

DETERMINANT FACTORS FOR EXCELLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Education from the etymological root *educere* means *to lead out*, probably out of ignorance and *educare* meaning *to lead* perhaps into knowledge, is for proper integral formation of the human person. The end product of education, *id est* teaching and learning, is seen concretely on the academic brilliance and scholarly performance of our students, finding them worthy in discipline and character. Academic institutions, precisely our primary and secondary schools, remain the citadel of this change in attitude and general learning for the expected academic superiority. Using the method of critical analysis, the researcher finds out that many of our secondary schools are not much involved in proper curricular activities that will guarantee and generate academic fineness. Instead, they are champions in extracurricular activities that often ridicule academic excellence. Nevertheless, the researcher opts primarily for a return to effective curricular activities and then complements them with extracurricular activities.

Keywords: Education, academic excellence, curriculum, extracurricular activities

Introduction

Education as a human enterprise guarantees knowledge which has universal application with regard to every facet of human endeavour. That is to say that as a human activity education not only trains the animality in us but tames the animal in us thereby giving us the opportunity to explore the world around us for our own good without jeopardizing other lives. To this end education liberates and refines us better human beings in a world of barbarism. This is why education as *educere* has to do with leading one out of ignorance which is not only a disease but a vampire that backfires.

Equally education has to do with *educare* that tilts towards leading anyone that desired as such into knowledge which is power and at the end has great universal application. With *knowledge-based* education one enjoys a kind of economy which is properly referred as knowledge economy that is precisely ruling and defining every activity in our world. All the scientific cum technological advances man has made and is ready to make is rooted in and is dependent on the power of human knowledge. And its only education that guarantees such implied knowledge that is scientific oriented and technologically grounded.

Education that is human oriented is based on general discipline, planned curricular activities and complemented often with extracurricular activities. With proper curriculum as well as effective educational policies, our educational system cannot guarantee the needed

knowledge that will have universal application and effect. This is why it is a truism that no country or development goes beyond the quality of her education and her teachers. The school as an academic institution guarantees the needed quality of education and the type of teachers that assure the standard education that offers knowledge.

Nonetheless many schools have deviated from this sole aim and singular act of pursuing and promoting knowledge within the bounds of effective curriculum to exalt and promote only extracurricular activities as if to say that they are the reason why school as an academic institution was established.

Curricular Activities in School System

Nigerian educational System is all about the development of the needed curriculums for every level of learning from crèche to university level. Curricular activities deals with recommended subjects or discipline well arranged for every stage of learning in our academic institutions taking cognizance of the domains of learning. Philosophers of education were known to be experts in these areas. Without curricular activities there is nothing like formal education that guarantee knowledge based economy. These curricular activities account for the admission and graduations in our schools especially the secondary schools. They determine the examination that qualifies anyone for promotion as such and thereby allows for exams like FSLC, BECE, WAEC JAMB, P-UTME, Undergraduate, Graduate Exams and Post Graduate Exams. Our interest is on the secondary school level.

Without well defined curriculums the school becomes anything except a place of teaching and learning. Therefore School, as a human activity and curriculum, as human effort for proper learning, are synonymous entities. Curriculums define a good school and good school is definable by their curriculums. The subjects offered in school as an academic institution help in making the students who are opportune to be in school knowledgeable. They prepare the students for great influence and serious impact on the society. With this understanding, one has to say that Curriculum is at the heart of any good and standard school. Curriculum reckons a good school. However, good school is ever a place more than academics. Part of the curricular activities in our schools is entrepreneur scholarship. Entrepreneur complements curricular activities and that is to say that they are co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities are those activities that are outside of but usually complementing the regular curriculum.

Contemporary Misconceptions of a School as a place for more than Academics

School is a place beyond academics'. There are many nuances of a school and what it ought to be. School is not just for academics. It is beyond that. There are more to academics in a school setting. The school remains a place of training for academics, imbibing moral values and character formation. Being an institution, the school is a veritable place for training and moulding a holistic pupil, an integral student. The school should offer pupils or students the opportunity for fundamental formation. The school, therefore, determines the child, as it influences everything about him or her. The four walls of the school are fantastic and impressionable. There, *Governors, Professors, Presidents, Experts* and *CEOs* of different corporate institutions are in making as well as different professionals in different walks of life. Scholars are products of school and its environment. Even the politicians who are now politicizing education remain the *good* and *bad* product of schools.

Our ultimate aim at home (as parents or guardians) and at school (as teachers) must be a healthy and educated mind in a healthy body. That is *mens sano incorporesancti*, a sound mind in a sound body. This is why school is a place for more than academics. There is something beyond academics to total formation and moulding students' life and character. All these lie at the ambient of teachers' work of which the parents share informally and primarily. Teachers by these are simply great because their work begins from school and continues outside the school premises. There is a need therefore, for a healthy teacher-student-parent relationship that includes and is beyond P.T.A General Meetings.

Extracurricular Activities in School System

These are activities done outside the specified and regimented academic program already fixed for the schools from the Ministry of Education as developed by the philosophers of education. Extracurricular activities are supplementary and most often additional activities done in schools meant to complement students' academic activities. They are simply complementary rather than being the very fundamental activities and basics in school activities. Unfortunately, entertainment as an offshoot of extracurricular activities is redefining our school activities. We must reiterate that in the pursuance of pure academics which our schools are built for and sustained on accordingly, pure entertainment as extracurricular activities may be very detrimental and distracting.

An online dictionary defines "an extracurricular activity (ECA or extra academic activity (EAA) is an activity, performed by students, that falls outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school, college or university education". Extracurricular activities are simply like hobbies that don't fall within the scope of the traditional and formal academic curriculums. Equally, extracurricular in general refers to organized, unofficial activities and athletics for which students don't receive school credit or formal academics.

Diversity in school clubs and extracurricular activities plays an important role in adolescent lives and futures, moulding them more into socially and culturally competent students. Exposure the students to diverse groups can help promote adolescents to become emotionally balanced, socially intelligent and responsible students. Common sense demonstrate that involvement in extracurricular, whether it be sports, clubs, or school-based programs, have a positive impact on the participant's life. Furthermore, extracurricular activities increase positive self-development, regardless of where the activities take place (at school or away from school)

Extracurricular activities are defined as those school-based activities that are not tied to the curriculum. Many schools today are deeply engrossed and involved in some form of extracurricular activities. Some of the extracurricular activities are: Excursions, Student Union Government, Civic Clubs like Debate Team, Community Development Service, Theatre Group and recently Feast and Parents day celebrations, *Igwe* and *Lolo* Installations as in Cultural Day Celebrations, Beauty Pageantry etc. Studies have shown that being involved in extracurricular activities reduces the likelihood of dropping out of school, getting involved in criminal offense, good exposure to opportunities and improvement in school work. It definitely guarantees "the greatest advantage of participating in at least one of these activities is the decrease in anti-social behaviours and students growing up to be more successful in communication and relationships".

ECA and Entrepreneur Scholarship

Nowadays a vast number of extracurricular activities are being offered in primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. There are two schools of thoughts, one in support of participating and other in support of not participating in extracurricular activities. So it is of great interest to determine how it affects the students, both in academics as well as in their future professional life.

An extracurricular activity (ECA) is an activity performed by students that falls outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school. They are just as important as academics in the growth and development of the children. Schools often support cognitive extra-curricular school activities. There are immense benefits of extra-curricular which includes; Extra-curricular programs help students get actively involved in activities enable children develop their innate talents in a strictly academic environment, stimulating their mindset and helps to nurture their talents and potentials in them but unfortunately, most of our schools adopt only the extra-curricular activities that are fun and entertainment based. Extra-curricular activities are fun activities and a source of enjoyment that help the dull and shy students. It encourages teamwork and helps the students develop social skills, communication skills, leadership skills and cooperation among both teachers and students. It also helps to improve self-esteem by providing students with training on the activities that interest them and empowering them. Internal and external sports competitions, educational and fun excursions organised in schools, different clubs organised in schools, inter-house sports, send-off parties and its preparatory programs, drama, dance presentations, cultural activities, singing, watching television are some of the examples of extracurricular activities. Another importance of is leadership and cooperation. It inspires team work and how to make initiative in leading their teammates. It also stimulates good relationship between the teachers and the students outside their normal classroom activities.

Extra-curricular activities are very good yet over participation may be burdensome as it may interfere with their academic performance. Exciting extracurricular activities are available for primary and secondary students which may affect their studies because of so much distraction. It requires more time and energy. For example, a student may love involvement with drama which will consume and distract him from finishing assignments and chores at home. When the students become overwhelming, it tends to hinder the student's academic performance. These activities are expensive because of its financial engagements especially low income families who cannot afford to provide any of them. Tiredness and too much commitment are also required and they may end up not having enough rest for themselves. This also affects their health. Therefore, there should be balance between extra-curricular activities and other curricular activities.

Entrepreneur Scholarship

Skill is very important in the life of every human being. The Federal Republic of Nigeria recognised the immense role of the development of entrepreneurial skills at the basic schools level when it noted that basic education should provide entrepreneur scholarship for the development of the students. (FRN,2004). Therefore, the quality of instructional delivery should be oriented towards inculcating the right type of value and attitude in the students. In addition, the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social competencies were necessary for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

One of the pillars of the Nigeria National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is one of the strategies employed for entrepreneur scholarship. It was also recommended that governments should improve the education system by bringing entrepreneurship to the classroom so that every student in the basic, secondary and tertiary levels of education should learn entrepreneurial principles and welcome new ideas. There should be an infusion of entrepreneur scholarship to the school by introducing entrepreneurial programs to the curriculum and provide young people the opportunity to acquire an entrepreneurial orientation and skills. It also provides the hub for job creation, poverty reduction and self employment. (Mkpa, A.M. ,2014).

Entrepreneur scholarship is a scheme for the identification, initiation, organization and the production of skills, ideas, strategies for self acquaintance. It also means the specific context of setting up a venture and becoming self-employed. (Gibb, A.,2008). Entrepreneur scholarship leads to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills for efficient and effective living; it gives the youths or students more opportunities to exercise creative freedom, higher self-esteem and a greater sense of control over their own lives. This is also the introduction of different programs into the school system for skill acquisition. It is very important in a country where lack of employment is the order of the day.

Various types of skills are required for the students to be successful entrepreneurs. Heder E., Ljubic M. & Nola, L. (2011) identified many categories of competencies or skills needed for the success in entrepreneurship such as Innovative skills of being independent, imaginative and constructive thinker, skills for introducing or using ideas/ways of doing things, skills to be critical to come up with innovative ideas, entrepreneurial skills for recognizing and using tools and materials for production. The inclusion of these skills into the school system will reduce dependence on government for job, instil in the students the right mindset, the ability to be creative and innovative and the ability to create job out of their chosen career especially in the secondary school level. Examples of Entrepreneurial programs are; bead making, blacksmithing, fashion and design, bakery, agricultural training, tie and dye making, hair dressing, make up, photography, computer training etc.

ECA scholarship Complementing CA for Holistic Academic Equipose

There is this saying that all work no play makes Jack a dull boy and all play no work, makes Jack a dumb boy. This statement alone will show you that there should be equilibrium between Extra- curricular activities and curricular activities. A healthy balance of curricular and extra-curricular activities is one of the keys to excellence in our schools.

Curricular activities are those activities and programs designed by a particular academic institution according to curriculum while the extra-curricular activities are the activities which do not fall under the school curriculum. This simply means that more attention should be paid to the curricular activities because it deals with recommended subjects or discipline well arranged for every stage of learning in our academic institutions taking cognizance of the domains of learning while extracurricular activities are just there to complement the system.

Extra-curricular activities are important but academics should come first and should be the first priority before other important ones. More time should be devoted to academics than any extra-curricular activities and if there be need for one, it should not interfere to normal academic activities. Distractions should be limited and only important extra-curricular

activities which will be beneficial to the students should be adopted i.e. only the activities that the students will acquire educational skills should be adopted and not outside the school system. Extra-curricular activities are very important because it makes the students to be happier, healthier and smarter but can be a great source of distraction if its time is not properly managed. Time management plays a significant role for any academic success of education system. By balancing practice time (sports, performing arts, clubs) with school academics, these students should use their time more efficiently. The school management should employ strategies to maintain equipoise between extra-curricular and curricular activities. Again, in the quest to become multi-talented students, the extra-curricular activities should not be too much in the school system to the extent that they cannot balance it alongside their studies. There should not be much emphasis to the financial aspect of it to avoid being a burden to the parents.

Finally, equipoise between extra-curricular activities and curricular activities creates a balanced student and a balanced school life needed for optimal academic functioning.

Factors that determine excellence in the school

Balanced and Functional Curriculum: A well balanced curriculum serves as a reference to ensure that the school is in the right track. A curriculum is essentially a series of activities and learning outcome goals related to each subject. It is a framework of the activities the school and its components are designed to develop concepts, from a basic level to increasingly complex topic. A curriculum is balanced when there is equipoise between curricular activities and extra-curricular activities in its structure. A functional curriculum is a curriculum that focuses upon independent skills deemed essential for living and working independently to learners with cognitive impairments. It is one which focuses upon independent living skills, emphasizing communication and social skills. It is functional because it inculcates skills for our daily life. Curriculum serves as a guide to the achievement of the school's aims and objectives without which there will be no progress in sequential learning. An effective curriculum provides teachers, students and the school management with a measurable plan and structure for delivering quality education. The curriculum identifies the learning outcomes, standards and core competencies that students must demonstrate before advancing to their next class. An evidenced-based curriculum acts as a road map for teachers and students to follow on the path to academic success.

Good management and competent teachers: Management refers to administration of the education system. A good management comprises of a group of people that are responsible for the supervision, planning, strategizing and the implementation of the structures to execute an education system. They include; principals, deans, teaching and non-teaching staff, administrative personnel working together to enrich and enhance the education system. They are one of the foundational pillars of a good school system.

Teachers in schools are the ideal people as well as in the best situation to promote active learning amongst students in schools. Effective and efficient teachers are one of the attributes of a good school. They imbibe the needed knowledge into the students, create an effective learning environment and inculcate discipline in the students. Good teachers are strong communicators and listeners. They are life changers. Good and competent teachers have transformative power to change the students positively, have genuine care for the students and possess passion for the subjects they teach. They have friendly attitude towards

the students that motivate them to learn. Without good teachers, the school will not be a home for the students.

Discipline: Discipline is an important component of human behaviour without which no school can function well in the achievement of its goals (Ouma, Simatwa & Serem, 2013). Discipline and academic performances are the core of our today's education. Some teachers have attributed to the poor performance of students in academics due to high level of indiscipline. Nevertheless, it is imperative for inculcate discipline in students in order to achieve excellence. In the context of a school system, a disciplined student is that student whose behaviours, actions and inactions conform to the predetermined rules and regulations of the school (Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon, 2014). Discipline is essential for creating a positive school climate conducive for academic performance (Masitsa, 2008). It is a basic requirement for successful teaching and learning in school for the teachers (Eshetu, 2014). Discipline includes good attitude towards learning, obedience to the school rules and regulations. The level of academic excellence of a school is measured by the volume of discipline evident in that school. There is no progress without discipline.

Excellent Curricular and Academic-Based Extra-curricular activities

An excellent curricular activity is one that deals with recommended subjects or discipline well arranged for every stage of learning in our academic institutions taking cognizance of the domains of learning. Curricular activities are those activities that are part of the curriculum. This is the major framework that guides the entire activities of the school system. An excellent curricular activity is the programs, duties, responsibilities carried out in the school that are done according to the school principles. Therefore, without well defined and excellent curricular activities, the performance and the excellence of the school will be in danger.

Most of the extra-curricular activities are only fun-based and entertainment oriented and a little far from the academics but extra activities should be academic and talented oriented in order to help the students develop their skills and talents. Academic based extra-curricular programs help students get actively involved in activities in education and enable the children develop their innate talents in a strictly academic environment, stimulating their mindset and helps to nurture their talents and potentials in them. Fun based extra-curricular activities breeds distraction and indifference to studies. Therefore academic based extra-curricular activities should be adopted because it helps to improve self-esteem by providing students with training on the activities that interest them academically and empowering them too.

Healthy and conducive school environment

A healthy school environment (physical, biological and socio-cultural) serves as a major determinant of health and greatly influences an individual's level of intellectual growth and development. A conducive environment is one that is favourable for learning, an environment with tranquillity, creating a communal environment and maintaining a positive classroom climate and culture. Good physical structures and standardized equipments and machineries for teaching and learning. A good physical classroom, neat and organized environment conducive for learning, a good communal atmosphere established to instil a sense of communication and cooperation and having good relationship between the teachers and the students. A healthy environment is one that is neat and School size, location, class size, teacher-teacher and teacher-student relationship; facilities like libraries, technical workshops and well equipped laboratories; teacher quality, good school management, teaching method are factors of a good school environment that affect

the academic performance and achievements of the students. Poor lighting, classroom noises and inconsistent temperatures make teaching and learning difficult while poor maintenance and ineffective ventilation systems lead to poor health among students as well as the teachers. These factors can adversely affect student behaviour and lead to high levels of frustration among teachers and poor learning attitude among the students.

To enhance students' academic performance, development and growth, the school environment is an important area that should be studied and managed well. A healthy and conducive environment for learning is the one with comfortable classroom set-ups, relevant use of teaching materials, interesting classroom activities and environment that is not prone and exposed to danger. A good environment stimulates growth and creates comfortable and inviting environment for teaching, learning and research.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this paper is to enlighten people on the determinants of excellence in our schools. There are various factors that contribute to excellence in our schools and they include; Balanced and functional curriculum, Good management and competent teachers, Discipline, Excellent Curricular and Academic-Based Extra-curricular activities and Healthy and conducive school environment. Again, there is need for the introduction of entrepreneur scholarship to give the youths or students more opportunities to exercise creative freedom, higher self-esteem and a greater sense of control over their own lives. Furthermore, this writing attempted to expose the imbalance between curricular and extra-curricular activities. Most of extra-curricular activities are fun and entertainment based which tend to pose a distraction to the prerequisite curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities should be academic and talented oriented in order to help the students develop their skills and harness talents. Therefore, curricular activities should be made the first priority and Extra-curricular activities supplementary.

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