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Work Environment and Productivity among Primary School Teachers in Nigeria (Pp. 367-381)

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Abstract

This paper examined the influence of work environment on teachers' productivity in Primary schools in Nigeria. Since primary education is the starting point for the citizen's general development and also the basic foundation for subsequent levels of education, a lot is expected from the teacher. Every education system depends heavily on the quality and productivity of its teachers for improving and maintaining standards and quality. This paper tried to identify and establish the relationship between work environment and the Nigeria primary school teachers' productivity. Recommendations were made for the improvement of the work environment of Nigeria primary school teachers to greater productivity towards the attainment of the objectives of primary education.

Keywords: Work Environment, Productivity, Primary Schools, Nigerian Teachers

Introduction

Basic Primary Education in Nigeria has been regarded by some parents as an optional commodity that is not essential for the child. This situation has arisen because of religious, cultural and economic factors.

The main objective of the primary school education is to train individuals to read, write and be numerically literate. In recent times, it is a note that many primary school leavers can neither read nor write accurately. Judging from the products of the Nigerian primary school, there is a big question mark on level of performance and the productivity of their teachers.

It is also observed that many Nigerians avoid sending their wards to public primary school because the products of public primary schools are the greater victims of the inability to read and write. From interactions with the primary school teacher in the public or government owned school there are stories of woes as regards their poor work environment. Primary school teacher complain bitterly about the irregularities in the payments of their salaries and allowance. They are dissatisfied with the infrastructural facilities in school, equipment and general environment. Their offices are ill-equipped. Most of the times the commonest teaching aid as the chalk chalkboard are not available for level of motivation is terribly low, such that a typical primary school teacher complains all the time about lack of job satisfaction and loss of interest on their part. They agree that they have not put their best and that the educational standards are falling.

They spend most of the school year at home and in their petty business places because most of the time, they are on industrial actions protesting against the lack of concern of government over their welfare. Sometimes in a typical school year or academic session, the period they teach is far less than the period the away from school. Public of public primary school learn very little, they are found most of the time loitering the streets, hawking and having no meaningful learning.

The lack of interest, concentration and continuity in the teacher work reduces their performance and productivity especially when coupled with the absence of on-the job training programmes, seminars and conference to update their knowledge and skills. They therefore become ill-motivated frustrated unproductive. The attrition rates among teacher are high compared to other profession. It is however pleasing to observe that the present government at the state levels are embarking on massive renovation of primary school in their states. It is hoped that this improved infrastructural facilities will be

complements with other necessary facilities in order to improve the work environment of the teachers for greater productivity.

The Position of the primary school teacher

'Primary' means first and the first stage of formal education. Just as we have 'secondary' for the second stage and 'tertiary' for the third stage which includes all kinds of post secondary education. But primary education in its usual accepted sense is not the first stage in the education of children. All children start receiving their education at home. Some pass through nursery school.

All over the world, both in the developing and the developed countries, the primary school exists to cater for children of approximately the same age group and are exposed to approximately the same curricular of reading, writing and arithmetic. The duration of primary education varies from country to country. In Nigeria, the normal duration is six years according to the 6-3-3-4 education system.

It was long recognized in Nigeria that without teachers the educational objectives as specified in the national Policy on Education would not be realized. Indeed, reformers of education may establish new schools, effect changes on the structure and curriculum, recommend and prescribed teaching methods and aids but in the end the teacher will be responsible for applying them. The teacher is the one that would translate educational objectives into knowledge and skill and transfer them to students in the classroom.

Accordingly, the teacher emits and commands the image of one who improves the physical condition of the classroom through orderliness, discipline and control and of one who makes diagnoses of students' feelings and attitudes inferred from their behaviour and response in the classroom environment. Hence, in the absence of school programmes the major responsibility of working with children in the school rests with the teacher. (Lash and Kirkpatrick, 1990).

Objectives of primary education

The objectives of primary education according to Ndagi (1995). are as follow:

- Development of permanent literacy and numeracy in children.

- Development of the ability to communicate effectively.
- Training for further education and preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.
- Development of good morals.
- Development of the basis for good physical health education.
- Development of basis for scientific and reflective thoughts.

Judging from poor work environment of the Nigerian primary school teacher the above objectives are achieved. We shall now take an overview of work environment of Nigeria primary school teachers in relation to their productivity.

The Concept of work environment

Work environment is the totality of conditions under which a person or a group of persons works or performs his or her duties. Work environment can be in form of physical environment, human environment and relationship with colleagues and administrators, interaction within the system and the general aura of the work climate.

Nakpodia (2006) believes that in any educational arrangement, the success lies in the commitment of the teachers. But in Nigeria according to him, teachers who are the shapers of civilization are sentenced to perpetual decent poverty. It is only recently with the present democratic dispensation that the Nigeria teachers' salaries have been made reasonably attractive. Salaries and allowances however are not the only incentive for job satisfaction and commitment.

Physical appearance of the school

Most teachers do not consider the importance of the school environment to the students' growth and development. Some teachers may not appreciate the negative impact of dilapidated, leaking and ill-ventilated school house with broken window panes, or defective walls, or muddy and sandy floor, on the students' behaviour. It would be stating the obvious to say that no normal student would embrace such a social environment, as it leads to students' anger, tension and frustration, and inhibits effective classroom control.

Our school environment should be clean enough to attract even the most unwilling student. The overcrowded building is not only repulsive but energy-sapping as students struggle and wrestle over sitting positions. In

some cases, the students lean on the walls and hang near windows to listen to the teacher. The importance of comfortable sitting in effective classroom control cannot be over-emphasized. Sommer (as cited in Tawari, 1993: 171), concluded that : when students sat in a semi-circle style, those directly facing the teacher participated more than those on the sides; when students sat in rows lecture style those in front participated more than those at the back, and those in the middle participated more than those at the sides". Corroborating this finding, Adams and Biddle (as cited in Tawari, 1993), observed that "students in the periphery of the classroom are spectators rather than actors in the classroom drama.

When students are accommodated in overcrowded rooms, it is difficult for the teacher to recognize classes in small groups, and the teacher's movements, which have serious implications on the degree of concentration of the students, are impeded. Udofot (1995) rightly observed that "In such classes, teachers can only talk to the learners as a group, instead of giving them individual attention, classroom space and class size could help to dictate the teacher's teaching approach. These in turn could affect classroom discipline."

While spacious classroom could allow for small and large group discussions and activities, narrow classrooms on the other hand".... Would tend to allow for teacher-dominated teaching and no face free communication among the learners and between the teacher and the learners". In cases of acute classroom shortage, the teacher can assemble his students outside under shades of trees where such exist. This situation can be properly realized in a rural environment where the human and vehicular traffic is less, as not to cause unnecessary distraction. Such outdoor classrooms are good for non-science classes where there is no need for a regular science laboratory. It is emphasized that caution must be exercised during the beginning of the rainy season when there is frequent lightening and whirl wind. Outdoor classrooms may not be encouraged or enjoyed in the North because of the frequent whirl, dust-laden wind, especially during the harmattan season. The cold wind can also be uncomfortable and dangerous for the students to endure. (Nwideeduh, 2003).

It is generally believed that job environment is a direct reflection of performance. Let us now take a look at the different types of job environments.

Types of work environment

Physical environment

The physical environment includes infrastructural facilities such as school building, staff offices, laboratories, libraries conveniences for staff and pupil's recreational facilities etc.

The presence of the above good conditions has positive influence on teacher's attitude towards their job. When such facilities are poor or not provided, the teachers' morale is low and their level of commitment is very minimal.

Human environment

The human environment has to do with the relationship with colleagues, administrators or school as well as staff of the ministry of Education who are the supervisors. Most of the time, school supervisors look down on the teacher on the field and they do not work in co-operative efforts to achieve the goals of the education industry. Teachers need to be encouraged to have self esteem and prestige in carrying out their duties. The society generally looks down on the teachers as inferior government workers because of the position given them by virtue of their poor work environment.

Relationship with other people and colleagues

The kind of relationship between teachers and their colleagues as well as other people creates a kind of work environment. The community in which the school is located expects much from the teachers. They become hostile who are not committed to their work and they are friendly to hardworking teacher. However, the kind of relationship that exists between teachers and colleagues can affect their level of commitment as well as their attitude towards the job. For an example in an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation, teachers are happy with themselves and their jobs. According to Ukeje (1990), organizational climate is related to job satisfaction in terms of interpersonal relationship, group cohesiveness and task involvement. Workers' general perception of work environment has a great influence on the level of satisfaction and productivity.

Political environment- over politicization of education

This is an increasing politicization of education in Nigeria. At the primary school level where the local government had some degree of control, there was cases of double loyalties of teachers to both the local and the federal government which control the ministry of education and the local

government education authority controlled by different political parties with different philosophies and ideology of education.

Education administrators and teachers find themselves torn between divergent loyalties to individuals, parents, government and politicians who have often divergent expectations, demands and values for the system. Besides loyalties, the nature of school administration and facilities provided are dependent on which party is in power. Most of the time this creates an unhealthy work environment for teachers who naturally are non-politicians.

Income and employment as work environment

Nakpodia (2006) believes that job security of workers in terms of income and employment will enhance stability of personnel and a long term commitment. When teachers' salaries are not paid as at when due the level of commitment is reduced. Incessant industrial actions due to non-payment of teachers' salaries leave and other allowances are common occurrences among the primary school teachers. Many teachers now resort to engaging in other businesses which take so much of their time and interest that teaching becomes a secondary assignment. This they do because they are never sure when the next salary would be paid. The culture of paying primary school teachers' salaries well in arrears has created a very poor work environment, which has taken its toll on their productivity.

Staff motivation

Lack of adequate motivation in a system has negative effects on staff performance. In every organization, activities and programmes are planned and executed for the purpose of accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organization. The issue and problem of how to motivate teachers so that they work hard for the interest of school and also raise their socio-economic status have occupied the attention of educational administrators. It is believed that hard work and commitment on the part of the teachers will bring about good job performance. Teachers will work hard and show high level of commitment when adequately motivated. Motivation, according to Odor (1995), is the force or condition within the organization that compels workers willingly for the progress of the organization. Human beings generally require some sort of internal and external drives, incentives, encouragement and satisfaction of basic need to get the best from them towards the accomplishment of the group goals and objectives. Odor (1995).

Motivation according to Nwachukwu (1992) is an energizing force that produces or compels and maintains behaviour. A good work environment

therefore is that kind of environment where staff is highly motivated for hard job and commitment to bring about good job performance. Salaries and allowances are not as important to most staff as good job environment and job satisfaction. Several teachers leave the teaching profession not because of poor salaries but because of lack of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a function of the general aura of the work environment.

Meaning of teachers' productivity

Simply put, productivity is a measure of job performance. An employees' productivity is a measure of how much the goals of the organization is being achieved through his commitment to and performance on the job. The productivity might be high or low depending on his input. Productivity can be determined through job evaluation and appraised the extent to which the objectives of education have been attained. This can be done or determined through classroom climate and management, evaluation of teachers teaching techniques and methods, effective communication skills and so on.

One way of determining the productivity of teachers is to asses what teachers do. According to Ukeje (1990) who sited Rosecrance's speech during bowling Green conference at Ohio, described the competencies of a good teacher as follows:

- What they teach and how to teach
- The nature of human organism
- How learning takes place how to motivate behaviour
- How to help become conscious of their own values, to examine their own values and build for themselves one more satisfying to them and the society.
- How to appraise an individual to mea educational diagnosis and help persons develop in a desirable fashion.
- How to help people think critically.

There are many compelling reasons being made for teachers to access their level of performance and hence productivity vis-à-vis their work environment. When the appraisal of teachers is aimed at, it determines the degree to which teachers' orientations and classroom instructions contribute effectively towards the achievement of educational goals, and thereby becoming very helpful and profitable (Eferakeya, 1998)

In fact, teachers at all levels are very important in the overall development of a nation through their impart in the educational system, since education is the door to civilization and modernization of any country. At this juncture, it is the teachers who hold the key to this door through performances of their primary functions in the schools. (Nakopdia, 2001). Therefore, the quality of any educational system depends to a great extent on quality of teachers in terms of academics and professional qualification and experience as well as their level of competency in and dedication and their primary function. Infact, the teachers count more important than any other factor which contributes to the quality of education at any level of our educational system. Hence, Anderson and Dyke (1972) asserted that, “the corner stone of good education in any school is its faculty (teachers); fine buildings and equipment, special services and all other factors which help to provide favourable environment for leaning mean little if the learning experiences are directed by incompetent teachers”.

Relationship between work environment and productivity of teachers

Teaching is a complex process with numerous variables affection the quality of instruction and learning one of which being job environment of the teachers. Teachers all over Nigeria seem to look down upon because of poor work environment manifesting in poor conditions of service. The Nigeria primary school classroom are poorly furnished, some do not even chairs for pupils; there are no equipment or infrastructure adequate to promote effective teaching and learning. Several teachers have taught for several years without any form of retraining or professional development to update their skills and methods.

The organizational climates in most school are very poor. Ukeje (1990) believes that organizational climates are related to job satisfaction in terms of interpersonal relations, group cohesiveness and task involvement. The workers' general perception of work environment has a great influence on their job satisfaction and productivity. A healthy organizational climate is desirable for greater commitment and productivity. A healthy organizational climate could be regarded as one which facilitates job satisfaction, high productivity, low tension and high morale (Denga 1990). Several other literature abounds about the relationship between work environment and staff productivity. These include those of the findings of Ukeje (1990), Denga (1990) Nwachukwu, (1992), and Odor (1995). They all share the opinion that work environment has serious effects on job performance of teachers.

There are 3 types of work environment namely good, moderate and poor work environment.

Good work environment is the type of work environment that provides job satisfaction to employee. It is a situation where all the necessary conditions and facilities that will assist the teachers to do his work will be provided. This include as good and well-furnished air conditioned offices with good communications and information technology network, teaching facilities and materials, good working atmosphere and open organizational climate, etc. in these situations, the teacher will have a good image high esteem, he will love his job put in his best.

The moderate work environment is one whereby facilities are provided but are not in very good conditions and the working conditions are just fair but not good enough for effective learning. Teaches under this condition are not very zealous about their performance on the job will be a reflection of the not too good environment. The poor work environment is the types we have in most school today were teachers' offices are either non-existent or very poorly equipped. Many schools lack chairs for teachers and students. Some school is in such dilapidated condition that teachers feel ashamed of being associated with them. They have low morale, no job satisfaction and are not willing to put enough efforts to achieve the goals of education because they lack motivation.

Salaries and allowance are not as important as good job environment and job satisfaction with regard to job performance. Several teachers level the teaching profession because of lack job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a function of the general aura of the work environment. According to Adegun (1999), it appears a number of factors hamper the teachers' job performance or productivity inspire of society's high expectations and output the school systems. These factors have been listed as constituting the teachers' work environment.

Recently, the present government is paying attention to school facilities in an attempt to raise the standard of education. Salaries of teachers have been greatly enhanced and several materials recently begin sent to primary school. It is hoped that the government's effort will be sustained in the area of providing good work conditions for primary school teachers to raise their morale motivate them to greater productivity. On the other hand it is hoped that teachers have a positive change in attitude towards greater commitment to duty and greater productivity. Besides this, the views of teachers about

their job and the school in which they teach is that many remain in the job because they themselves been unable to climb up the educational ladder as high as they wished. They became primary school teachers not by choice but change because they have not been able to do nay better. As a result teaching in the primary school, by and large are done by men and woman who spend so much of their time trying to get out of the job, either out of the whole teaching profession or by obtaining better qualifications into post secondary school and colleges. This attitude cause rapid lowering of staff morale and high attrition rate. The lack of enthusiasm and professional commitment among many primary school teachers that accompanies their poor work environment is more damaging to the system than the lack of professional training of such teachers.

Because of poor work environment, primary school teachers incessantly go on industrial actions, which has become the only means of getting government to react to their needs and frustrations. During such periods, pupils stay at home, roam the streets hawking and imbibing criminal behaviour. Because of delves in salaries, many primary school teachers get involved in trading even inside their classroom. When such salaries are eventually paid they continue with their trading because they don't know when the next salaries would be paid. The resultant effect is the primary school teachers hardly teach. They do not prepare their lessons and they do note care whether pupils learn or not. To cover up their lapses they get all the pupils to pass at the end of the school year. Such pupils cannot nr write not show any evidence of learning. Many of the pupils fail their national common entrance examinations and are of very low discipline and morals. Many primary school teachers even send their children to private school instead of the public schools in which they teach because public school products are poor.

The teachers' lack of interest in their job results in low productivity and lack of attainment of the laudable goals of primary education. The productivity of the teachers can be measured in terms of the quality of their pupils. The quality of the pupils is evidenced in low much they have learnt to become useful citizens and their performance in external examinations. Because of the lack of motivation, the attrition, rate among primary school teachers is very high and their productivity, very low.

Implications for educational management

The quality of teachers as well as other supporting staff, their level of motivation and work environment can significantly influence the tone of the school and the performance of the pupils. This according to Whawo (1999) explains the reason why the activities of educational administration also centre around staff issues. Among others according to him, the recruitment and deployment of teachers to school and the welfare service which include improved conditions of service, provision of professional development through in-service programmes, seminars and workshops should be of special interest to educational administrators and planners.

The primary school teachers in particular should feel at home and be very happy with their jobs in order to bring up the children in the proper way that will make them become useful and productive citizens. Primary school teacher's promotions, discipline, transfers and periodic evaluation should be done with the aim of improving their performance and productivity. The school managers should adopt the Behavioural Approach proposed by B.F. Skinner otherwise known as behavioural modification, on primary school teachers to advantage. To change the poor attitude and low productivity of primary school teachers, the first step is to identify the behaviour to be changed, the current factors that support the undesired behaviour to be changed, the current environment or other factors that need to be effected to change the behaviour. Thus by carefully identifying the behaviour and grievances of the teachers to identify those actions that should be sustained by reinforcement and motivation, their job performance can be influenced.

According to Herzberg's research (1966) reported by Odor (1995) in differentiating between factors that bring about job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction, five factors stand out or strong determinants of job satisfaction and high productivity. These are achievements, recognition, work facilities, responsibility and advancement. On the other hand, the major supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions. Following this research findings, it is of significance that educational administrators should recognize those factors which contribute to job satisfaction such as good infrastructural facilities, good and well furnished offices for teachers, teaching materials, provision and on the job training for professional growth among others. This will ensure adequate motivation of teachers to greater productivity.

Conclusion

It is a known fact that the quality of a teacher and his level of commitment affect the standard of his work. The standard of his work determines the quality of the performance of the children that he teaches. If the good standard of education of children must be maintained, teachers' quality must be improved by improving not only his academic and professional competence but also his work environment. Motivation is a major factor for promoting productivity. Improving the work environment of primary school teachers will improve their productivity and educational quality.

Recommendations

Since there is a relationship between work environment and productivity, the following recommendations are made in order to guarantee productivity of the primary school teacher: The infrastructural facilities of the Nigerian primary school should be improved.

1. Teaching aids and equipment should be provided for teachers for effective teaching and learning.
2. Teaching should not be made a stepping stone for other professions rather it should be made lucrative such that it will command higher socio-economic status like profession.
3. Besides salaries and wages, the work environment should be made more conducive for academic work. Many teachers will prefer good classrooms and teaching materials to fat salaries.
4. Salaries should however be made attractive for the teacher to be able to take good care of themselves and their families without working elsewhere to make ends meet. Their salaries and allowances should be paid as at when due.
5. The conditions of service of the primary school teachers should be the same as that of workers in other government ministries and parastatals.
6. Teachers should be encouraged to stay on the job in primary school through motivation. Teacher's promotions should be a regular process in order to motivate them to higher productivity.
7. The retraining of primary school teachers should be part and parcel of their working conditions. They should be exposed to special

training programmes that will increase their earning power and also update their working knowledge and skills.

8. The ministry of education should change their poor attitude towards primary school teachers. Primary School teachers' complain of humiliating treatments during the several rigorous screening exercises they are subjected to before their salaries are paid. They should therefore, be treated with dignity as colleagues and not lower citizens

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