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The International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies (ISSN 2141-6656) is published monthly (one volume per year) by Academic Journals.

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Table of Contents: Volume 8   Number 4   July 2016

ARTICLES

Full Length Research Paper

Questioning the scholarly discussion around decentralization in Turkish education system

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From the beginning of Turkish Republic till date, Turkish Education System (TES) has been steered by a handful of politicians and civil servants, who enjoy maximum centralized authority. Over the years, therefore, centralized management has repeatedly been blamed for the deadlocks hampering progress in the TES. Turkish scholars often seem to find intellectual shelter in extolling decentralization, supposedly the exact opposite of centralization, as a panacea for all the dilemmas facing education. Indeed, in academic writings about the issue, scholars generally refer to decentralization unquestioningly as the transfer of authority and power from the center to the periphery. While there is a prevalent faith among Turkish scholars in the curative characteristics of decentralization, the broader literature suggests that decentralization neither helps solve educational deadlocks nor necessarily means an effective transfer of authority. Moreover, national idiosyncrasies often define the extent and direction of decentralization, as well as its effectiveness, as can be seen in different implementations in several countries throughout the world. On another note, the decentralization discourse centered on the education sector also has direct implications on Turkish politics, since the accusations of dictatorship leveled against the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) have been strengthened by its tight grip on policy-making power in education. The following article attempts to build a dual argument, asserting that decentralization is not a solution to the dilemmas facing the TES and that the ruling JDP is no dictator.

Key words: Centralization, decentralization, the ruling JDP government.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the nation state as a political structure after the French Revolution gave birth to a new discourse that gave the state the function of running a system of education that would create loyal citizens. This idea has prevailed throughout the world and national education systems under the direct control of the state can be found everywhere (Basar, 1996, p. 63), including in Turkey.

During the early years of Turkish Republic (TR), a minority of intellectuals with power and authority undertook a variety of reforms without engagement with any other stakeholders (Ozsoy, 2009); likewise, a small group of elite civil servants dominated educational policy-making and created a centralized TES.

Although scholars largely agree that, in the first years

of the TR, centralized management was desirable; they also consider it one of the major causes of later and current dilemmas in the field (Arslan, 2009; Aypay and Isik, 2006; Can, 1999; Duruhan, 2007; Gulcan, 2008; Ozturk, 2011; Sirin, 2009; Tasar, 2009; Yildirim, 2001; Yirci and Karakose, 2010). The disadvantages associated with centralization, on a managerial level and for the quality of education itself, are cited in the arguments for the implementation of decentralization. For example, some highlight the effects of a lack of teacher autonomy due to the strict, centrally imposed instruction methods and curriculum (Arslan, 2009; Gulcan, 2008; Ozturk, 2011; Yirci and Karakose, 2010). Others give centralized management the blame for a lack of transparency and nepotism, manifested in politicians appointing friends, compatriots, and political sympathizers to high-ranking bureaucratic posts (Aydogan, 2009). At the same time, bureaucrats at the periphery are given a limited authority, but burdened with excessive administrative responsibilities, so lack the time and energy to meet their full potential for contributing to the betterment of the TES (Can, 1999; Tasar, 2009). In the discussions concerning the establishment of quality assurance and accountability in TES, some argue that authority-responsibility balance has been lost in this management structure due to the lack of institutional autonomy in contrast to overly loaded responsibility on the peripheral actors (Bulbul and Demirbolat, 2014; Ince, 2008). Aside from centralization and its drawbacks listed above, the extent of the bureaucratic red tape in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is widely seen highly debilitating (Arslan and Atasayar, 2008; Buyukduvenci, 1995; Duruhan, 2007; Turan et al., 2012; Yalcinkaya, 2004). Some contend that bureaucratic ossification in the ministry has reached such an extent that it is not able to fulfill even its basic functions (Ozden, 2005; Silman and Simsek, 2009; Tasar, 2009).

When diagnosing the malady in the body of TES, scholars increasingly rush to identify the cure: decentralization. This trend is so infectious that almost every piece of scholarly writing about the TES includes passages extolling the uncertain blessings of decentralization. For instance, describing centralization as unable to respond the contemporary challenges of the field, Tasar (2009) dreams of reaching global standards through decentralization. Likewise, others list some supposed advantages of decentralization, such as finding solutions to new challenges of the field (Ozdemir, 1996, p. 426), the benefits of student-centered education, better decision-making, multi-channeled communication among all stakeholders, and better educational supervision (Yalcinkaya, 2004).

At the administrative level, scholars identify a number of advantages of decentralization, most notably: more rational educational programs and policies (Arslan and Atasayar, 2008, p. 60), a solution for bureaucratic ossification (Can, 1999; Kurt, 2006), and the better use of human and material resources (Kurt, 2006). Given the desirability of these improvements, scholars certainly have sound reasons for the efforts to build a discourse in support of decentralization.

Problematically, however, a number of scholars move from a conviction that centralization is main culprit to a belief in a direct correlation between decentralization and quality education (Arslan and Atasayar, 2008; Balci, 2000; Tasar, 2009; Yalcinkaya, 2004). This way of thinking takes it as given that the more decentralization in education management, the more quality can be reached.

In their arguments for not only decentralization but also all other dilemmas in TES, scholars rarely mention the political factors, which manifest themselves in all institutional affairs, education being no exception. To be clearer, they seem to ignore the politics on educational policy-making. In this vein, newly presented scholarly writings in Turkey repeatedly prove that scholars ignore this delicate link between education and politics, as they insist on tracing solutions on the black sands of education (Güçlü and Şanal, 2015; Sağır, 2015). To illustrate, in their studies about an educational journal namely Education Journal (published between the years 1951-1958), Güçlü and Şanal (2015) expect to shed light on current educational dilemmas through reviewing the subjects such as teaching profession, social and psychological tiers of education, curriculum development etc. from a historical perspective yet again missing the political context of that period at issue. Similarly, skipping the cardinal place of politically caliberation of educational policies, Sağır uselessly recommends –to whom it concerns- that school principals' voices should be heard in decision-making process.

However, in the more general literature, many argue that most of the solutions for educational dilemmas can be found outside the field of education, particularly in politics and economy (Apple, 2004; Carr, 2005; Cemalcilar and Goksen, 2012). In this regard, Apple (2004, p. vii) argues that, economic, political, and cultural power and its implication for the education system must be included in investigations into dilemmas in education. Similarly, Carr (2005) underscores that philosophical and theoretical studies have to deal with the "political dimension of education" (p. 230). Scholars writing about the TES would do well to heed this advice and dedicate more intellectual energy to investigating how education coalesces with politics.

In order not to make the same mistake, and to ground the discussion, it is necessary to understand the ruling JDP's view of the state and its role in education. One aim of this article, therefore, is to investigate the implications of this view in the process of decentralization.

It is certainly the case that some scholars criticize the JDP for holding on to central authority and control over all

institutional affairs, including education. They characterize the reign of the JDP as dictatorship, and seek to remind the government of its former promise to implement decentralization in every institution. In this regard, another aim of this article is to trace the discursive roots of the dictatorship label, attributed to the JDP throughout decentralization discussions. To this end, it first goes back to the definition(s) of decentralization and its usage in different contexts, including an examination of whether decentralization is really a better way of managing educational affairs. Moreover, it investigates the JDP's understanding of the role of the state and its implications for the realization of decentralization in education. It ends with some concluding remarks about the epistemological fallacy clouding the judgments of Turkish scholars.

A complacent discourse: decentralization

It is useful to note that there is no agreed-upon definition of decentralization, but rather divergent conceptualizations shaped mainly by scholars' personal agendas and bias. The following definitions provide ample illustration of this: "the transformation of the education system by forming a new way of schooling with its own vision, mission, and authority" (Taşar, 2009, p. 108); "the autonomization of educationalists and schools" (Arslan and Atasayar, 2008; Çelik, 2011; Mızıkaci, 2011; Öztürk, 2011, p. 1928); "the way to free the education system from the burdens of bureaucracy" (Can, 1999; Kurt, 2006, p. 70); "the financial support of local people and parents to the schools in the provinces" (Balcı, 2000). Despite the diversity of definitions, it should be noted that they all share a common interest in finding ways to improve the TES.

A lack of agreement on a definition for decentralization is also prevalent among Western scholars, who use the term to refer to various trends. According to Aasen (2004), there are two kinds of decentralization: delegation and devolution. While delegation refers to the diffusion of tasks and responsibilities to the periphery as a way of implementing centrally decided policies, devolution implies diffusion of authority and responsibility for decision-making and implementation and the increased independence of local authorities (Aasen, 2004, p. 144).

Rizvi and Lingard go further and identify three kinds of decentralization: (a) "democratic devolution, characterized by enrichment of democratic participation, local control and community decision-making"; (b) "functional decentralization, characterized by the transfer of specific functions of the central government to the local or regional levels"; and (c) "fiscal decentralization, characterized by the transfer of monies and control over funding sources, to local institutions" (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, pp. 120-121).

As is to be expected, the kind of decentralization seen depends on the idiosyncrasies of each country where it is attempted (Astiz et al., 2002; Gibton et al., 2000; Green, 1999; Levinson, 2005; Rhoten, 2000). In Colombia, for example, decentralization diminishes the power of teachers' unions, and legitimizes government's domestic reforms, while in Spain it allows for more decision-making participation at the provincial level but gives central management more control over the curriculum (Astiz et al., 2002). In Argentina, local power holders and structural realities stand in the way of decentralization (Rhoten, 2000), while in Israel, school principals are skeptical because they feel it might in fact diminish their influence over local policies (Gibton et al., 2000).

Despite the clearly documented diversity in the conceptualization of decentralization and its implementation in practice, scholars still have a tendency to portray decentralization as a direct transfer of authority from the centre to the periphery. Departing from this tendency, McGinn and Street refute the understanding of decentralization as a transferring or devolving power and authority from government to the individual citizen (1986, p. 471). Similarly, Vavrus (2004) reminds us "decentralization does not necessarily mean the end of decision-making at the ministerial or executive levels" (2004, p. 147). One of the key paradoxes, related to government will, is aptly explained by Gibton et al. (2000, p. 193) who argue that since the state does not truly accept the idea of decentralization, it tries to keep hold of its former power by centralizing certain areas, such as curriculum and standard testing, while decentralizing other aspects of the education system.

Various scholars have successfully shed light on the political usefulness of the decentralization discourse, which in power-political situations driven with internal conflict allows politicians to protect and increase their power or avoid blame for their inadequate policies (Aasen, 2004; Astiz et al., 2002; Green, 1999; Lauglo, 1995). In effect, peripheral actors are given responsibility for the execution of educational policies but not effective administrative authority, while central authorities are protected from blame when the implementation goes wrong (Astiz et al., 2002, p. 86). As Aasen (2004, p. 142) succinctly points out, selective decentralization may simply represent a more legitimate system of control within a strong state. Taking this further, some suggest that decentralization should not be seen as simply an issue of empowerment of individual citizens, but rather as an issue of power distribution among social groups (Aasen, 2004; Levin, 1997; McGinn and Street, 1986).

Further criticisms of a blind faith in decentralization can be found in the wider literature. For example, Rhoten warns policy makers and analysts against overly sanguine attitudes, since they often stem more from hope and predilection than hard evidence (2000, p. 615). Likewise, McGinn and Street (1986) along with Simkins (1999) point out that there is no evidence that

decentralization leads naturally to a more efficient system or reduce costs.

In this context, one should not ignore the strong link between the state and the education system, particularly the former's desire to keep control over the latter, while avoiding taking the blame for mistakes in the field. Otherwise, one risks the repetition of common fallacy that decentralization is a path leading to greater participation and sharing of power. Of course, the belief in decentralization and its promises, notably an improvement in the quality of education, is so strong that it eclipses all other possible alternative approaches to structuring the TES.

The JDP: A dictator or an apprentice of the new governance?

Scholarly literature confirms the impression that states around the world have recently been going through great transformations, particularly concerning public management (Allais, 2012; Baker et al., 2012; Ball, 2006; Borman et al., 2012; Johnson and Morris, 2010; Levinson et al., 2009; Levinson, 2005; Rhoten, 2000; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Starr, 2011). In his study of these transformations, Ball (2007) identifies "a new governance" and summarizes its manifestation in the education sector as "a concentration of power at the centre as well as a movement to localities" (p. 114).

In the case of Turkey, official JDP documents confirm the party's commitment to these changes, including in the field of education. In its statute of 2013, under the heading 'Our Understanding of Public Management,' the party details the changes to be achieved:

Our party aims to place the concept of public management on an axis of democratization, decentralization and civilization. It believes that a contemporary state has to have the following features:

1- Instead of the accumulation of power and authority over public management at the centre, an understanding of the state should spread in which authority, responsibility and functions are transferred as much as possible to peripheral managements where the state's several functions can be realized in tandem with local administrations.
2- As a requirement of our understanding of the social state, the state has to undertake social welfare. Therefore, the state has to implement social security, social support and social service programs effectively.
3- The state should delegate all service fields, except those related to its basic functions, including internal and external security, justice, basic education, health and infrastructure; its functions in organization and inspection should continue (AKP, 2013, p. 652).

So while the JDP declares its commitment to giving more authority to the periphery, it still maintains tight control over a gamut of "basic functions" –security, justice, basic education, health, and infrastructure. The fact that the JDP considers education to be a fundamental state function goes a long way to explaining its tenacity in maintaining its decision-making control over the TES.

Notwithstanding, one cannot argue that the ruling JDP never share the authority and power in making educational policies. Illustrating this notion, while rationalizing the recent reconstruction of the ministry, an official document hints that the JDP actually is determinant to make use of peripheral contribution to the betterment of the TES. The document reads:

There must be an orientation in the MoNE towards service principles. The central management of the MoNE deals best with more macro level tasks including strategic planning, definition of the curricular program and coordination. Apart from these high-profile functions, most authorities and responsibilities should be given to the provinces and local managements (MEB, 2011, p. 31).

This quote shows that the ruling JDP had already rolled up its sleeves to turn the ministry into an organization that only deals with nation-wide educational policies, so that the provinces and local bureaucrats were to be given more power and authority over the decision-making process on the ground.

In practice, signs of Rizvi and Lingard's 'functional decentralization' and Aasen's 'delegation' can be seen in the JDP's management practices in the TES, but the emphasis strongly on the centralization side of the spectrum. This is because while the authority of taking political decisions increasingly accumulates in the centre, local authorities are only allowed to take everyday decisions regarding practical issues of implementation. Put bluntly, it cannot be argued that there is a balance between decentralized and centralized management practices in TES, while all authority and decision-making power still rest with a handful of politicians.

Yet, having a strong hand over the calibration of education does not necessarily go wrong, especially when it comes to getting over a decades-long challenge in the field. Let us look at the headscarf ban, which was a legacy of the 28 February 1997 period stopping thousands of veiled female students from attending university for many years. The JDP government discontinued this ban and thus helped veiled female students enter university, in the process ending a decades-long dispute in Turkish politics. On this point, it is noteworthy that, although previous governments attempted to abolish the headscarf ban, they were not successful. The JDP's success on this issue proves its political power and authority in political terms, greater

than other political parties or indeed the Turkish army. Hence, the removal of the headscarf ban can be attributed to the party's unsurpassed political power and authority.

Nevertheless, although it rhetorically committed itself to urgent decentralization in its first years of power, the JDP has recently been accused of being an authoritarian party. In fact, these critiques have gone so far as to label the JDP's leadership cadres dictators. To demonstrate the prevalence of this dramatic accusations, it is enough to look at titles of recently published works of scholarship: AKP's New Turkey (Toledano, 2011); Sharing Power: Turkey's Democratization Challenge in the Age of the AKP Hegemony (Onis, 2013); AKP at the Crossroads: Erdogan's Majoritarian Drift (Ozbudun, 2014); Turkey's AKP in Power (Dagi, 2008); Islamization of Turkey under the AKP Rule (Turk, 2013). With these phrases in mind, an examination of the JDP's alleged renunciation of its former commitment to decentralization might enrich the discussions around decentralization in education and, more generally, of the supposed dictatorship of the JDP.

Despite the initial emphatic nature of the JDP's decentralization discourse, policy-making authority has since then rested solely with the government. Many see this as proof of a mismatch between the government's rhetoric and its commitment to its declarations. However, taking the easy step of characterizing JDP rule as a dictatorship fails to fully explain this mismatch, as there might be many factors influencing education.

Firstly, this impression of insincerity could be a result of the common misconception, examined above, that decentralization is the polar opposite of centralization, as well as the cure for all education's ills. Secondly, the JDP's tight grasp of authority over educational policy can be attributed to its conviction that education is one of the basic responsibilities of a strong state. In fact, the JDP implemented some aspects of decentralization: while it maintains the authority of decision-making on political and nation-wide issues, it allows other parties to take decisions regarding the practical issues of the periphery. Therefore, a recognition of the strong link between politics and education would help some observers move away from a single-minded focus on decentralization as a certain solutions to the dilemmas facing the TES, as well as showing the simplicity of labeling the JDP as dictator.

Conclusion

Turkish scholars' commitment to the virtues of decentralization stems from a reaction against centralized management practices in education, which deemed outdated and unsuitable. In spite of scholars' conviction, the JDP government has pursued a twofold strategy, decentralizing decision-making on practical and peripheral issues, while maintaining its authority on political and nation-wide policies. This nuanced approach reflects the JDP's conviction that education is one of the main responsibilities of the state. This concern with the education means that, despite the accusations of dictatorship, the JDP does not seem to step backward in dealing with its one of the basic functions, which is educational policy-making. In conclusion, although decentralization is not necessarily the best way of managing educational affairs and despite the unfounded accusations against the JDP, the simplistic ideas about the superiority of decentralization and the dictatorship of the ruling JDP will likely continue to survive because of the handiness of the two in scholarly and political labyrinths.

Conflict of interest

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest

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Enhancing access to and quality of basic education through head teachers' leadership functions

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Basic education is the fundamental requirement for idiosyncratic and societal development. The individual child needs to have access to it and acquire it qualitatively. The sum total of all the knowledge attitude, skills and competences that the Nigerian child today acquires have been declared to be on the decline. Every stakeholder: teacher, pupil, community and government / proprietor have its own blame to share. Rather than bulk passing blame, it is necessary to seek for how to enhance access to and quality of basic education. This study explains what access and quality are. The leadership functions of the head teacher in enhancing access to and quality of basic education are also discussed.

Key words: Access, quality of basic education head teachers' leadership functions.

INTRODUCTION

Leaders of educational institutions have important functions to perform in the achievement and success of the entire education system. For success to be attained through having children who are able to read and write and later impact on the society they live, there must be access to quality of such education provision. An individual product of an education system has to initially posses the basis before ascending to the higher levels.

Having basic education is not just passing through the first nine (9) years of schooling but having happy children who possess the readiness to acquire the basis of literacy, numeracy, life skills and learning how to learn. The National Policy on Education has provided conditions to encourage access to education. The success at the initial, primary level puts pressure on higher levels of learning. As it is being run, the number of primary schools available dictates need at the junior secondary level and so on. Therefore, it is not all the products of the lower level that are readily absorbed at the higher level.

For instance, in the 2013 Annual School Census Report, there were 1,555,925 pupils in the 1004 public primary schools of Lagos State, Nigeria. This was far

greater in number than 497, 984 students that were enrolled in 2013 into its 328 junior secondary schools (that is, basic 7 to 9 classes or grades). In other words, only 32% of pupils enrolled in public primary schools get enrolled in junior secondary schools that same year.

The quality of any educational system is mostly assessed by the performance of the system's products - such education system must be able to produce individual who is useful to himself, to his society and who will be prepared to meet up with global challenges. The fact is that a greater percentage of the products of basic education cannot stand on their own, and contribute to the achievement of the national goals and objectives. In other words, our schools appear ineffective, in that, low quality is achieved. This bothers on the leadership functions of school administrators to impart positively on people they work with so as to have successful pupils through giving quality education.

Therefore, attempts will be made in this study to explain what access and quality mean, and then discuss what it takes to have access to and quality of basic education. The leadership roles of the head teacher in enhancing access to and quality of basic education shall be discussed too.

What access to basic education mean

Access means availability or admittance. The Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary of Current English defined access as opportunity or right to use something or to see something (Hornby, 2005). Access to basic education can then be described as the opportunity or right that an individual child has to enroll or register for basic education class. The Blue-print on Basic Education stated in one of the objectives of UBE that government shall provide free, universal and basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age (FME, 1999).

Two researches were carried out by Nigerian Education Research and Development council, and were exposed by Maduewesi (2004), which undertook a situation analysis of access to learning and teaching at the primary school level. There was an increased enrollment among male and female pupils between 1997 and 2000. Based on access, the trend indicated an increased access to school for boys and girls; however it favoured boys in most States except Cross River and Enugu States, Nigeria.

People do not find it easy to change long held views, especially when they are based on deeply held beliefs and unexamined assumptions that "uneducated parents do not value education and that is why they do not send their children to schools. For examples, the head teachers needs to be exposed to different view points in that parents and community should no longer be told what to do. This is the taking and expecting approach to community interactions/relations.

Quality of basic education

Quality is the ability of something to perform or serve the purpose it is meant or designed to serve. It refers to being able to meet customers requirements, either in terms of products (pupils) or services rendered (Aina and Oyetakin, 2015). It is therefore a continuum of worth, ranging from the highest levels of excellence or superiority. Every institution is to ensure that a high quality of education is being offered.

Quality is characterized by fitness for purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money, perfection and excellence (Ekhaguere, 2005). Each institution should be able to embark on school self evaluation (SSE) by answering: where are we now? What is good now? And what needs improving?

Fitness of purpose

This is measured by the extent to which a school's provision aligns with, or fit national priorities, goals, objectives and aspirations.

Fitness for purpose

This is measured by the extent to which each institution's product fits its envisaged purpose.

Value for money

This is measured by achieving more with less in an efficient manner. That is transformation from one state to another with value added.

Perfection

This is perceived as the attainment of a near flawless product.

Excellence

This can be viewed as the attainment of exceptionally high standards (Okandeji, 2007). If all these have to be attained, the institutional head has to provide leadership in the right direction.

Leadership functions of the head teacher in enhancing access to basic education

The basic school head is expected to provide leadership

in enhancing access to basic education. Just as community needs the contribution of school head (and his team) in enhancing it development, the school head is equally duty bound to develop community-school relations for purpose of enhancing access to basic education. No wonder, Ekhaguere (2005) quoting R.S Peters declared that the school head as an educator has important social function in a community, however idiosyncratic his individual aims may be, he cannot be completely indifferent to the pressing needs of his community, especially if he is paid by the state. It is the pressing need of community to get its children educated, at least to have the basic. It is the head teacher that provides leadership in respect of this.

There is a need for the head teacher and the school to drift from the "taking" and expecting relationship with the community to a "sharing" equal relationship. This will enhance access and enrollment of community children in school. There is need for the community to be closely involved in school. There will be enhanced access and enrollment if people are willing to be involved in the school and be actively involved (Department for international Development/Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (DFID/ESSPIN, 2010).

The Lagos State Government (2013) recognized the involvement of the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) in helping to link the school with the community. The SBMCs are official bodies being established nation wide under government policy to strengthen the link between local communities and their schools and to check that schools are working. They are made up of voluntary representatives from across the local community who are committed to making sure schools make the best use of available resources so that children can learn well in a happy and safe environment. These are neither Parent forum (PF) nor Parent Teachers' Association.

Improved access to basic education will take place with the head of the school supporting the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) in sharing the SSE with the community. The SSE had been done with openness and honesty, and the area of the school weaknesses are used to prepare school needs. These are later prioritized, the School Development Plan (SDP) prepared and implementation strategies developed. Monitoring of all these are embarked upon. The improved status of the school that is in a continuum aids enhanced access to education.

Heads' leadership functions in enhancing quality of basic education

The issue of quality is uppermost in educational discourse all over the world. Quality is essential in maintaining a high standard of excellence. In spite of government effort at ensuring quality in Nigerian educational system, there

are allegations of low standard at all levels, the basic education level (primary and junior) inclusive (Ekweyugbe and Omoraka, 2005; Okandeji, 2007). Pupils are no longer willing to study; teaching-learning have become teacher-centred and poor quality has led to drop-out and low enrollment (Maduewesi, 2004). This, according to her led to many people, especially boys from the Eastern part of the country taking to trading rather than schooling, only to be unemployed at the end.

The Federal Government promulgated Decree No, 16 in 1985 on the minimum standard for primary and secondary schools nationwide. It was a deliberate effort at ensuring quality and it aims at:

1. Providing guidelines on general and specific principles of inspection and monitoring of schools;
2. Providing tools for evaluating the efficiency of school management;
3. Guiding proprietors in providing funds for the school.
4. Using the guides for accrediting the schools (Maduewesi, 2005).

Highly germane of the leadership functions of school heads is that of leading teaching and learning. This requires a deliberate and planned effort to carry out activities that improve the teaching /professional skills of the teacher so they can improve children's learning. The head teacher can do this by, for instance, observing lessons and providing feedback. He can also arrange for others to do it. For example, organizing teachers with good skills to guide/mentor other teachers. There must be an organized and planned set of activities or process to improve teaching skills and children's learning, and that is why it is 'leading'.

Good/quality lesson plans can also be used as models for other teachers. It can be used as a resource in workshop on writing lesson plan or they can be used in conjunction with lesson observations, reviewing them as part of the feedback process.

Apart from that, the head teacher can organize monthly meeting for teachers' professional development. The resource person can be the head teacher himself or school service/supervisory staff from the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). He can also organize demonstration lessons of good teaching skills. All the activities by the head teacher in leading teaching and learning are intended to improve pupils' learning and achievement.

The head teacher's leadership and management, especially in the area of delegation of responsibilities will enable him to be focused. He identified those role/responsibilities to be delegated and those that should not. For those that are delegated, he establishes boundaries which make role holder to be aware of those functions he/she can perform independently of the head teacher, and distinguish them from those he would have

to consult the headteacher before embarking on them. In other words, there should be clear roles/responsibilities. Doing this allow teachers and other staff to perform duties that each has the natural propensity or endowment to perform. A kind of high standard is attained and this is quality.

It is the responsibility of the head teacher to provide leadership in ensuring regularity and punctuality of children's attendance in school. This will eventually curb truancy and lateness. If children enjoy coming to school, the happiness makes them learn better. Irregular attendances are also followed-up. The absentee register will guide the welfare officer so appointed by headteacher in doing proper follow-up. Irregular attendance makes it hard for pupils to build on previous learning. The SBMC also has role to play in discussing with the headteacher and the classteacher of pupils that are absent or attend school irregularly. They will look for patterns such as days or classes or gender (boys or girls) of pupils having poor attendance. Older pupils are also made to mentor younger ones. All those will assist in enhancing quality education. It is worthy of note to state the three perspectives of quality of education as follows:

1. Quality of education refers to the extent to which the educational system meets or tends to respond to the economic needs of the society.
2. It refers to the effectiveness with which the educational system promotes or reinforces among children and young people, the culture and values, morals and attitudes particular to a given society.
3. It refers to pupil performance or standard of attainment in different schools or subjects. The complaint about decline in the quality of education means that standards of attainment have fallen or that the average level of achievement at different level as established through examination results or test scores or other forms of scholastic achievement, has gone down steadily.

The school improvement programme (SIP) currently going on in Lagos State and some other five states of the federation (Nigeria) has shown improvement in the way teachers teach, and consequently increasing the quality learning acquired by pupils. The reason being that, teaching-learning is becoming more activity based and head teachers are progressively providing leadership in teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Enhancing access to and quality of basic education requires the leadership functions of the school head. He develops community-school interactions/relations,

ensures accountability and manages the school resources (both human and material). This reposes confidence and eventually children are given access to education that they enjoy having, for happy children learn better. Quality education is very vital in every human existence and societal development. It enhances the rate of development and increases the standard of living whoever acquires quality basic education, receives the pivot for further development both of himself and his society. The impact of the intervention by the Department for International Development/Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (DFID/ESSPIN) can be best show-cased at the end of the on-going composite survey by Oxford Policy Management (an independent body).

Conflict of interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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