REPOSITIONING SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR BETTER QUALITY ASSURANCE

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Abstract

It appears incontestable that no nation can rise above the quality of its educational system and no educational system may rise beyond the quality of its teachers. Hence, this paper explores various conceptions of teacher education vis-à-vis quality assurance. It also examines the inevitability of Social Studies teacher education with special reference to quality assurance as enunciated by the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004). The paper therefore critically reviews issues in qualitative Social Studies teacher education with emphasis on some pitfalls in Social Studies teachers' development and various competencies expected from Social Studies teachers. It finally recommends among others that the nation’s system of teacher education should be appraised regularly to ensure better quality assurance in Social Studies teaching.

All over the world, the teacher is widely identified as the foundation of quality and relevance in education at all levels. Judging from the array of information and documentation available, Nigeria never doubted, the pivotal role, teachers play in its educational system (Jegede, 2003). The quality of our schools depends to a great extent on the quality of our teachers. Teacher education programme therefore, maintains a crucial role in this regard. It is a core condition to ensure quality of school education. Specifically, if teachers are equipped with desirable knowledge, competencies and commitment, and are empowered to perform their multiple tasks in the classroom, school and community in a genuinely professional manner, it would ensure effective learning on the part of their students in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

The foundation for a teacher’s capacity to add value to the educational process is laid especially through initial training. This process of teacher education affords trainees the opportunity of being tutored and mentored by specialists in their subject fields. In whatever area of learning the trainees are to specialize, a major assumption is that the quality of training would be acceptable locally, nationally and internationally (Ogunyemi, 2007). This assumption is at the root of quality assurance in teacher education in general and Social Studies teacher education in particular. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to review major issues in Social Studies teacher
education and explores way forward for better quality assurance in Social Studies teaching.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

Teacher education, commonly referred to as teacher training, is the art and science of institutionally providing pre-service and in-service training to educate students in theoretical basis, specialized knowledge and the acquisition of practical and applied skills in the teaching profession, with adequate attitudes and orientations (Adegoke, 2000). It involves the systematic, integrated, formal and professional training in teaching. The system relates to the context in which such training is given to trainees for the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

While Adewuyi and Ogunwuyi (2002) equated teacher education to teacher preparation which involves the various activities for training teachers in various institutions, Afe (1995) on other hand, viewed teacher education as that component of any educational system charged with the education and training of teachers to acquire the competencies and skills of teaching for improvement on the quality of teachers for the school system.

Indeed, any form of teacher education involves a close study and understanding of the complex processes of teaching and learning; systematic study of the joint and independent activity of the teacher, learner and the environment in any type of classroom. Teacher education is central to both quality of education and development. Hence, the diverse interest in the philosophy, goals, content, structure, quality control, certification of the pre service and in service training of teachers.

Specifically, the ideal Social Studies teacher education according to Ogunyemi (2007) is designed to provide general education for social living through the processes it adopts; draw its contents from the social sciences and other relevant academic disciplines; equip learners at whatever level as it is taught with knowledge, skills, values and disposition needed to make informed decisions for addressing issues and problems in their environment; and prepare learners for participating in the events and processes around them as citizens of a democratic society in an independent world.

Basically, the word “quality” has several meanings. Linguistically, quality means a high standard of something when compared to other things like it. It implies a degree of excellence; a characteristic or attribute and a comparative term of product ‘X’ is better than product ‘Y’ (Onocha, 2003). Philosophically, the definition of quality is drawn from the essentialist, norminalist and objectivist perspectives. The essentialist identifies the fundamental aspect of quality; the norminalist identifies quality of purpose while the objectivist emphasizes objective operational measure of quality (Maasen, 1995).
However, Cloete (1998) cited in Onocha (2003) classified the different conceptions of quality into three categories; Firstly, quality as exceptional which refers it to excellence, a high standard of attainability by exceptional students and staff. Secondly, quality as efficient production which is based on practice in industry as regards absolute standards but settles for relative ‘specifications’. Thus, a quality product is one with ‘zero defect’. Thirdly, quality as transformation is an approach that adds value to the abilities of students regardless of their initial levels.

Uvah in Jubril (2005) quoted by Okoli (2007) describes quality assurance as the degree of fitness for purpose. It is a practice of maintaining a high standard. Viewing it from the same perspective, Okebukola (2005) further highlights the purpose of quality assurance in higher education as; providing clarity regarding the purpose of programmes; enhancing quality and standard and giving credibility to awards (and hence to award holders) among others.

Quality assurance in teacher education therefore has to do with the effectiveness and efficiency of administration, teaching, learning and research, the quality of teachers being prepared and produce for society. Comprehensively, quality assurance in teacher education focuses not on the teacher production but also on the physical, social and the intellectual environment which impact on the outcomes of schooling. Quoting UNESCO, Onocha (2003) identified the following as components of effective quality assurance in teacher education (including Social Studies teacher education):

- **Quality Learners**: healthy, well nourished, have access to school, motivated to learn and supported by their family and community.
- **Quality Teachers**: with consideration for adequate entry qualification, course duration, pedagogical skills, motivation, curriculum offerings, internships, promotions, remunerations, number and specializations and so on.
- **Quality Context**: with relevant curricula, adequate and appropriate materials for literacy, numeracy and essential knowledge and skills for life.
- **Quality Teaching**: learning process with child centred and (life) skill based approaches and technology applications to reduce disparities and promote learning.
- **Quality Learning Environment**: (child friendly schools), policies and practices which prohibits harassment, humiliation, violence, corporal punishment and substance abuse including adequacy of facilities and standard services.
- **Quality Outcomes**: with defined learning outcomes (knowledge, attitudes and skills) and suitable ways to assess them at classroom and national levels (Onocha 2003: 64).
The National Policy on Education and the Inevitability of Social Studies Teacher Education

Generally, the training of teachers for the school Social Studies derives its basis from the core subjects in schools. Teacher education is a necessity not a luxury. No meaningful development can take place without adequate manpower resources. No adequate manpower training can take place without competent teachers who are products of good teacher education (Adegoke, 2000). Indeed, section 8(70) of the NPE (2004) clearly articulates that ‘no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers’ and acknowledged that ‘teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development’. Thus, a national seminar on quantities and qualities in Nigerian Education held in 1980 also agreed to this when it concluded that:

...... teachers are the main determinants of quality in education. If they are apathetic, uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, unmotivated, immoral, anti-social, the whole nation is doomed. If they are ignorant in their disciplines and impart wrong information, they are not only useless but also dangerous. The kind of teachers trained and posted to schools may well determine what the next generation will be (NERC, 1980:5).

Specifically, the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004: 33) clearly stipulates that the goals of teacher education shall be:

- to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- to encourage further the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers;
- to help teachers to fit into social life of the community and society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation; and
- to enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.

On professionalism and quality control, the policy statement stipulates that all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained. Teacher education programmes (Social Studies teacher education inclusive) shall be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. Thus, the following institutions among others, shall give the required professional training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standard - Colleges of Education; Faculties of Education; Institutes of Education; National Teachers’ Institutes (NTI); Schools of Education in the Polytechnics; National Institute for Nigeria Languages (NINLAN) and National Mathematical Centre (NMC) (NPE, 2004: section 8, sub section 72).

Reviewing the implications of the above policy statements on professionalism and quality control, Jegede (2003) remarked that the Nigerian teacher must:
be a professional educator who should by aptitude, education, training, comportment, and social status be able to display expertise, knowledge and skills in his teaching;

ii) assist learners in the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge through the use of choices and a variety of teaching methods and media;

iii) should be comfortable with wages, conditions of service and work environment; and

iv) should be scientifically literate and technologically update.

Issues in Qualitative Social Studies Teacher Education in Nigeria

The goals of teacher education as earlier identified point to a number of issues which are critical to ensuring qualitative social education especially for the beginning teachers. Among these are the personal attributes of fresh entrants into the programme; the environment for the production of the teachers; suitability of programmes to local and national needs; capacity level of teacher trainers; and professionalism (Ogunyemi, 2007). Undoubtedly, all these have serious implications for quality assurance in Social Studies teacher education.

Quality of Entrants: Most prospective university students register for teacher-related courses as a matter of last resort. The few that eventually get enlisted in the Social Studies programmes among them do so purely for reason of being helpless (Adedoyin, 1994; Ogunyemi, 1999). Surprisingly, even those who completed the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme in Social Studies still explore the possibility of gaining admission into more ‘elegant’ programmes like Economics, Political Science and so on (Ogunyemi, 2007). The resultant effects of enlisting ‘reluctant candidates’ for quality teacher education in Social Studies are obvious. This is because the quality of inputs determines the output as computer scientists will say “garbage in garbage out”.

Training Environment: Many of our colleges and universities lack basic facilities for meaningful teaching, learning and research. The libraries are stocked with outdated journal titles and publications where available at all. Lecturers’ offices and classrooms are nothing to write home about. Such a setting does not provide the required supportive environment for qualitative teacher education in social studies (Ogunyemi, 2007; Shindu and Mohammed, 2005). It is also regrettable to note that most of our classrooms are overcrowded, dilapidated and are bedeviled with inadequate seats.

Quality of Trainers: The position of teacher trainers is critical in teachers’ production matrix. Indeed, Shindu and Mohammed (2005) remarked that none of the problems facing the development of Social Studies in Africa “seems to be more crucial and more responsible for the disparities observed between training and actual teaching responsibilities than the training problem of Social Studies tutors themselves”. Indeed, the Social Studies course in the teacher colleges of many
countries according to these Scholars is handled by tutors (seperatists) who have little or no idea of what integrated Social Studies is all about.

**Curriculum Politics:** Beside the infiltration of uncommitted Social Studies teacher educators earlier alluded to, some certified practitioners readily avail their services to curriculum contractors who trade proposals in government circles for the introduction of strands of the field because of the superficial appeal. The aborted curriculum project of the late 1980s called “Citizenship Education” is a case in point. This moribund project attempted to duplicate the subject matter of integrated Social Studies on the school curriculum. The recently introduced “Civic Education” is another example.

**Government Policies:** The inconsistent government policies on the place of Social Studies does not help the situation. Every government appears with its own policy on education without due consideration for the worth of the existing one. The sense of inferiority reported by pre-service Social Studies teachers (Jekayinfa, 2005; Ogunyemi, 1998 reported by Ogunyemi, 2007) may have been confounded with the removal of the subject from the secondary school curriculum where it was (nominally) listed through the NPE until year 2004 when a new edition of the policy was released. Government seems to have bowed to pressures from the separate subject specialists and this is bound to reverse the gains made in the development of Social Studies teacher education way back from the 1960s.

There is no doubt that the Nigerian teacher education curriculum has gone a long way in pursuit of a high degree of relevance and quality since 1960. Undoubtedly, a lot still has to be done. Among the outstanding problems that impinge on relevance and quality as identified by Isyaku (2003) are; entry qualifications and caliber of entrants into B.Ed. and NCE programmes; poor funding, facilities, resources; low rate of development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the Nigeria educational system as a whole and Social Studies teacher education in particular; the need to review the principles and practice of Social Studies teacher education in the light of new technologies and other emerging issues; poor attention to values and character education not only in teacher education but in the entire field; preponderance of abstract learning, and poor attention to skilled, functional and competence-based learning. Isyaku equally alluded to the need to re-examine the Nigerian Social Studies teacher education curriculum against the backdrop of new societal concerns, devastating health problems, healthy environment and healthy living, deadly anti-social forces/groups and an intolerable level of insecurity in the polity (P.115).
What Competencies are Expected from Social Studies Teachers?

The teacher is the heart, soul and the live wire of any educational enterprise. Thus, no nation can rise above the quality of its educational system (NPE, 2004). Consequently, no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. To justify this position, Ukeje (1991) cited in Akale (2003) argued that:

*If the child is at the center of the educational system, the teacher is the pivot of the educational process. This is because in any educative process, there always stand the teacher, in the front or at the back, at the centre or at the side, what he knows and does can make difference and what he does not know, cannot do, can be an irreparable loss to the child. For it, is the teacher in the final analysis that translates policies into practices and programmes into action (Akale, 2003: 121).*

Reviewing the UNESCO handbook, Ayodele (2003) gave a diagrammatic representation of a competent teacher thus;

**Fig 1: A Diagrammatic Human Shape Representation of a Competent Social Studies Teacher**

*Source: Adapted from Ayodele (2003)*
This funny looking diagram that seems to mimic the shape of a human being intends to represent the various aspects of a competent teacher. A very close study would reveal its message thus;

1) that the competent teacher is expected to possess an ability to control the pupils, to cooperate with fellow teachers, to utilize materials for his activities in the classroom, and to operate smoothly with pupils as well as with parents;

2) that he must be able to draw programmes, to devise content, and to use various media of the interpretation of these;

3) that he should have such a highly developed personality that operates with an open mind as he works smoothly with friends and other colleagues; and

4) that he has a mature awareness of his own self, of his world, of the sources of knowledge and how to use them and of his pupils and their background (Ayodele, 2003).

A professional teacher therefore must be competent to teach the subject he has been trained to teach at the appropriate level (Isyaku, 2000). The competence of a good Social Studies teacher can be represented equally in the following diagram.

**Fig II: A Diagrammatic Representation for Ensuring Social Studies Teachers Competence**
Teachers are expected to possess some mastery of basic general education and professional teaching skills. They should therefore be able to demonstrate those teaching skills that are basic for effective teaching before their graduation from training institutions (Isyaku, 2000).

Conclusion

There is no gain saying that no alternative to good quality teacher education. Teachers play a key role in ensuring that education achieves for the individual and the nation at large, its set objectives. Since no meaningful attempt could be made to tackle in isolation the problem of quality of the teacher and teaching, hence, we need to improve the quality of teaching and the teacher. However, the policy on teacher education should be more rewarding, more inspiring, more pragmatic, more attractive and more retentive. The nation’s system of teacher education should be appraised regularly to ensure adequate supply of quality teachers in the right proportion for our various learning institutions (Odedeyi, 2011). Our Social Studies teacher education programme in the coming years must be geared towards the full realization of all the objectives and programmes clearly spelt out in the National Policy on Education.

Recommendations

It is necessary to bridge the gap in teacher training by improving the quality of advice/supervisory roles/meaningsful relationship in teacher education programmes. In the context of Social Studies teacher education, a cohort adviser should focus on helping students realize their individual academic potentials; to operate as a facilitator, a guide, a resource person, a role-model, a diagnostician, a confidant and a consultant; assess cognitive strengths and weaknesses with a variety of devices using his professional ingenuity, and keep adequate records without any frustrations for the trainees (Adegoke, 2000).

To curb the problems of poor funding, facilities and resources, Nigerian government needs to implement the UNESCO principle of investing 26% of her Gross National Product (GNP) to education. For teacher education in particular, Nigeria should apply international standards in funding Colleges of Education for the purpose of setting and maintaining high quality - for no education can rise above the quality of its teachers.

Adequate in-service training course should be mounted by all teacher education institutions and adequate provisions should be made by all employers of teachers to enable those with and without professional qualification to benefit from such in-service training programmes. No matter the efficiency of the pre-service training that we give to teachers, there is the need for in-service education to fill any gap left in moulding an excellent teacher.
Our teacher education programme must be more goal and development oriented. In the context of Nigeria, a developmental Social Studies teacher education programme is one that perceives itself and seeks to play a conscious role as the vanguard of the efforts aimed at mobilizing for maximization of resources. It must, apart from mere production of teachers, seek to inculcate in such teachers, a spirit of innovation and training in self-sustenance, so that at the end of the day, they can stand on their own in the ever-changing world (Ajayi, 2007).

Social Studies teacher educators must be able to effectively communicate with students, as well as build their trust, motivate them and understand their needs. Increasingly, Social Studies teacher educators need computer skills and they should be able to work cooperatively with parents and other teachers. Social Studies teachers should be constantly ‘built up’ as better professionals through in-service opportunities, constant workshops, conferences and seminars. However, less qualified teachers should gradually be eased out of the classroom to make way for the more qualified ones. Also, prospective Social Studies teacher educators should be able to function as reflective practitioners, and should demonstrate that their teaching could lead to increased student achievement. They should be able to teach (and prove they can teach) in such ways that all children even with diverse backgrounds can learn.

References


