Teachers Challenges in Nigerian Public Secondary Schools Climate: Implications on Students Dropouts

By
Awwalu Muhammad Inuwa
Ph.D., Student, Sociology of Education
School of Educational Studies University
11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
yphilisawwula@yahoo.com

&
Najineen Bint Mohammad Yusof (Ph. D)
School of Educational Studies Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
najineen@usm.my

Accepted 17 October, 2012

Abstract: This paper discusses the challenges Nigerian teachers are facing in public secondary schools [Government owned schools] and its effects on the present rising students dropouts. Secondary school in Nigeria is an educational stage to be attended by students after primary school and before tertiary institutions. This is a period for youth direction on subject specialization, leading to issues of professionalization base on subject compartmentalization and choice of higher institution. The significance attached to this requires productive school climate with efficient resources for teaching and learning. Nigeria public secondary schools climate are facing the challenges of inadequate professional capability, poor school preparatory ground and absence of facilities to cater for students. In terms of curriculum contents there is a total mismatch between stated policy on education and the provision of teaching facilities and structural preparation. These over stretched public secondary school problems which cannot be managed by authority and be accepted by education clients had led to frequent absenteeism, poor performance and constant student’s dropout. This easily predicts the future of unproductive youths and these classes of citizens will be unskilled and unproductive. Thus, teachers are strongly finding it difficult to meet up to the expectations of teaching profession, because the school climate is not conducive for both teaching [teacher] and learning [student].

Keywords: Teachers challenges, Public secondary schools, School climate, Students dropout, Dysfunctions of education.

Introduction

School institutions remain a preparatory ground to empower and certify the requirement for human development. The teacher is faced with the challenges of educating, socializing, empowering and certifying students, but with the help of good teaching atmosphere (Fafunwa, 2004; Farrant, 2004; Wasagu, 2009). By implication, the task of a teacher, which includes sustaining education system, do not rest on his or her professional competency alone, but on the entire features of the school climate (Loukas, 2007). But, public schools which are owned by government and are predominantly occupied by citizens of lower socioeconomic status in Nigerian society and are facing challenges of educational sub-standard, lack of adequate resources, leading to poor teaching, students poor academic performance and dropping out. Research has shown the relationship of school climate as a factors influencing success or failure of education to teachers and students (Adesina 2011; Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie 2004).

Among the task of the school is the socialization and educating youths. This makes family (Home) to commit children to schooling process (Aggarwal, 2006). The Nigeria public secondary school is posing unending social challenge to teacher’s professional standard, which affects their abilities for human modification, cultural reproduction, social recreation, innovation and social placement to suit industrial development (Nwagwu, 2008; Reddy & Sinhas, 2010; Fafunwa, 2004). This requires more of teachers effort and adequate school instructional facilities. Teachers are charged with the responsibilities of re-creation, conservation and changing of human biological being to a socially accepted person (Haralambos, Holborn & Heald, 2008; Burke, Oats, Ringlet, Fichtner & Delgado, 2011; Gemic & Rojewski, 2010; Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie, 2004). The teachers are entrusted with the values of education institutions in the school climate (Anuforo, 2007; Adegoke, 2003; Marshall, 2004). But a productive school climate needs good teaching and learning strategies, sufficient instructional materials, richer classroom ecology, pleasant school culture, objective administration and good school physical structures. The availability of these features can help education to be successful. Thus, the absence of these can make students in secondary schools to be poorly socialized, uneducated, wrongly informed, half trained and become unskilled individual (Carpenter, 2011; Len, Stewin, Ma & Deveda, 2001). But the failure of school climate in Nigeria is more attached to public secondary school (Nakpodia, 2011; Egbochuku, 2007). The failure of the school to meet the expectations of students has led to poor academic performance, frequent absenteeism and dropping out. Students dropout from school (Rumberger & Sun Ab Lim., 2008; Fafunwa, 2004), is an unconventional act, against social order or rules of any
schooling system and culture (Char land, 2011; Ellison, Boykin, Towns & Stokes, 2000; Fafunwa, 2004; Loukas, 2007; Sigh, 2007).

Nigerian public secondary school climate is facing challenges of low operational quality and absence of required facilities to cater for teachers and students, which features; rampant examination malpractices, lack of parental commitment to school activities, high rate of bullying, dominant acts of indiscretion, gangsters, illegal substance abuse, lack of proper supervision of students activities, inbuilt culture of incompetency and a general hopelessness leading to students failure, truancy and dropout, which societies have blindly attributed faults to the classroom teacher (Raymond, 2009; Wasagu, 2009; Abinboye, 2011). There have been a rising number of students dropouts from formal schooling system [public schools], amounting to about 10 [Ten million] (Abinboye, 2011). This in future will lead lower class citizens with lower socioeconomic status and inferior social class (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2009). This difficulty in managing school productive standard by government is posing a trait to teacher profession in Nigeria. It therefore becomes imperative to examine the challenges teachers of Nigerian public secondary school are facing and how it is affecting the rising number of students’ dropouts.

Nigerian Teachers and the Social Philosophy towards Secondary School

The philosophy of FGN (2004, p.39) with respect to the goals of teacher education programme are:

a. Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational systems;

b. Encourage further the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers;

c. Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.

d. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation.

e. Enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.

Teachers are the interpreters of all and any educational plan and philosophy (FGN, 2004; Anuforo, 2007; Nakpodia, 2011; Lingard, Hayes, Mills, 2003). Teachers are best known for their constructive effort towards interpreting government policies on education, and put the features of the policies into practical measures for assessment (Farrant, 2004; Nakpodia, 2011). A skillful teachers requires training, acquiring this in Nigeria begins with the study of theories and principle’s which form the foundation for academic and educational pursuits of teacher trainees. Presently, this training is available in; National Teacher’s Institute, Colleges of Education, Institutes of Education and Faculties/Department of Education in Universities (Anuforo, 2007; Fafunwa, 2004). According to Aggarwal (2006), teaching is a profession in which a trainee has to be exposed to theories and practices over a long period of time. During which trainee acquires desirable work ethics to practice as teacher (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 2003; Nakpodia, 2011). A professionally trained teacher is one who has acquired training from any recognized institutions of education in any country (Aggarwal, 2006; Anuforo, 2007). Because of the importance attached to teaching Nigeria provide various means to meet with the demand of producing teacher manpower in the country. These are full-time, part-time, pre-service and in-service education programme in various tertiary education institutions, that provide teacher education programme. This is why, FGN (2004, p. 39) states that, "Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development". Sequel to the above, teachers are faced with the task of meeting the expectations of society in terms of educating the pupils in primary and students in secondary and tertiary institution.

Secondary school is a transitional stage of education (FGN, 2004). This is a forecasting period of youth ability (examining talents) to be specialized as science, social science, art, or commercial students depending on the students’ abilities. These categorization are mostly predicted by aptitude test conducted by schools or a choice made by parents, guidance or through teacher’s advice as the case might be (Azetta, Adomeh, Oyaziwo, 2009). The primary objective of this is to prepare individual student to have strong educational background before proceeding to higher education (University, Polytechnic, Monotechnic or College of education), with the simple focus of subject tracking for the purpose of having and producing experts or specialists in subject area. The success of this is seen as the central duty of the teacher in school (Fafunwa, 2004). To achieve the production of human experts in subject areas Nigeria secondary school subjects are divided into two sections: Junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school (SSS) with the following objectives of secondary school programme:

Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;  

a) Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;

b) Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;

c) Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world cultural heritage;

d) Inspire its students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;

e) Foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
f) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens; These fascinating objectives led to the compartmentalization of secondary school subjects in to the JSS and SSS subject, with an inspiration to have diversified field of experts in the workforce of Nigerian social system.

g) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (FGN, 2004, p. 18).

Table 1. Subject offered at JSS and SSS of Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Junior secondary school subjects</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Senior secondary school subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Group A (Core)</td>
<td>English, French, Mathematics, Language of the environment L1 and any other L2.Integrated science, Social studies and Citizenship education, Introductory technology</td>
<td>Group A (Core)</td>
<td>English language, mathematics, A major Nigerian language, Biology, Chemistry, Health science, Physics, Literature, History, Geography, Religious studies, A vocational subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group C (non-pre-vocational elective)</td>
<td>Religious knowledge, Physical and health education and Arabic</td>
<td>Group C (non-pre-vocational elective)</td>
<td>Biology, Chemistry, Further Mathematics, French, Health education, Physical education, Literature in English, History, Geography, Bible Knowledge, Islamic studies, Arabic, Government, Economics and any Nigerian Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adopted from FGN (2004), with modification.

Both the JSS and SSS classes are for the period of three years, which finally students will be engaged in writing examination. It is from this point a student will be able to determine and predict his or her educational career and future profession. This is a challenging stage of education that requires the school climate to be functional, using the teacher to meet the expectation of the education policy, students and communities at large.

Presenting the Features of Ideal Public Secondary School Climate

Nigerian schools are always termed as a place of learning functional skills, receiving ideal information, to act rationally to the expectation of the broader society (Bagudo, 2006; Daramola, 2002). This is equally the practices of schools in other societies, thus schools expects teacher to have control and operate in the school climate to the expectation of society (Carpenter, 2011, Loukas 2007; Marshall, 2004). The deliberate attempt by society's institutions (family, religion, polity, economy, sub-organisations and structures) to entrust to education (school) its social philosophy and ideology (mission and vision) has resulted to high expectations, result oriented relationship between teachers in school climate and society, which resulted to the question of what and how to measure the school progress (Cohen, McCabe, Michelle & Pickere, 2009; National School Climate Council, 2007; Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2003; Singal, et al., 2011; Char land, 2011).

These challenges make school climate to build up strategies of executing proper, stable and functional duties to the
parents, children/students/pupils and social institutions. School affairs are structurally organized in a bureaucratic format because the school is bureaucratic in nature (Max Weber-21 April 1864 -14 June 1920, in Macionis 2006). To this end, giving a clearer picture of a school climate will involve [teachers, students, and policy makers]. A number of scholars have identified these as the features of school climate; school physical structure [school plants/buildings], social interaction between teachers and students [teaching and learning], between students and within, peer associative plays and discussion [academic and social] (Marshall, 2004; Loukas, 2007; Nakpodia, 2010; Galton, 2010; Char land, 2011; Lingard, et al, 2003). The school climate (environment) is a description of the total written and unwritten, academic, social and administrative rules that affects and influences the behaviour of teachers and students. By implication the entire school climate have influences on the academic, social, safety, relationship and connectedness of teacher and students in school and beyond. This is why teacher are seen as custodian of the education success and failure (Smith, 2010; Cohen, et al, 2009; Lenl, Stewin & Mah, 2001; Galton, 2010).

**School culture:** The school culture (belief, values, traditions, patterns of behaviour, climate, environment, the way we do things) designates the organisational norms and believes as parts of school social milieu with either directly or indirectly influences teachers and students. School culture involve believes, they are socially structured with the features of do’s and don’ts (rules and regulations), within the school settings. It is an ideological, assumptions, and values of the social unit (school). The school culture silently dictates its social rules to individual; administrators, teachers, parents and students (Ellison, Boykin, Towns & Stokes 2000; Doivos, 2012; Char land, 2012). This in summary can be seen to be school ways of activities and it will is a routine affair that must be maintained with the passage of time (McGrath & Noble 2010; Loukas, 2007; Daramola, 2002; Ellison, et al, 2000; Al Fassi, 2004).School climate is an academic cultured environment.

**Classroom ecology:** The classroom is a part of the entire school climate. The classroom ecology describes the teaching and learning room in every school setting. To the teacher it is the most sensitive place where the intentions of all educational plans are tabled down to its micro level. This is the predicting position of education success or failure (Galton, 2010; Burke, Oats, Ringle, Fichter & Delgaudio, 2011; Anderson, et al. 2004). The importance of the teachers activities in the classroom was equally recognized by, FGN (2004) that, no nation rises or will rise above the level of its education, this involves both the structures, contents and pedagogies of teaching, as no education system can progress beyond the quality of its teachers. The classroom is the laboratory of educationists and indeed sociologists of education. Effort to make a good classroom depends on; teacher’s pedagogical competency, student’s readiness to learn, school authority’s willingness to provide all teaching and learning requirements duty (Anufo, 2007). The classroom did not stand or appear in a vacuum, it comes about as a myriad of (physical, psychological and social phenomenon) which are akin to the teacher and school successes. In the study of Ellison, et al 2000), in understanding classroom factors, some variables where identified as (social and psychological relationship or interactions, technical and pedagogical aspects of instructional delivery, physical and organisational routines of classroom, discipline and management, seating arrangement perception and expectations) (Singal, et al., 2011; Burke, et al 2011; Finn & Gerber, 2005; FME, 2007).

Social and psychological relationship, of teaching and learning is an interaction that involves teacher and student’s relationship involving teaching and learning contents and materials in the classroom and beyond (Aggarwal, 2006). Teacher’s personality is the combination of his or her ability to teach effectively (academic quality) and make a valued fair judgment within the contents of what is being thought and beyond (Farrant, 2004; Anufo, 2007). Student’s friendliness should improve academic confidence and integrate parents into school relationship (Azetta, et al, 2009; Aluede, 2011; Al Fassi, 2004). School facilities are to be at student’s disposal when needed (Singal, et al., 2011; Al Fassi, 2003). Classroom interaction should be seen to favour all academic activities of students, quality of instruction [by teachers] and monitoring of students’ progress (Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Erickson & Mc Donald, 2009).

The ability for the school[teacher and authority] and students to interact base on standard stated norms promote positive schooling atmosphere and when school culture is not conducive there will be high expectation of indifference (Lingard, et al., 2003; National School Climate Council [NSCC], 2007). A well cultured classroom must be disciplined and above all the teachers’ voice, actions, gesture are toward the maintenance of social rules embodied in the classroom. This compliment Bagudo (2006) position that a teacher is expected to put discipline and management together, but in personality building, perception on students and general expectation from school and students’ academic activities. This has direct impact on the entire classroom ecology (Anderson, et al., 2004; Cohen, et al., 2009). Positive classroom ecology can keep students in school and improve accommodative managerial policies, while negative aspects of school can make the students uncomfortable.

**School physical plants:** This captures school appearances [paint, colour, decorations and attraction] and school physical plants (school building, location, and safety), and environmental safety (Adesina, 2011). School building and environment should be free from risk and hazards. The features of school safety should involve good building plans, with protective majors for risk management, propose adequate budget for combating social risk and enhancing access to education and improve retention strategies (NSCC, 2007; Raywd, 2001; Lingard, et al., 2003). The school plants are expected to be for conformability, as an essential factor with importance features; toilet facilities for teachers and students, good classroom structures that are strong and safe, types of building fitting must be humanly favourable. While planning to have school the distance, location, means of transportation should be considered. There is a relationship between good school plant and academic achievement, which is tied to be the classroom, location of school and its safety to students. Research indicated that a pleasant teachers working atmosphere and students learning environment is obvious to
enhance social security and environmental safety, which is important in the assessment of school climates (Dovos, Dupriez, Paguay, 2012; Oluwadare & Julius, 2011).

**Administrative organisation in school:** School is an administrative system, a bureaucratic organisation, which leadership style and decision making always remain a focal point of discussion between and within teachers and students of a particular school (Macionis, 2012; Carpenter, 2011; Chandler, 2011; Aluede, 2011). Leadership style affects school climate (dealing with both the seen and unseen governing roles and regulations). In referring to the written and unwritten socially constructed norms and ways of behaviour, this has effects on teacher’s job; in term of commitment and discipline in the school environment. A rigid administrative organisation causes fear in students, lateness and absenteeism. School leadership affects school climate, culture and classroom positive or negative ecology (Nwagwu, 2008; Ananga, 2011; Smith, 2010; Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2011).

**Implications of Nigerian Public Secondary Schools Climate to Teacher’s Duties and Students Dropouts**

The challenges that teachers are facing in Nigerian secondary school are equally detrimental to the students as these encounters are the major factors affecting the school climate productivity and efficiency. The challenges teachers are facing causes students dropout from school. Disciplinary measures are prime concern to school climate, an integral part of the school culture and a factor to control the school by administrative organisation (Regina & Stella, 2010; Reddy & Sinha, 2010). The absence of discipline in school will render it to be unsafe, but schools are known to be a cultured environment, without which the control of youths by teachers will be difficult. School premises are built on disciplinary ethics, both in the classroom and outside (Patrick, 2012; Nwagwu, 2008; Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2011; Lingard, et al,2003). Earlier on (Bagudo, 2006; Ananga, 2011; Daramola, 2002), had observed the school climate is a place where major social rules are thought to the younger one in preparation for adult life. Discipline in the school is one primary factor that has to be moderated to accommodate all students and teachers. A rigid, harsh and uneducated school climate push students out of the school, this interprets the school climate and culture negatively, and the consequences to the teacher is the traditional confidence built in the profession by students, parents and the community (Nwagwu, 2008; Azetta, Adomeh & Oyaziwo,2009; Aluede 2011).

The provision of positive public school climate to Nigerian teachers and students is a challenge, which is against productive teaching (Regina & Stella, 2010; Okopi, 2011). The schools are observed to be short of instructional materials, poor school structure, inadequate teaching staff and overcrowded classroom (Oluwadare & Julius, 2011). A pre-existing conditions for positive schools climates are; students’ conformability demand to have high interest in school activities, attaching strong value to school culture, acceptability in the part of students and teachers to work as a team, a designed and stated security measure for the environment safety (Loukas,2007; Nwagwu, 2008). This involves interdependent interaction of staff, students, and policy makers in school climate. For any school environment to be successful it is expected to provide facilities for teaching and learning, which are; instructional materials, safety measures, games facilities, recreational centres, libraries, transportation and social security (Adegoke, 2003; Anderson, et al., 2004, NSCC, 2007; Gemici, et al., 2010).

A schools with high bulling syndrome (Lenl, et al., 2001; Aluede, 2011; Al Fassi, 2004), scare new students, a multiple illegal entrance encourages leaving school early and coming to school late, absence of extra-curricular activities (games, debates, and social play) makes school to be bored. If a school is not productive, and not improving on positive connectedness to establish forum for peer academic support interaction, then it is not safe and conducive for learning, as it goes contrary to expectations of (Affalo & Gabay, 2012), that teaching environment is expected to prevent conflict and technically built moral ideology in students. School climate emotionally operates good or bad to the students, where it fails to stop smoking, bullying, theft, dragging, absenteeism, and dropping out syndrome. Such a school environment is said to be failing, because is operating on the negative side of the climate, and this is going to have negative effects on students (Gregory, et al., 2011; Egbochuku, 2009).

Classroom ecology (Ellison, et al. 2000) will either be negative [academically unproductive] or positive [academically productive], but teachers are expected to achieve success and encourage learning. This can equally be done by conducting class assisting programme [improving] to have a lively environment that encourages group work and collaboration within students. To provide a fruitful classroom, the teacher needs cultural integration strategies. Children from various backgrounds with an inbuilt “cultural traits” and experience need positive classroom interaction to build intrinsic valued idea (Carpenter, 2011; Egwunyenga & Nwadiani, 2004).

Any class teacher that fails to employ a constructive pedagogy and a motivational factor to curtail the problem of classroom dominant culture will make some students to fill inferior during class interaction and be isolated. Teachers are to be fair in the classroom and strike balance between students of different background, and academic abilities. To impose where the policy fail to and give hope to students regardless of their abilities and avoid aspect of individual preferences on interest, by improve the spirit of ideal competition, using bureaucratic orientation to manage class. Thus, language and communication style should be toward transmitting proper classroom ecology to avoid putting students at a risk position of classroom alienation or school environment seclusion, this will save students from dropping out from school (Singal, et al., 2011; Lingard, 2003; Dovos, et al., 2012; Ready, 2010).

School environment should be enriched to improve students enrolment figure and have to cater for the dropouts and children/adolescent and initiate strategies to improve standard. This is because report shows that out of 63% pupils who completed school only 43.5% transit to Junior Secondary School (JSS), drop-outs cases affected about 10 million Nigeria school children. In a related reported by the World Bank that, 45% of over 140 million of Nigeria’s population are school age children, but a million are school dropouts due to policy

factors (FME, 2007; FME, 2009; Ready, 2010). Poor implementation of education policies makes children more vulnerable to social risks by dropping out from school. This affects the total school climate (Cohen, et al. 2009).

School dropout is a global educational problem, is not peculiar to Nigerian schools and family alone, thus many countries and family are facing the problems of students’ dropout which needs an urgent revamping major (FME, 2009). Public secondary school programme is bedeviled by higher institutional (economy, family & polity) expectations, but with very low technical preparation, which led to low student productivity and high students dropout from schools across the country (Patrick, 2002; FME, 2007), communities (Erickson, McDonald & Elder jr., 2009) at all level to school age children, irrespective of sex and ability, remain a serious challenge to Nigerians (Azetta, et al, 2009; Patrick, 2002; Okopi, 2011), which has led to higher students and pupils dropout from various education program. sequel to the above, parents and students lose hope in education policy, as the challenges of maintaining children schooling activities become expensive and poor parents who want to send their children to government public school find it unproductive in terms of quality (FRN, 2004; Fafunwa, 2004; Nakpodia, 2011; FME, 2007).

Conclusion

The general schooling conditions of Nigerian public secondary school is deteriorating, as teaching and learning activities are operating at the lower ebb. Teachers are therefore left with no alternative than to work in a poor condition, which reverse effects are on students’ academic performance and moral decadent. These factors are challenges to teachers (school personnel) they find it difficult to fulfill their primary responsibilities [teaching, socialisation, moral training], leading to students absenteeism and dropouts from school.

Therefore, it will be imperative for Nigerian government to abolish all private secondary schools, which existence has resulted to the total neglect of public secondary schools, all political office holders should be compelled to send their children to government public secondary schools, all government personnel’s [civil servant] should have their children schooling in public schools and all members of the public should patronize public secondary schools. This will re-direct the attention of the authority to lift the standard of public secondary schools and built confidence in people, which will further boost the morale of teachers towards work ethics and will consequently affects students’ attitudes to school positively.

References


