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VITAL ROLE OF PRACTICUM IN QUALITATIVE EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to examine the vital role of practicum in qualitative education in respect to future Nigerian educational mangers. The issue of qualitative education is one of the problems facing Nigeria as a nation. The issues discussed in this paper include concept of practicum, importance of practicum to qualitative education, Analysis of practicum in educational management and vital role of practicum with regard of future Nigerian educational managers. Qualitative education cannot be achieved if teachers are unable to make learning experiences more meaningful through practicum. Practical experience is the heartbeat of intellectual revolution, culture and development. Any learning experience that is not applied is as useless as an obsolete Newspaper. Learning experience is fortified with practical experience. This experience is lasting and the memory is forever. Qualitative education must be pursued, maintained and sustained for the educational goals of Nigeria to be realized. Hence, the focus of this paper is on the vital role of practicum in qualitative education in respect to future Nigerian educational managers.

Introduction

The pride of Nigerian educational enterprise is the attainment of educational goals in such a way that radiate fulfillment from beneficiaries. This cannot be possible without qualitative education. Qualitative education is built on practicum. Empirical evidence abounds to establish the fact that any learning experience is incomplete without practical experience.

The gap between theory and practice is not static or narrow but is continually widening. The hope of qualitative education is difficult to realize. This gloomy situation is of great concern to stakeholders and the concerned educationists. Theory and practice are expected to be a component entity that will complement each other. There is an impact of practice on theory and vice versa. Each cannot do without the other. Obi (2001) in support writes that "practicum is designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice". Practicum is therefore critical to the growth, development and sustenance of educational enterprise.

According to UBEC (2012), "the development of any nation is linked to the quality of education provided for its citizenry over time. It is also known that the vision of greatness is achieved through comprehensive qualitative educational provision". Qualitative education cannot be attained on a platter of gold but must be doggedly pursued, maintained and sustained for the educational goals of any nation to be realized. Practicum in Nigerian education has been narrow in focus without corresponding creative, functional and qualitative results.

In many countries of the world, there is an inward look at the performance of their educational system. This is because of the critical role education plays in economic and social growth. Many times, it has been seen that progress in terms of growth and global competitiveness is being addressed by the operations and outputs of the educational enterprise. This has been traced to the quality of education.

In the words of Ukoje (1983) "Education is characterized by
inputs, process and outputs. If we want creative, functional and qualitative education, none of these three elements must be played down in the course of educating the child". Government's interest in educating the Nigerian child is shown in the fat allocation of resources to education in the annual budget. Parents and guardian's concerns for education of the Nigerian child are clearly indicated in the enormous contribution they make. All the same, resource inputs in Nigerian education

are tremendous but can be wasted if the process of converting the inputs to outputs is poor, ineffective and inefficient. Practicum stands out clearly in this delicate process of converting inputs to outputs in education.

Concept of Practicum

The term "practicum" is a Latin word that means "practical". Thus, practicum is the process of putting all the theoretical aspect of knowledge into practice. Mbiti (1974) defines practicum "as an activity that has to do with the practice of acquiring knowledge and skills in a particular field or discipline". Practicum is organized to assist students gain practical experiences. It also exposes them to the actual practice of the numerous theories, concepts, skills and principles they studies in school.

According to Ramsden (1992) "Practicum is a field-based internship designed to give students supervised practical application of a previously or concurrently studied theories, concepts, ideas and principles". It is therefore an integrated exposure to professional practice through dynamic and multifaceted modes of practice oriented education. Practicum is also designed to help the students establish the qualitative connection between theory and practice as well as experience in real life the dynamics of learning.

Hence, practicum is introduced in educational system to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This assertion is a truism in the sense that usually some of the theories learnt in school are far-cries from the reality in the educational world. Practicum is then a process of applying theories students have learnt in the school to the real life through practice.

The aim of practicum is to give students opportunity to put into practice, experience and apply their knowledge and ideas of theories they have learnt in the school. This is achieved by:

(a) Introducing the students to the world of practice.
(b) Demonstrating how theories can be applied to real life situation.
(c) Explaining to students the differences in theories and the real world of practice.
(d) Giving students an appreciation of possible future development in the field of study (Maduewesi, 2000).

Practicum looks like teaching practice but it is more broad than teaching practice. It comprises school income and expenditure, teachers' normal roll, students' enrollment, school records, school timetable. According to Smith and Lev-Ani (2005) "praticum deals with practical realities and critically assess theories in relation to practice". Practicum enables student teachers to acquire teaching competencies. It prepares the student teachers for the realities of their profession by providing them with a clear understanding of the contexts for schooling. Practicum plays a major role in bridging the gap between theory and practice but beyond that it offers the context for students to develop their personal professional competence. It also help the student teachers to acquire and develop the knowledge of teaching.

It is through the practicum experience that students develop important professional knowledge such as knowledge of people, knowledge of themselves, self-control and inter-personal sensitivity - all of which are important traits that would see them through their professional lives. In practicum experiences, students develop independent problem - solving strategy, working with fellow workers and developing professional values and attitudes. (Shulman 20 1 0)

During practicum, students are mentored and guided by their school co-coordinating mentors (SC M S), cooperating teachers (CTS) and NIE supervisors (NIES) through systematic observations, assistance and advice. They have opportunities to become involved with, and actively participate in all aspects of the organizational activities. Through these experiences, they learn to link theory and practice. They also acquire the understanding and skill necessary for their profession (Yan and He, 2010).

Importance of Practicum to Qualitative Education

The index of qualitative education is the ability of the teaching and learning process to achieve the intended target with regards to what the teacher and the student should do,

what the student should be as well as what the student can do. One of the indicators of qualitative education is its functional nature. Practicum is designed to ensure functional education. Practice is the hallmark of functional education. According to Okoli and Ezeani (1999) "Qualitative education refers to the system of education which meets the goals and objectives of the society that sets it up. It means the provision of education that is functional and relevant to the social needs of the recipient as well as the society. Practicum makes qualitative education possible. The experience of practicum help to lead students on career choice paths. It also give them a chance to utilize their skills in the 'real world'. A practicum is enriching and offers many gifts when properly coordinated and facilitated by students and the stakeholders.

The rewards of practicum placements for students are numerous. The rewards may be professional, personal or both. Personal rewards include skill development, greater awareness of likes and dislikes. The most important reward is life experience and professional development. Practicum allows students to gain valuable experience in their future profession under the supervision of people currently working in the field (Azubike, 2005).

The importance of practicum to qualitative education cannot be over-emphasized. Practicum provides the rare opportunity for student to place academic in the context of practical realities. It also enables students to acquire initial professional competences. Practicum helps students to further develop their professional identity as it pertains to interactions outside the school setting. In practicum exercise, students learn to link theory and practice. They are made to acquire the understanding and skills necessary for them to function effectively in their chosen professions.

Analysis of Practicum in Educational Management

According to Ukeje (1993) "practicum in educational management is relatively a new field of study: it is designed to help students bridge the gap between theory and practice between how things ought to be and how they are in real life". Students are exposed to the practice and realities of various educational management theories, concepts and principles. It is a practical aspect of educational management that enables the future educational manager have practical experiences and skills of all theories acquired during their course of study in the university. It is an experiential skill building course in educational management. It is critical assessment of educational management theories in relation to practice. It is introduced to unite knowledge obtained through educational management, their theories, principles in practice.

Practicum in education management is a field experience that allow a student to observe and document how working professionals perform their job responsibilities. Students participate in performing tasks under supervision. It also offers students opportunity to develop his or her personal administrative and managerial competence. It is an enriching experience for the student in the area of management, leadership, decision-making, planning, organizing, staffing, co-ordinating and budgeting. (Okafor, 2010) .

In the words of Obi (2001) "Practicum exercise in educational management is meant to help students translate theoretical learnt experiences into real life situations. To achieve this, students are posted to educational establishments and organizations. Practicum may be carried out in the area of educational planning, educational supervision and educational administration. The essence of practicum in these areas is to
expose both students and practitioners to the problems affecting
the areas. Solutions can be proffered. Practicum exercise in educational management is an internship programme that involves the attachment of students of educational management and policy to any educational institution to acquire the practical aspect of educational management.

The attachment is compulsory for every student of educational management and policy to stay in an attached educational institution or organization for twelve (12) weeks. The student must write a comprehensive report at the end of practicum exercise. He or she must collect a letter of

recommendation from the educational organization or institution to ascertain his or her participation. Practicum in educational management is the centre-piece of educational management. In the exercise, students of educational management and policy are exposed to a wide range of managerial issues in educational real life-setting. Practicum in educational management goes beyond general coursework to provide specific, useful skills and information. It allows students to address the intersection of educational principles and practical management application in the context of achievement. Practicum of educational supervisors and management in the area of human services, government, industry and other related agencies. Each student join a leadership team under the supervision of a mentor who is committed to guiding his or her professional development through the course of practicum (Okoy, 2008).

Practicum exercise in educational management is expected to help students to become highly competent educational managers, effective problem solvers and be skillful in transforming issues. In practicum exercise, students of educational management and policy are expected to be receptive, polite, diligent, friendly, trustworthy, warm and tactful in the relationship with educational establishment where the practicum is taking place. The students are expected to establish good rapport with the educational establishment to make their stay or period of practicum fruitful one. According to Breach (2000), "The student needs to go a step further by being friendly with the people in the educational establishment". By so doing, he or she gets to learn more of the environment and various functioning of the educational establishment. This will assist him or her to identify the needs of the establishment which he or she can be of use". In the absence of any immediate need, the student should be thinking of any new innovation that could be introduced to help improve the educational establishment. The head of the educational establishment could assign a problematic task to the student. This is seen as a challenge and an opportunity for the student to gain experience and put into practice many concepts, skills, principles and theories of educational management that he or she has studied. Supervision is an important aspect of the practicum exercise. In order that the educational establishment, the student and the organizers of the programme benefit from the practicum, it is imperative that an evaluation exercise is carried out in this context. The supervisor visits the student on practicum at least twice.

Vital Role of Practicum to Future Nigerian Educational Manager

Nigerian government through her National Policy on Education desired to produce:

(a) Future educational manager with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of our country but also in the wider world.

(b) Highly motivated, conscientious and efficient educational managers for all levels of the educational system.

Practicum in its vital role to future Nigerian educational manager makes the government's desire to become a reality. Practicum in educational management enable future educational manager to have practical experiences and skills of all theories acquired while in school before becoming a full fledged educational manager. Disclosing the vital role of practicum to future Nigerian educational mangers, Adesina (2006) writes "A practicum provides an opportunity for student aspiring to be educational manager to integrate and apply knowledge and skills from course work to the type of settings where they will work as educational management professionals". Practicum in educational management is designed to ensure that students or would be educational managers obtain meaningful work experience within the educational sector prior to graduation. It also help students of educational management and policy to be exposed to educational organizational management structure and mobilization of human and material resources towards the achievement of set goals and objectives'

In practicum exercise, future educational managers encounter in their day-

to-day management what sometimes leads to inefficiency and ineffective. The practicum exercise also assists the students to exhibit some personal characteristics and qualities expected of an educational managers. Such qualities include maturity, intelligence, kindness, sympathy, honesty, accommodating, impartial and being considerate in decision-making and general administration. Okafor (2010) summaries the vital role of practicum to future Nigerian educational managers thus:

(a) To test their career interests and gain valuable work experience in the various segments of the education sector.
(b) To recognize, develop and practice skills necessary for the students' future career as educational managers.
(c) To put theory into practice in the real world and utilize this practical experience in future professional assignments.
(d) To compare and contrast different types of educational organizations, educational establishments' cultures and work environments
(e) To explore different departments/areas within an educational organization, gaining invaluable perspective regarding issues, concerns and behaviours of employees of various levels for improvement.

Conclusion

Practicum deals with the application of acquired knowledge and skills in school to real life situations. It therefore plays a vital role of binding theory and practice together for effective results.

Qualitative education is built upon effective results. Hence, practicum also plays a vital role in ensuring qualitative education.

It is the contention of this paper that practicum play a vital role in ensuring qualitative education with respect to future Nigerian educational managers. Qualitative education is dynamic. It is in a process of mutation. If not cared for, it fizzles out of sustenance. Practicum is designed to ensure qualitative education. Practicum enables students to retain learning experience. The memory is lasting and forever.

Indeed, practicum enables teachers to produce future Nigerian educational managers that are academically competent, well tutored, skilled, disciplined and ready to face hard business of their profession.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to ensure qualitative education through practicum.

i. Nigerian government should redouble her effort in encouraging practicum in schools
ii. Emphasis should be laid on practicum in teaching and learning process.
iii. Practicum should be made compulsory in any learning experience.
iv. Efforts should be made to shift emphasis from the age-long theoretical approach to a more functional and purposeful education through practicum exercise.
v. The curriculum could be diversified to cater for practicum exercise in learning

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