

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE HEADMASTER**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the role of the headmaster in the affairs of the primary school as indispensable. Without him, there would be no success in achieving the objectives of the school. The problem necessitating this work is that a lot of people do not know the duties of the headmaster. This is more disturbing when we learn that some headmasters do not know their duties. This affects various primary schools. The data for this work are derived from library materials. The researcher used survey method in the work. The findings are that various duties of the headmaster, whether glaring or subtle, have been made clear. The significance is that various headmasters that read this work will learn their duties and so improve on their jobs. In addition, non-headmasters will learn the duties of the headmaster and so would contribute in reminding headmasters of their duties so that they will sit up.

### **Introduction**

Education which involves teaching and learning started from time immemorial. It is in two forms, the informal education, which is not organised with a known venue, time and curricula started in the home with parents and seniors teaching little ones various things including behaviours, manners of performing different functions or activities in the locality, and the formal education, that involves curricula, venue, time and the appointed teacher.

The latter form was transferred from abroad. It is of two main kinds. One of them is Islamic education which was copied from the Arabic world. The other one is the European education. This brand of education was brought to us by Europeans. The education was based on European culture and so its curricula are foreign to Africa. Uwazurike (1991:1) is aware of this as it concerns Nigeria and states:

Prior to independence the Nigerian educational system was directed and controlled from Europe... The educational system administered was good but it was not relevant to Nigerian needs because it neglected the country's cultural and special background. In other words, the foreign educational planners failed to consider the country's social and cultural background in planning the educational system.

Policy making helped Nigerians to change the policy of their education to portray their local environment. Ocho (2003:1) helps us to understand policy making as "decisions

of people in authority, which express organisational intentions for achieving the purposes of the organisation” Nweke (n.d.:xiii) is interested in the importance of policy in public organizations thus:

...general principles which guide the state actions, the input process, conversion, strategies and performance management have been subjects of major interest among scholars and analysis. A good policy does not really depend on its contents of outlined strategies but upon the impact it has on society and the governed.

Policies have been made from the past to the present. So many policies have produced educational programmes that contributed in indigenizing the foreign-oriented European education in Nigeria. The programmes include the Phelps-Stokes Fund's sponsorship of two commissions in 1920 that attacked British Education Ordinance 1882 with the first 1922-Report on Education in Africa. A study of West, South and Equatorial Africa shows that “Native tongue is immensely vital in that it is one of the chief means of preserving whatever is good in Native Custom” (Nwadike, 2003:59). Since then, so many programmes helped to indigenize Nigerian education. The programmes include Universal Primary Education (1976), Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the *National Policy on Education*(2004) which states that at 1977 the primary education would portray “citizenship education” and “develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment.”

Education in Nigeria is divided into different levels. The levels are pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The business of this work is the administration or management of the primary level in Nigeria. The management of the primary school is made clear by our expression of what management is all about. Onyali, Okekeokosisi and Okoye (2014:2) state that management is in every aspect of human endeavour whether “in business, hospital, religion, or even at home, management is indispensable. Therefore, management is being in charge or being in control” Druicker (1974:6) observes that management that concerns itself with “ownership, rank or power” ought to be deeply involved in the responsibility that will yield performance. In Onyali, Okekeokosisi and Okoye (2015:3) Reretomode enlightens the audience by explaining that management is “the performance of executive duties, the carrying out of policies or decisions to fulfill a purpose and the controlling of the day-to-day running of an organization.” And Alu et al (2001:2) observe that “Educational Administration can be seen as the co-ordination of human and material resources towards the attainment of some predetermined educational objectives. It means bringing all the attributes of administration to bear on educational issues and problems in an effort to realize the educational objectives”

In the primary school, it is the headmaster that is at the apex of administration. The headmaster discharges a lot of duties which help to keep the school alive. It is the headmaster that takes decisions on the matters of the primary school. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011:8) observe the same: “... primary school headmasters perform numerous administrative roles. They plan, co-ordinate and direct their staff and pupils, manage school

buildings and facilities and provide the physical and human school environment conducive to teaching and learning”

### **The Role of the Headmaster**

The headmaster is the highest authority in the primary school. He sees to the day-to-day administration or management of his institution. The school leans on him for co-ordination of various persons in the schools, teacher to teacher, pupil to pupil, pupils to teachers, the school to the community and the school to the government, ministries and agencies in charge of education. So the role of the headmaster is enormous and so indispensable that the school cannot achieve success without him.

The headmaster is ever busy in order to be able to discharge enormous duties awaiting him. That is why Ediger and Rao (2007:57) state as follows: “A school administrator then needs to become a decision-marker. Shying away from difficulties generally makes for increasingly complex problems.” The duties of the headmaster included the following.

**Conducting the Assembly:** The first thing the headmaster does in the day is to conduct the assembly of the school. He ensures he comes early enough to see to everybody performing his function. If the headmaster comes around 7.20 a.m. he would have enough time to monitor the lateness of teachers and pupils. The headmaster that comes early gingers his teachers and pupils to come early. Early attendance will enable pupils sweep their classrooms and school compounds before the bell for the assembly rings.

When it is the time for the assembly, the headmaster, with the help of teachers, especially the Assistant Headmaster, will conduct the assembly as it concerns prayers, recitations or speeches and the match past as the school band plays at about 7.40 a.m. to make room for roll calls before the commencement of teaching the first subject.

The next thing is checking of late comers. The prefects will help the headmaster and his assistant stop the late comers. Sometimes the headmaster would administer corporal punishment on them. In alternative, he would give them manual labour. He may ask them to do picking and keep the compound cleaner by collecting and dumping rubbish in compost pits. The punishment serves as deterrence to the late comers.

**Marking Lesson Notes:** The headmaster’s primary duty is to ensure that the teachers under him teach very well. This is because adequate or appropriate lessons are the major things that will keep the school going. As long as the pupils are taught very well, the school will continue to grow.

The headmaster ensures the inculcation of the right education by correcting the teachers’ lesson notes. The lesson notes enable teachers to study their topics. So the headmaster goes through the lesson notes to see how prepared the teachers are in familiarizing themselves with the topics. Without this, teachers might procrastinate studying their topics of lessons until it is time to deliver the lessons and so the quality of their lessons would be very poor as they will teach without the grasp of the knowledge of their topics. Alu et al (2001:203) make the importance of lesson notes clear.

Given the importance and complexities of teaching and learning processes today, it would appear that some sort of elaborate preparation is necessary and should be made by

teachers when presenting instructions. This elaborate preparation should include among other things the meticulous writing of the note of any lesson a teacher intends to deliver.

**Supervision of Instructions:** Considering what are written down in the lesson notes good is one thing but delivering the lessons well is another. so the headmaster achieves his aim of ensuring good lessons of his teachers by supervising their delivery of their lessons. This is what he can do from time to time to ensure good performance. The headmaster will correct the teachers where they have gone wrong. Teachers can deliver lessons wrongly by missing the steps of their lessons. They should be corrected as it concerns introducing their topics, entering behaviour through other steps to evaluation and correction of exercises. The headmaster will be on the watch out for the use of adequate teaching aids, pupils' participation and enough exercises. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011:8) note this duty of the headmaster by stating that the headmaster should be involved in "supervising the instructional activities of teachers."

**Keeping School Records:** A lot of records are very necessary in the primary school, because from time to time, people come for one piece of information or the other, especially in writing. The information could be transfer certificates, pupils' school fees statuses, testimonials etc. Without referring to records, the headmaster cannot have the knowledge of what is demanded, more so when the information is from the time the headmaster in question had not been posted to the school. Oraemesi (2002:66) takes a look at school records thus:

Education law demands that every educational institution should keep certain school record. There are other records not required by law, but which are kept because they provide vital source of information not only for members of school community but also for people outside it. The administration also wish to collate some information about a student or member of staff in order to substantiate a case he/she wants to table before a school board.

The school records are as many as their uses are. They include the admission register, the log book, visitors' book, movement book, school timetable, syllabus, weekly school diary, transfer and leaving certificates, minutes of staff meeting, financial record, pupils' personal hygiene, staff duty roster, school budget, school imprest account, record of buildings and physical development of compound, Inspection/Supervision Report Book, Record of Games and Sports Activities etc.

**Co-ordinating Teachers' Activities:** The primary school has different teachers that work from different directions. They need somebody at the centre to co-ordinate what they do. If they are out for games or sports like inter-house sports competition, they need the headmaster who co-ordinates them. Otherwise they will clash over various interests so the headmaster directs them and resolves clashes otherwise they will separate and go in pieces.

**Instilling Discipline:** Indiscipline is common these days that crimes thrive everywhere. Teachers are bound to be undisciplined. They commit offences ranging from disobedience

and dereliction of duty through truancy to absenteeism. It is the duty of the headmaster to punish them and so curb excesses that can destabilize the schools activities.

Indiscipline is a vice that does not enable any organization to thrive. Ezeugbor (2019) accommodates the disciplining of teachers thus: “According to Thomason and Kleiner (2005), discipline helps to direct the behaviour of members of staff towards achieving the goals of organization.”

Pupils’ indiscipline cannot be underrated, because undisciplined pupils will not only disorganize the school but will also disrupt the society in future for the undisciplined pupils will become adults of the society in future.

Undisciplined pupils will not only be dropouts but end up criminals. This is covered by the *National Policy on Education* (2004:14) which observes that one of its objectives in the primary school is “to mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child”. Oraemesi (2002:50) notes that the need of administering punishment in schools to inculcate discipline is legal:

A high court in Britain continued this is a 1908 case when the judges declared, “the ordinary authority extends not to the head-teacher only but to the reasonable teachers who have charge of classes (c.f. G.R. Barrel, Teachers and Law, London, 1978).

**Maintenance of the Timetable:** The headmaster keeps the timetable and it is his duty to see that teachers strictly follow the timetable. It is not always that teachers keep to the timetable because of one reason or the other. The reasons can include starting one particular subject late in which case the teacher will start the subsequent lesson late, delaying in one lesson and so spend too much time on it as to eat into the time of the following lesson etc. So when the bell for a change of lesson rings, the headmaster makes sure all the teachers change to their next lessons. Alu et al (2001:194) explain the timetable and state the disadvantage of the failure to keep to the timetable thus:

The timetable is a mapped out plan indicating the periods the school will be in session in a day, subjects to be taught as well as when, where and by whom they should be taught. School timetables are usually drawn by experts or experienced teachers in timetable planning and preparation efforts are made to ensure that no subject receives undue attention at the expense of others and that no subject is unduly marginalized.

**Maintenance of Teachers’ Welfare:** It is the headmaster that organizes the school welfare scheme for the goodness of the teachers in his school. They will have an organisation by which they contribute levies for welfare purposes like attendance of marriage ceremonies of their members, child dedications, title taking, house warming and funeral ceremonies. They can extend their welfare business to the contributions of thrifts (*isusu*). The headmaster is at the centre. Every member pays his due to the headmaster who collects it and hands it over to the person whose turn it is to reap the proceeds.

**Controlling and Supervising School Businesses:** The primary school engages in different money yielding ventures, which the headmaster controls and supervises. Such businesses

include productions, collections and sales of handwork and crafts. The products include brooms, baskets, hand fans, mats, mortars, pestles, statues, bags, necklaces, earrings etc.

These products are sold. Some of them are sold in large quantities. For example, brooms are sold in large quantities to dealers who carry them to the northern parts of the country where they are sold at high prices. The teachers account for the sales of the products of their classes to the headmaster who records the account and keeps the money.

**Keeping School Finances:** The school earns money from different sources. Apart from the money realized from sale of handcraft, the school earns money from sales of the products of the school farm. Cassava, yam, coco yam, maize and vegetable from the school farm are normally sold within the school and teachers buy. The school also make money from dues or levies paid by pupils within the approvals of the education managing authorities. Parents also pay some levies or dues at parent's teachers association so the headmaster records the income in the school finances book and keeps the total money.

**Development of Teachers:** Teachers need to develop themselves in order to learn more as well as refresh what they had learnt. These days, new things come into the world by way of computer and computer technology, so there is a need for teachers to update their knowledge.

The headmaster has a duty in this by asking those that look away from in-service training to embark on it. His encouragement will make those shying away from it to start programmes for there are many opportunities of professional growths, hence these days the opportunities include week-end programmes and sandwich programmes held during schools' long vacation periods in various collages of education, polytechnics and universities.

The headmaster will not only encourage teachers to enrol for educational programmes but will also be accommodating. Sometimes the academic year of the primary school do not correspond with those of tertiary institutions where teachers are obtaining in-service training and so teachers take early part of the session to complete their programmes for the previous sessions. Sometimes they start school a month behind resumption date. It is left for the headmaster to accommodate their absence from school. He should not antagonise them, hence they write for permission from the school managing authorities or boards.

**Settlements of Disputes:** There are many persons in the primary school from pupils to teachers so disputes are bound to occur from time to time. The disputes could be between one teacher and another or between a teacher and a pupil or between a pupil and another. The headmaster plays judicial function in his school where it concerns one teacher and another, where pupils quarrel outside the purview of teachers or still where the quarrel is big enough to destabilise the peace of the school.

**Requesting for Teachers:** The teachers in the school must be enough at any given time. This is not always the case. From time to time, teachers in the school reduce due to retirements of old ones, deaths of some teachers in service and leaving the jobs by those that secure better jobs.

Lack of teachers must be given attention by the headmaster. He should take note of the school's need for teachers and make requests to the school management organisations. He has to state the category of the teachers he needs. Old teachers are normally placed in

lower classes like primary classes one to three. Young and intelligent teachers are normally placed in senior primary classes. The school gets needed teachers on the basis of the worry of the headmaster. The school performs well when there are adequate qualified teachers working very hard to achieve the objectives of the school. Nwachukwu (2002:20) notes the importance of enough teachers and states that it is on “renewed concerned realization that the UBE can only be realized if there is an adequate number of trained and committed teachers who are expected to mediate the process of learning”

**Taking Care of the School Premises:** It is the duty of the headmaster to look after the school premises. He repairs the school buildings like patching the broken floors, mending the leaking roof, constructing pathways and so on. Where the amendments are too big for him, he can involve the parents’ teachers association.

He also has the record of the school physical arrangements. He has a copy of the school compound survey plan. He guards the school jealously and notices when people encroach on the school compound and stops the trespassers. Where they are very troublesome, he will involve his teachers the chairman of the parents teachers’ association, the community and lastly the government agency in charge of the school.

**Maintaining School Community Relationship:** The school situates in the community, whether it is owned by the community or not. The school needs the community or vice versa. The headmaster has to be in good relationship with the administration of the community in which his school situates. He cannot operate in isolation to the community and the community cannot do without the school that educates its children. The headmaster should invite the community administration to the school activities on such occasions like inter-house sports, founders’ day celebration, prize giving occasion, old pupils’ day etc. The school should also not constitute a problem to the community. The school should be law-abiding and go about its business without involving itself in the community disputes.

The headmaster should reciprocate by paying visits to the community leaders. He should do that with his assistants accompanying him. The headmaster should also accept invitations to community occasions and honour them. The school-community relationships are very important. It helps to familiarise both entities and create rapport for heading issues concerning both of them. That is why Omoke (2002:68-80) states: “The school exists for the good of society and so should as much as possible satisfy the cultural needs of the state and community. In summary, one can see that the headmasters have much role to play for the success of their school. Headmasters should be alive to their duties because dereliction of duties will put clogs in the wheel of the progress of the primary school.

### **Conclusion**

The headmaster is the leading teacher of the primary school who sees that the general activities of the school go on smoothly. He supervises the educational instructions, ensures adequate number of teachers that must work hard to realize the school objectives. He co-ordinates the teachers and pupils in the school on the one hand and the school and the community on the other. He protects the school from external influences and mediates between the school and government organs in charge of primary schools. The administration of the primary school revolves over the headmaster who must work hard to prevent the failure of his school in realizing its objectives.

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