

Achieving Quality Education/Music Education: Attainable?

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Abstract

Education comprises organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. Music education can therefore be said to be an organized and sustained communication process designed for the acquisition of music skills. It is said that education in its broadest sense is the foundation of a nation. The five principle objectives of the National Policy for Education were to create a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and a dynamic economy, a just and egalitarian society, a land of bright and full opportunity for all citizens and a free and democratic nation. No economy can be dynamic until there is enough high level and intermediate manpower to direct a discipline and responsible labour force – all these are products of quality education/training. Therefore key players (like the students, teachers, funding, and the curriculum involved in achieving quality education / music education would be discussed and necessary suggestions given.

Introduction

Osa (2010) report that education is the preparation of our young adults to embrace all that it takes them to survive in the global community drawing from their immediate environment (p.13).

Education is a set of processes and out-comes that are defined qualitatively. Quality on the other hand, is contextual and there is no agreed definition of what is 'quality' in education. According to the BBC English Dictionary, 'quality' is how good or bad something is (p.39). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined 'quality' as the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it; how good or bad something is to be of good, poor or top quality (p. 953). From this context, 'quality' is seen as available tools used in measuring how good or how bad education outcome presently is - which could be intrinsic and extrinsic in nature.

Many key players are involved in achieving this quality in education. No country has succeeded without educating its people; education is the key to sustaining growth and reducing poverty and providing education of the highest quality is crucial for all countries, no matter our circumstances, to support our social and economic development, to develop the potential of our citizens and to give them satisfaction. There is a widespread recognition that the way education is governed can have a very significant effect on quality and efficiency. This is a true saying that quality and nature of governance could significantly impact on the development quality in the system.

In order to be a key player, the Federal Government of Nigeria endorsed the National Policy in Education, first published in 1977, which was the outcome of the seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria held in 1973. The five main National goals of Nigeria which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of 'a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (p. 6).

The above national policies for education have provided an influential context for goals, standard and curricula. These goals cannot be achieved without other key players. This brings in the teacher to the fore. Teacher policies set the enabling conditions with which educational practices occur. These contextual circumstances have an important potential influence upon education quality. The teacher cannot teach without having pupils to teach and space to carry out teaching activities. Other key players involved are the students and funding of the programme. Quality education means helping individuals (students) achieve their own economic, social and cultural objectives and helping society to be better protected, better served by its leaders and more equitable in important ways that will be strengthened only through education of the citizenry. And when education is grossly unequal or variable in quality and comprehensiveness it bores to the fact that large numbers of young people enter the workforce not just ill-equipped but incapable of navigating the social and economic environment in order to advance themselves.

The role of the government in this matter is not necessarily that of provision of finance but it does involve stimulation and appropriate regulation of provision of services of consumers of information about the value and opportunities of education and training services.

Quality Music Education

Music education is a field of study associated with the teaching and learning of music. It touches all domains of learning including the psychomotor domain (the development of skills), the cognitive domain (the acquisition of

knowledge) and in particular and significant ways, the affective domain including music appreciation. Quality music education ensures that learners have the opportunity to learn an instrument, learn to sing, have opportunities to play in ensembles. It ensures that all pupils have access to high quality music education.

Student – Centered Theory

The process of achieving quality music education differs from country to country, and the attainment of education will be dependent on the quality of education available. Achieving quality music education involves (a) how well students or learners are taught (b) how much they learn (c) how regularly they attend and how long they stay in school.

Achieving quality music education means that education should be student centered. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (p.1190), a student is a person who is studying at a school especially a secondary, a university or college. This means that education should be relevant to the learner's interests, level, needs and skills. Education should be engaging and challenging, it should lead to the development of all aspects of musicality. It means exposing learners to a range of music genres, performances and role models. Fundamental initiatives in 'what is taught', 'How it is taught', 'who is taught' and 'when it is taught' is of interest and importance if quality music education would be attained – because fundamental change in 'what is taught' is necessary to equip students with a wider range of skills that would enable them to perform at higher levels in applying knowledge in varied life situations. Thus reducing the number of subject, balancing factual content of textbooks and learning materials with emphasis on developing abilities such as problem solving as in Harmony writing, musicianship, creativity as in composition, dance, versatility in various instrument, ability to improvise, and team-working as in ensemble studies, group assignment and so forth.

Another indicator is changing 'How it is taught'. This means, shifting from a tradition in which the teacher is the expert and the student or learner is the passive receiver of knowledge to enquiry-based' learning. Changing 'who is taught' is another module to be considered - here the teacher strives to ensure that all students attain higher levels of skill. It requires a mind-set change away from that in which the school's performance in the academic Olympiads is taken as a measure of school's educational accomplishment and human capacity. The performance of some small academic elite is not an indicator of the preparedness of all students to participate successfully in a rapidly changing labour market and as citizens in a democratic society. Finally, changing 'when it is taught (time-table), is necessary in order to achieve quality music education. This requires having education and training systems including delivery of education relevant to needs of individuals.

The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education an education for the twenty-first century chaired by Jacques Delors (1996), saw education throughout life as based upon four pillars that: 1. 'Learning to Know' acknowledges that learners build their own knowledge daily, combining indigenous and 'external' elements. 2. 'Learning to do' focuses on the practical application of what is learned. 3. 'Learning to live together' addresses the critical skills for a life free from discrimination where all have equal opportunity to develop themselves, their families and their communities and 4. 'Learning to be' emphasizes the skill needed for individuals to develop their full potential.

How people learn and how quickly are strongly influenced by their capacities and experience. And assessments of the quality of education outputs that ignore initial differences among learners are likely to be misleading. Sequel to this, important determining characteristics may include socio-economic background, health, places of residence, cultural and religious background and the amount and nature of prior learning. It is therefore important that potential inequalities among students deriving from gender, disability, race and ethnicity and situations of emergency be recognized. These differences in learners' characteristics often require special responses if quality is to be achieved and improved.

Teacher-Centered Theory

The most important factor in attaining quality music education is the teacher. For he is the central figure in all teaching activities (commencing from pre-primary sector through to the tertiary sector) and the student is the heart of the matter. According to Peretomode (1992), teacher in the professional usage or sense is a person trained or recognized and employed to help learning in a classroom situation in order to achieve set educational goals. He is one who attempts to help someone acquire, or change some skills, attitude, knowledge, ideal or appreciation. He creates and influences desirable changes in the behaviour of his pupils (p.11). The teacher takes up the starring role of leading his pupils under his charge to become useful, upright and law-abiding member of the society. The teacher's role and responsibility is to serve as value developer, model and advocate. He acts as adviser, facilitator, friend, parent and even architect.

The teacher's role in our society is very wide and he is considered the most important factor in the quality transfer of knowledge, value, and ethos in an educational setting. He possesses the virtue like love, patience, kindness and so on to the needs of students, parents and community alike. He is a medium via the students to the government, local government, community and religious leaders. Presently, it is hard to find

dedicated teachers with the outmost commitment and dedication, integrity of their profession. Dedication, integrity and commitment are a must if we would achieve quality music education.

A bane to achieving quality music education is academic excellence. Academic excellence is indispensable to quality education thus a teacher who lacks the skills in teaching most especially in strategies and techniques of teaching, is a teacher who needs to bolster up his savvy as well as in-service-training and who needs to uplift his standards of teaching. Teacher in any private and public or federal school around the world needs to be equipped with caliber of intelligence and vast repertoire of experiences.

The teacher is an agent of change and education lies in his capability to develop things into perspectives. Quality of music education is very important not only for students but also for teachers. Hence, the teacher should have passion for teaching and learning. He should possess the ability to inspire, be an excellent communicator, a combination of a high standard of teaching and performance skills including ability to plan and develop programmes. In addition, there is need for quality assurance in terms of teaching and learning outcomes (evaluation) which is focused on assessing the quality of the teaching and learning experience.

Curriculum- Centered Theory

Divergent opinions have been expressed by numerous authors regarding the curriculum in particular reference to its meaning, its composition in terms of goal or purpose, organization, aims and objectives, needs and contents. Brennan (1979) maintains that curriculum is not the same as teaching. He says that for education to be highly effective, it requires a combination of good curriculum with good teaching. Hence curriculum is a course of studies to be followed in the process of acquiring education.

The term curriculum comes from words meaning to “run a (race) course” and refers to a sequence of steps or stages in teaching and learning specific content, it involves a wide range of inquiry into how to create educational environment - this includes what is ‘taught in schools, ‘how it is taught’, to what group of pupils’ and how it is organized. Swann (1983) opines that curriculum could be described as ‘a set of teaching plans’. In another way, curriculum is a sequence of learning opportunities provided to students in their study of specific content. As a sequence of learning opportunities, it exists as plans and intensions, that is, the sequence of learning opportunities that one wishes students to experience. It exists as patterns of classroom activities that are meant to implement those plans and provide the desired learning opportunities. It exists in textbooks as pages intended to support or present those classroom learning opportunities. It leaves marks on what time is devoted to specific contents by teachers or textbooks. Curriculum impacts what students obtain as a result of opportunities to learn. Therefore curriculum consists of the sum total of all the planned programmes of the school.

Achieving quality music education via the school curriculum means that it must have clearly defined aims and objectives because these aims and objectives help to determine the content of the syllabus (which is narrower in scope than the curriculum). Secondly, the ‘content’ must be well organized logically in terms of the relationship between the aims and objective and the contents. Thirdly, the content must be related to the interests and experience of the pupils or students. Therefore the curriculum must focus its attention on the age, interests, aptitudes and environmental background of the pupils or students for whom it is meant to serve.

Curriculum is designed according to the needs of different disciplines or courses/subjects offered. For example the National Certification in Education (N.C.E) programme has designed curriculum to man that programme. In process of time the curriculum had to be revised in order to solve the problem of overstressing students with too much course work or load. In addition, students now have more time for their teaching-practice exercise – instead of the usual one or two months, one semester has been allotted for this exercise. As a student running the N.C.E programme it is a requirement to take courses in Education Department, GSE (general studies in Education) Department including the students Departmental combination/option including specific course unit (s) to be attained. This is time consuming and tedious most especially for music students whose courses are more practical in nature (involving series of rehearsals) apart from tuition from the teacher. Because of lack of preparation, students tend to involve themselves in examination mal-practice in order to meet-up. Though this may be due also to laxity and/ lack of readiness for examination on students part. Thus in order to curb the problem of over-crowded curriculum, recently, the N.C.E curriculum has been revised - it is still in its experimental stage. We hope with time, its aims and objectives would be achieved.

Funding Theory

School funding is an issue that has taken center stage in the educational world recently. Funding simply means the act of providing money for a particular purpose. Funding according to the BBC English Dictionary (p.470) is an amount of money that is collected or money made available for a particular purpose.

Some schools of thought holds that funding do not affect quality of education. In order to buttress their claim, the following questions were posed:

1. What do schools spend most of their money on? Teacher’s salaries? Does paying higher salaries get you better teacher? Do we have an understanding of what is a good teacher to know one when we want to hire

one? Do we have a good process in place to further the professional growth of teacher? Do we have a good process in place to get rid of bad teachers?

2. Is the school falling apart? Is it possible to have quality education if you are in a school or classroom block that is old, dilapidated and falling apart? Does funding somehow control the safety issues in a school? Does it lessen bullying? And does it raise general self-esteem or does funding improve student's grades?

This school of thought still upheld that it is not necessary to spend huge sum of money and still not achieve a quality school. Throwing money at the problem has so far not been an effective answer to the question of how to improve schools. Money thrown at schools unless specifically directed towards improving the 'physical structure' usually gets swallowed up in mysterious ways that have no impact on educational quality.

The other school of thought holds that school funding can greatly affect the quality of education student's receives. The funds schools received can determine many factors such as the equipment the schools purchase, the resources available to the schools, the teaching and supporting staff of the schools. The more money a school has the more resources the school would have for students. On the other hand, if a school does not have adequate funding, it may be difficult to purchase appropriate and sufficient amounts of materials for students. There may be a lower number of highly qualified teachers as well. Students need to have learning experiences that are pertinent and meaningful. There needs to be equipment available to support lessons. There needs to be qualified staff to teach in classes. There needs to be buildings that have safe structures. Buildings in bad structures or conditions are not conducive to learning. Everything cost money and schools need to have access to money.

In addition to availability of fund, schools should be equally funded - the reason being that equal opportunity calls for equal affordability to possess many of the same equipment, resources and staff. Students would be able to have the same opportunities in education regardless of their socioeconomic status. For instance, in Delta State renovations of schools have been put in place particularly some primary and secondary schools in some areas of the state, yet observations revealed that many schools both primary, secondary and tertiary sectors are either over-crowded or the buildings and sitting arrangements is nothing to write-about. By not having proper amount of funding, students and teachers are forced to work in an environment that makes their work harder than it really is. Over-crowded classes, class size as well as school size can adversely affect student's ability to learn. With students' population steadily growing every year, schools need to buy more text books in the library, textbooks for teaching, beautiful school buildings to create more courses and increase classroom space in order to accommodate all of the students. Funds are needed to have state-of-the-art technology at various levels, procurement strategy for musical instrument, and music education programme generally. Not having a large enough supply of textbook can greatly impede and hinder the quality of education that students receive. Without proper funding, the materials needed cannot be bought and in turn, the quality of education is questioned.

All things being equal, the success of teaching and learning is likely to be strongly influenced by the resources made available to support the process and the direct ways in which these resources are managed. It is obvious that schools without teachers, textbooks or learning materials, technological devices like the computer, music instruments, and offices for teachers including learning environment that is conducive for both teachers and students would not be able to do an effective job. In that sense, resources (funds) are important quality education.

Suggestions

A part of the document of the national policy for Education (2004:4-5), writes that:

The Government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society in consonance with the realities of our environment and world... Government's intention was that the far-reaching provisions set out in all sections of the policy should transform all aspects of the nation's life over time.

The ideals above are laudable but these ideals cannot be achieved except proper machineries are put in place. In this vein, Government effectiveness is strongly recommended, effectiveness in terms of quality of policy formulation and implementation, regulatory quality in terms of sound market-friendly policy and control of corruption. Political authorities should always see education as the key to survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive world. Economic growth of the nation is the primary goal with education generally, not just education but quality education as the **CRITICAL DRIVER**. Investment in people is the best investment. In order to be competitive, the government has to substantially boost investments in education and research to foster innovation and cutting-edge development. Subsequently, to boost the system, the government should give appropriate or commensurate motivation (promote as at when due without delay of accrued benefits), give job satisfaction and pride to workers and then persuade them that they have a personal and professional responsibility to contribute to the achievement of a culture of quality that can pervade the entire education system.

As for the teachers, they should passion for teaching and learning. It is passion for something that

makes one an addict to or dedicated to that thing. They should possess the ability to inspire, be an excellent communicator a combination of high standard of teaching and performance skills including ability to plan and develop programmes depending on the courses/subject taught.

From time to time the relevant curriculum and syllabus should be updated and upgraded to the changing times. Evaluation which is focused on identifying if targets have been achieved in both quantitative and qualitative terms is an ace. Also there should be an evaluation process which involves music teachers and students (generally). Broadening the experience of students via performances appropriate to them (that is, streaming students according to academic ability) including a highly competitive environment would lend to achieving quality music education and education in general.

In addition, there should be resource center for instructional materials development - this would serve as the center mode for networking specific data, provide professional assistance, encourage mutual support in the state for upgrading programmes and facilitate those who want to expedite school/departmental accreditation.

Conclusion

Achieving quality education in general and music education in particular was discussed including key players involved in actualizing quality education. Although the government has made a good start by approving and building lots of schools, Education Trust Fund (ETF) on the other hand have been aiding teachers in the aspect of human development capacity, but assuming the quality of music education and education in general is another thing.

How can we be sure that courses offered are really of quality? The answer lies in the hands of the teachers. For teachers are the implementers of the system. Apart from the teachers, others involved in the vehicle of 'quality' are the students, school administrators, available fund to run the system and the departments concerned.

Though challenges abound, let us strive harder for the improvement and standard on the quality of music education/education in general and for the realization of the vision of our country.

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