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Internship Experience: Summer 2018 Scott Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship

Summer 2018 was a summer like no other! It is one summer that I will never forget because I had the opportunity not only to do research in Nigeria, but to also do an internship with the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LSUBEB). Let me first express my gratitude to Mr. Ken and Mrs. Marlys Jenson for their magnanimous gesture of generosity in making this grant available. Thank you so much! A big thank you also to the IRIS selection committee for finding my proposal worthy of this esteemed award. Through this fellowship, I have been able to complete my very first internship in a government parastatal organization that is directly related to my dissertation research. It was indeed an extraordinary experience for me, and I would not trade my time in Lagos SUBEB last summer for anything.

The State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) is an offshoot of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which was introduced by the federal government of Nigeria in 1999 to tackle inequality in educational opportunity in basic education. The objective of the commission is to reinforce the implementation of National Policy in a bid to eliminate distortions and inconsistencies in the delivery of basic education, as well as to ensure that every child has access to quality and equitable basic education. Each of the 36 states in Nigeria has a State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), which serve as a catalyst for attaining 9 years of free and compulsory universal basic education for all school age children irrespective of their socioeconomic status.

There are 1,016 public primary schools scattered across the 20 Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) in Lagos state, and the department of Special Duties is responsible for them all. Each LGEA is headed by an Education Secretary and each LGEA has a Special Duties section, headed by the Head of Section (HOS), which oversees primary schools within their LGEA jurisdiction. These HOSs in the LGEAs report directly to the Special Duties department in SUBEB. Through my internship, I learned that the Education Secretary position is politically appointed, meaning that those who hold that office do not necessarily have relevant academic or professional experience.

Because my dissertation research is focused on primary schools, I requested to be placed within a unit in SUBEB that has constant interactions with schools as well as classrooms. The Board granted my request and placed me in the Special Duties Department of the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board. This department has direct and close contact with schools on a regular basis. I had the honor of working closely with highly spirited staff whose passion for the provision of quality education ignites in me a hope of a better education system in Nigeria. While my interactions with these men and women has provided me first-hand experience working with a team of committed and hardworking government officials, I also repeatedly saw the difficulties they faced in ensuring that the government provided the necessary resources to reach the most vulnerable of citizens.

Lagos SUBEB has 34 staff members including the Head of Department (HOD), who welcomed and accepted me without any prejudice. I learned a great deal about effective leadership from her, as she would always tell me that it takes a lot more than patience to be a leader. My mornings in the Special Duties office started with a chat with the HOD about trending

issues, which was often about education but could also be about politics, culture, or religion (I always looked forward to this moment). This was followed by a breakdown of the day's activities. Most often, these activities included a visit to one or more schools either to investigate new incidents or to follow-up on previous investigations. Some other times we did routine checkups on schools to see what exactly was going on in real-time. The department worked closely with head teachers and assistant head teachers to make sure that schools operated normally. As such, it entailed a lot of school visits throughout the school year and even during holidays. We did both routine and non-routine visits. Sometimes schools were aware of our visits, and other times, they were unaware. After each visit, we prepared a report to summarize our findings and provide recommendations.

One of the most memorable moments was a four-day retreat in July where I had the opportunity to meet all the HOSs and the Executive Chairman of SUBEB. I had the opportunity to give feedback on the retreat to the Board Director of SUBEB. The retreat featured a welcome address by the Executive Chairman, and two guest lectures. One from the Dean of Education, Lagos State University, who talked about the sustainability of quality standards in Lagos state government primary schools. The other guest lecture focused on doing quality assurance right in government primary schools. On the last day of the retreat, we had an excursion to the Badagry National Monument Slave Museum, the original Slave Relics Museum, the first storey building in Nigeria (built in 1845), and the first primary school in Nigeria (established in 1845).

My internship with Lagos SUBEB was immeasurably significant for my dissertation research. As a graduate student in Educational Policy Studies, with a concentration in comparative and international education, my research looks at the implications of policies (local, national, and international) on early grade literacy pedagogy in multilingual contexts. Specifically, I explore early grade literacy in the first three years of primary school in Nigeria to understand how policies shape classroom pedagogies. In 2015, I had the opportunity to interview some of the assessors that carried out Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in Northern Nigeria. Their testimonies baffled me, and I became curious about the condition of early grade literacy in the western part of Nigeria, especially in linguistically diverse states like Lagos-the most populous city in Africa. As a result of this experience, my dissertation research looks at language policy in multilingual contexts, focusing specifically on the first three years of primary schools in Lagos.

The experience I gained with LSUBEB this past summer has created a paradigm shift in the way that I think about my research and frame my questions. It gave me the opportunity to explore, from a more holistic stance, the implications of educational policies (either national or local) on early grade literacy pedagogy in multilingual contexts. I now look beyond the classrooms, the teachers, and even the schools in trying to decipher why schools are the way they are, and more importantly why literacy pedagogy within early grade classrooms are not yielding encouraging learning outcomes in the country.

Similarly, my experience interning with LSUBEB this past summer has also opened up wider windows of opportunities and curiosity for me as a researcher. It has greatly shaped the overall framing of my research to capture more effectively the current challenges facing public primary schools in Nigeria, and to better understand how to tackle such challenges. My interaction with educational stakeholders at different levels (classroom, school, local government, and state government levels) affords me the opportunity to examine different challenges at different levels and to make connections between and among each level in order

to understand how policies reinforce or undermine such challenges. This interaction paved the way for me to begin to understand the structure of public school administration and management from both top-down as well as bottom-up. Interning in the department of Special Duties within the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board has therefore given me a lot to work with for my dissertation and for future research. For this, I am extremely grateful to Scott Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship.