

REPOSITIONING TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TO MEET THE DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES OF 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

In every civilized and even uncivilized nation. It is widely acclaimed that "no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers". From, the above exposition, the paper examines the concept of teacher education, its objectives, problems etc; the paper also attempts to advocate for repositioning of teacher education and teaching profession in grades to meet the demand of the ongoing reform in our educational institutions in Nigeria, Education For All (EFA) by 2015, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the National Economic, Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

Introduction

The need to ensure qualitative teacher education in Nigeria is becoming increasingly imperative particularly if Nigeria is to achieve techno-scientific development soonest. The reason being that teacher education is the foundation of quality in the education, which is the key that unlocks all aspects of development.

Furthermore, the proposed internalization of a "culture of reform" in our educational institutions in Nigeria, Education For All (EFA) by 2015, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the regional level, (the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) at the national level, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) all impose enormous responsibilities on teacher Education and by extension, the teaching profession. Education For All (EFA), in particular, demands that all children of school age should be given opportunity of primary education and that at the end of primary education, the children should be functionally literate (Okebukola, 1996).

A good teacher education programme must seek to assist the individual teacher to grow and develop as a person, provide him with the necessary skills and professional competence that will assist him to become not only an effective teacher but also an enviable community leader.

Teacher Education

Teacher education is essentially the training and/or production of would be teacher, which encompasses production of pre-primary, primary and post primary school teachers (Nuran, 1996). Furthermore, Okafor (1988) as reported by Okoli & Uneze (1996) defined teacher education as that form of education which is properly planned and systematically tailored and applied for the cultivation of those who teach or will teach particularly but not exclusively, in primary and post primary levels of schooling. As the training arm of teaching profession, teacher education is charged with developing knowledge and skills as basis for practice, with preparing personnel for entry into the teaching profession (pre service) and with contributing to the on-going development of practicing professionals (in service). Ipaye (1996). In appreciation of the role of teachers in the education process, the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1998) acknowledges that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. This is because teachers are the foundation of quality in education. Hence, teacher production, utilization and retention are critical to effective education delivery in Nigeria. One of the main functions of teacher education, both at pre-service and in-service, is to equip teachers with ethical intellectual and emotional wherewithal to develop some range of qualities in the pupils, as society demands (Delors, 1996). Specifically, the importance of teachers based on the role they play in the educative process, is central to basic education. Hence teacher education is the foundation of quality particularly at the primary and junior secondary school levels (Isyaku, 1996). In order to meet the demands and challenges occasioned by "the changing world" teacher education must be qualitative and repositioned in accordance with Fafunwa's (1967) dream about four decades ago when he (Fafunwa, 1967) advocated for the need to keep upgrading teacher thus:

Teacher education should be basically related to every phase of development

for wherever one turns, be it in the social, economic or a political sphere of activities, one is faced with the ever recurring problem of the need for trained man power; but no adequate training can take place without competent teachers to handle the programmes.

The teacher is therefore, a crucial component of any educational system because no organized learning can take place without teachers. The national policy on education, conscious of the importance of teachers, clearly states the objectives of teacher education.

Objectives of Teacher Education

According to the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1998), the objectives of teacher education are:

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

Where Is Teaching Profession In Nigeria?

Teaching is perhaps the least rated profession in Nigeria as regards the categories of people with the appellation, teacher. Many of the so-called teachers are mere birds of passage hanging for survival, pending such a time a greener pasture is found. Many people in this category unfortunately have not undergone any professional training as teachers. But even among those who possess professional qualifications, there exist thousands of unwilling teachers to whom professional ethics means nothing. There are those teachers who have not had any secondary education because of their inability to pass the entrance examination, or because of lack of opportunity to do so in the past.

There are, however, some truly and professionally well-adjusted teachers who invest their lives and interest in teaching as a lifelong career. The Teacher's Registration Council (TRC) was therefore established to separate the wheat from the tares. The policy thrust is to accord the true professional teacher's desired recognition comparable to that accorded other professions such as medicine, law, pharmacy, accounting and engineering. By the time the objectives of professionalization have been achieved, most of the problems of teaching and teacher education would have received some commendable attention.

Ensuring Quality Control in Teacher Education

Before the establishment of NCCE in 1989, the various colleges of education were implementing varying curricula of teacher education based on the influences of the universities to which they were affiliated. Entry qualification requirements for students differed widely as did quality of entrants and teaching staff. One implication of this situation was that the universities were discriminating in admission for degree programmes in favour of candidates from their own affiliated colleges of education. There was therefore, a need for harmonization of practices such that the NCE holders from different colleges of education would have same national interpretation.

In the same vein, section 60 of the 1998, NPE provides as follows:

Teacher education shall continue to take cognizance of changes in methodology and in curriculum. Teachers shall regularly be exposed to innovation in their profession. This policy provision actually paved the way for emergence of establishments whose function is related to quality assurance in teacher education and professional development of teacher. Accordingly, NCCE went ahead to establish minimum standards governing the initial training of teachers and teacher enrichment programmes at the NCE level. As part of quality control, the minimum standards are reviewed every five years to include best practices. So far, the minimum standards have been revised three times Isyaku (2004). In order to ensure conformance to the established standards by colleges of education, NCCE embarks on regular accreditation and monitoring visits to colleges of education and other NCE awarding institution including NT!, NCE DLS, on five years basis so as to cater for emerging issues as well as innovation in methodology. In the case of degree programmes, there is also National Universities Commission (NUC) minimum standards accreditation of degree

programmes in the university, which are also aimed to ensure quality.

The Emerging Issues/Problems

(a) Morale of Teachers

The teaching profession has become stigmatized due to irregular payment of salaries and other deprivation that engender disaffection in occupational disposition Isyaku (2003). The implication is that majority of people who are recruited into teaching are either birds of passage or those who have nothing else as better option. Although it is suspected that the recent large salary increases and alignment with other public servants salaries could improve some aspects, especially low teacher morale.

(b) Quantitative and Qualitative Aspects of Teacher Demand and Supply

The National Policy on Education accepts a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 although a ratio of 1:30 is envisaged "as target in the nearest future". However, empirical evidence shows that teacher availability has not kept pace with increase in pupil enrolment in schools. Consequently, we find schools in many states such as Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Taraba and Yola operating with class sizes of more than 50 (NCCE, 1992).

(c) Dearth of Applicants Into Colleges of Education

A recurrent problem of teacher education in Nigeria has been and still is the dearth of entrants into colleges of education. Apparently, no school leaver wants to be a teacher because teachers in Nigeria have over the years, been economically pauperized and emasculated. Meanwhile, it suffices to say that the quality of teachers is critical to the attainment and maintenance of standards in education and, the recruitment of teachers on any criteria other than merit and professional qualification is an invitation to falling standard in education.

(d) Job Insecurity

The teaching profession no longer offers secure employment. Teachers at all levels are always among the first set of workers in the country to be affected by any economic measure taken by the government. This always takes the form of retrenchment, cancellation of allowances, irregular payment of allowances or outright termination of appointment.

(a) Problem of Funding

We must admit that education in general and teacher education in particular is very expensive. We must also admit that unless we deliberately declare it a 'disaster' or 'grant' area, we will be merely deceiving ourselves discussing and making policies for teacher education everyday. Since it is certainly clear that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers, it will be in the interest of the nation to correctly position teacher education in this twenty first century.

(/) Incompetence Due to Poor Recruitment and Training:

The candidates recruited for teacher training in Nigeria before independence and up to 1970, were among the best brains in the century. They were also given very good training in the few schools and colleges available then, so that the teachers produced were of high quality. Inadequate training facilities in colleges of education and universities have not helped the institutions to produce very good teachers. When such teachers are faced with the rigorous academic work necessary for advancement in the academic environment such as training, research and publication, many could not cope so they leave for the less academically demanding job.

Recommendations for Repositioning

(a) Teachers' Remuneration

The remuneration of teachers should be according to the proposed Teacher Salary Structure (TSS). The government should promote teacher welfare most especially in rural areas through: The provision of basic amenities

Construction of school friendly and teacher friendly schools. Tying teachers training duration to higher status for teachers. Giving some allowance to teachers on in-service training. Recognitions of teacher during the national teachers' day.

(h) Plan for Teachers Retirement:

Government should establish pension board for teachers in every state with appropriate legislation.

(c) fit Service Training

The suggested reforms are:

Regular workshops, conferences, seminars and study leave should be encouraged and sponsored for teachers.

In-house training workshop should be organized on regular basis. Guidance and counseling should be strengthened in schools.

(d) Appropriate Class

In order to enable teachers cope with overcrowded classrooms in schools, the following are suggested:

Improve the managerial or administrative skills of teacher in handling of overcrowded classrooms;

Improve and develop the capabilities of teachers in the improvisation of teaching aids;

Upgrade the skills of teachers on ICT to enable them cope with globalization and keep abreast with changes in global community.

(e) Teaching Profession

To strengthen the teaching profession the following reforms are recommended: (i) Training and retraining of teachers with agreed point of entry qualification (ii) Teaching Ethics - All teachers and their employer should be familiar with teaching ethics. (iii) Registration with professional body such as Teacher's Registration Council (TRC).

To achieve effective reforms in the teaching profession, teacher education programs in colleges of Education and other teacher's training institution need to be reposition. Some aspects of the program that need urgent review are:

(i) Teacher education curriculum.

(ii) Admission into teacher training.

(iii) Provision of adequate facilities,

(iv) Capacity building.

(v) Orientation for new students.

(vi) Mentoring and monitoring.

(vii) Reward of excellence.

(viii) Empowerment of Colleges of Education to Award B.Ed. Degrees.

Grant in Aid to all colleges of education.

Conclusion

Repositioning teacher education for the demands and challenges of the 21st century requires adequate funding, precision at adequate teaching and learning facilities, curbing the problem of overcrowded classroom and encouraging the contributions of the private agencies in the participation of ensuring qualitative teacher education. This will enable the country cope with demand of EFA,

NEPAD, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEHDS) and in Particular, Universal Basic Education programmes.

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