
- n) **Participate in curriculum planning and development:** If headmasters and teachers participate in primary school curriculum planning they will not only make valuable in-puts into the system but they will also strive to ensure that knowledge and skills, that will promote functional education, are effectively promoted.
- o) **Prudent management of school Finances:** Most primary schools face the problem of lean financial resources. The money allocated by Federal Government for running schools are often inadequate. In the face of this inadequacy, schools should look inwards to generate funds from local sources e.g. sale of crops from school farms. Headmasters should strive to disburse available funds judiciously.

Conclusion:

It is clear that the new primary school curriculum has been designed by the Federal Government of Nigeria to give a comprehensive and functional education to all citizens. What is needed now is concerted efforts by school heads, teachers and pupils to ensure that adequate resources are mobilised towards its implementation. In particular headmasters and teachers should recognise the important role of functional education and take appropriate steps to prepare pupils to become functional and practical men and women of the future. This inevitably calls for a programme of incentives (such as special allowances for primary school teachers) to make teaching more attractive. If headmasters are to be able to meet the growing challenges of managing the modern primary schools, there is need to undergo at least an NCE (Primary Education) course where they will acquire more efficient

managing the modern primary schools, there is need to undergo at least an NCE (Primary Education) course where they will acquire more efficient pedagogic and management skills. This will no doubt improve the competencies of the headteacher and enable him/her to make worthwhile managerial decisions promptly and efficiently.

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