

# REFORMS IN TEACHER-EDUCATION: A CRITIQUE

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## **Abstract**

The paper examines the reform agenda in the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme. It focuses on the proposed re-structuring of the School of Education, elongation of the period of teaching practice exercise and raising the entry requirement. The paper observes that the spirit of the reform is acceptable to almost all the stakeholders. However, the bone of contention lies in the content of the reform, that was described as too radical. Finally, the paper recommends some measures that will refine the content of the reform agenda that would save teacher education from destruction.

## **Introduction**

The paper examines some of the areas of the proposed reform in the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme, being one of the major avenues for the production of teacher educators in Nigeria. The paper begins with the definition of some of the basic concepts employed in the paper.

### ***What is Teacher Education?***

'..... education designed to groom those who teach or would like to teach or would be engaged in relevant professional services to our schools, colleges and ministries of education as needed' (Aieyideino, 2002 cited in Tahir, 2006). Therefore, teacher education simply refers to the professional training of teachers. It is supposed to be given by Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education, Institutes of Education among others (FRN, 2004).

### ***What Are the Goals of Teacher Education?***

The goals of teacher education according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004: 39) are to:

- a. produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- b. encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- c. help teachers to fit into social life of the community and 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 situations; and
- e. enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Thus, the goals of teacher education are geared towards the making of an ideal teacher. It is determined to produce teachers that have the intellectual, emotional, social and the attitudinal disposition to deliver qualitative education.

### ***What is Reform?***

Hornby (2000:983), defined reform as 'to improve a system, an organization, a law, etc. by making changes to it.....'

Therefore, the major reforms in the socio-economic sectors embarked upon by the Federal Government are deliberate efforts to improve the efficiency and level of productivity in the various spheres of our national life in order to enhance the overall standard of living. Reform in the Nigerian educational system is in consonance with developments in other countries of the world, the trend started with the inception of the new millennium (Akale, 2006).

## **The Background Information**

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE\_) is the government agency that is responsible for regulating the provision of teacher education in the State and Federal Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The commission in consultation with the stakeholders draws the Minimum Standard for the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) as a means of ensuring qualitative teacher education. The NCE Minimum Standard is presently undergoing the fourth review. The current exercise i.e. of the year 2006, coincided with the Federal Government's reform agenda that cuts across the socio-economic and political sectors. Hence, the ongoing review of the NCE Minimum Standard is bound to be thorough.

Critical researches were conducted between 1996 and 2003 that assessed the quality of teacher educators and academic achievement in Nigerian primary schools. The result of those studies ' showed that the primary school teachers lack the appropriate pedagogical skills that would enable them teach well (Shehu, 2006; Adeyanju, 2005). On the other hand, works into the quality of learning achievement in primary schools revealed a negative trend. In other words, the pupils are doing badly in both literacy and numeracy, Adeyanju (2005), reported, the state of education in Nigeria is more disturbing when compared with the realities in 22 sub-Saharan and North African countries. The learning achievements of pupils in Nigerian primary schools were the lowest with national mean scores of 30 percent compared with 70 percent (Tunisia) the highest score and the median of 50.8 . percent in Mali (Akale, 2006).

The NCE graduates were described as half-backed by the NCCE scribe (Shehu, 2006). The ill preparation of the NCE products was attributed to the inadequacies in the curriculum i.e. the lack of emphasis on pedagogical skills (Akale, 2006). Therefore, the only practical way of salvaging primary education has to begin with improving the quality of the teacher educators, because it is generally believed that no system of education would rise above its teachers.

In view of the foregoing, it is imperative for all the stakeholders to contribute to the reformation of the pattern of teacher education in order to salvage the educational system from total collapse.

## **The Reform in Teacher Education**

The dimension of the reform in teacher educators is far and wide. This paper will focus on the proposed entry qualification, programmes offered in the Schools of Basic Education, Early Child Care Education and Basic Education and Teaching Practice. In each of the three areas highlighted, the current and proposed arrangement will be stated and followed by respective critiques.

### **(I) Entry qualification**

The current NCE Minimum Standard (F.R.N, 2002:3), stipulated the following requirements:

- a) A Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) NECO, or GCE "O" level with passes in five subjects including English Language, three of which must be at credit level at the same sitting or four credits at two sittings. Two of the credits must be relevant to the course the candidate wishes to offer. Credits in English and or mathematics may be required in some courses.
- b) A Grade two Teacher's Certificate (TC II) with credit or merit in three subjects, two of which must be relevant to the course the candidate wishes to offer as his/her specialization.  
Credit/merit in English Language and or Mathematics may be required in some courses.
- c) For candidates wishing to offer courses in Vocational and Technical Education, RSA or City and Guilds Intermediate Certificate, and the Federal Craft Training Certificate (FCTC) with credit/merit in at least four subjects, are acceptable qualifications.
- d) Associate-ship Certificate in Education awarded by an approved institution in Nigeria or abroad is

- e) also an acceptable qualification.
- e) All candidates wishing to be considered for admission must enroll for and write the Selection Examination organized by an accredited body such as JAMB.
- f) Successful candidates in the Pre-NCE final examination who take and succeed in a selection examination organized by an accredited body are also qualified for admission.
- g) It should be noted that Colleges may in addition to all of the above, administer their own elimination tests and, or interviews for some courses.

### **The Proposed Entry Requirement**

According to a Position Paper (F.R.N., 2006), the entry requirement should include:

- a. A minimum of five credits (to be achieved at a maximum of two sittings). These qualifications must include English and Mathematics.
- b. All applicants to undergo a Selection Interview.
- c. Admission into Pre-NCE programme should:
  - (i) Be restricted to areas of need based on 60 percent Sciences and 40 percent Arts,
  - (ii) Students must have a minimum of three credits including the major subject to be studied,
  - (iii) Students must have at least a pass in English and Mathematics.
  - (iv) Transition from Pre-NCE to NCE 1 will be dependent upon students achieving at least Grade D in the final examination for pre-NCE.

A comparison between the existing and proposed entry qualification reveals a significant difference between the two positions.

There is no doubt that the prime motive behind efforts to raise the entry qualification was informed by the desire to enhance the quality of the NCE graduates. Many scholars (e.g. Tahir, 2006) are in favour of this proposal. This measure will reduce the influx of dropouts and unwilling candidates into the programme (Tahir, 2006). In other words, the raising of entry requirement will ensure that only those genuinely interested in the teaching profession apply.

### **Implications of the Proposed Entry Requirement on Teacher Education**

- a. It is a common knowledge that virtually every secondary school leaver is aspiring for admission into the University, as evident in JAMB applications into various institutions. The reason for this was influenced by the public attitude and governmental preference for university education. Conversely, most students opt for the NCE programme as the last resort for obvious reasons. Therefore, raising the entry requirements for admission into the NCE programme will give room for an unhealthy competition in search of students between Universities and Colleges of Education. This will surely place the former at a disadvantage.
- b. Insisting on the 60:40 ratio in favour of the Science subjects is not attainable in the near future, as most of the students in this part of the country are more inclined to the Humanities.
- c. Raising the entry requirement coupled with preference for Science subjects is likely to increase the rate of examination malpractice in the students' desperate effort to meet the entry requirements. Therefore, accelerating the rate of moral drift in the country.
- d. The emerging trend will seriously jeopardize teacher supply, which will further aggravate the problem.
- e. The proposed entry qualification will deny Colleges of Education students, which will create room for rationalization i.e. the so-called right sizing of the workforce.
- f. The teeming population that would be denied access to the Colleges of Education may have nowhere to go. This will negatively promote illiteracy and unemployment the consequences of which are better imagined.

## **Teaching Practice**

The NCE Minimum Standard (F.R.N., 2003) provided for a 12-weeks long compulsory teaching practice for the students. It is supposed to be done in the candidate's teaching subject, and has to be passed for the candidate to earn the 6 credits required for graduation in the course area.

## **The Proposed Period of Teaching Practice**

It is proposed to increase the total amount of time spent on Teaching Practice i.e. from 12 weeks to either 2 semesters or 3 terms as contained in the NCCE Proposal (F.R.N., 2006). Two models of Teaching Practice were proposed:

### **Model One**

Two semesters i.e. first semester of year two and first semester of year three. This model, according to the proposal (F.R.N., 2006), allows students to practice what they learned during year, one. It also allows time for reflection upon the experience of teaching practice before further practice is embarked upon.

### **Model Two**

The whole of year two is devoted to Teaching Practice covering three terms of the primary school calendar. However, during .vacations the students go back to school to continue with lectures. This will be from mid-July to mid-September after the end of second semester of the first year (NCE one) before the beginning of the first term (about 8 weeks), between April and May after the second term (about 3 weeks) and between July and September after the third term (about 8 weeks). Put together, their lecture periods would amount to a full semester. This will amount to a period of two semesters in year one, one semester in year two and another two semesters in year three, while at the same time providing three full terms of Teaching Practice.

The proposal added that the Teaching Practice must be spent in a school where students can teach the age group for which they are training (e.g. B 1-3). More so/during the Teaching Practice student teachers should teach 70 percent of capacity of a normal teacher. In the remaining 30 percent of the time they are expected to be involved in lesson preparation, preparation of resources, assessment of children's work and completion of administrative task, etc.

The proposed teaching practice exercise would entail a frequent, rigorous supervision of the trainee. A partnership should be developed between Colleges and Practice Schools that uses the experience of existing teachers to monitor the developing skills of the trainee teacher. The role of College observation should be to moderate the observations made by the school-based monitor.

The advocates of the proposed Teaching Practice exercise (e.g. Akale, 2006; Tahir, 2006) argued that, the organization of teaching practice as is now done, does not seem adequate to expose the student teacher sufficiently to the practical experience required. The 12-weeks period was described as too short for any meaningful practical experience.

## **Implications of the Proposed Teaching Practice**

The idea for the extension of the period of the practical exercise is a welcome development, because it is generally believed that the level of exercise is a major determinant of the retention of any learning experience.

However, it is my candid opinion that, the institution-based supervision may not deliver the desired objective. Anybody that is conversant with the happenings in our primary schools knows that teachers have abandoned the professional approach to teaching e.g. hardly do you find a teacher preparing lesson notes along with the appropriate instructional materials. Therefore, how do you expect a permanent teacher that violates the professional ethics to provide a meaningful guidance to a trainee?

Another problem that may frustrate the proposed institution-based teaching practice supervision has to do with the negative attitude to criticisms. Experience has shown that very few teachers are disposed to taking corrections. It is in view of this that many teachers do not care to guide" others, because any attempt to do that may amount to bad blood.

Conversely, the involvement of College teachers in the year-round teaching practice coupled with their routine jobs will further compound their workloads.

### **The Schools of Early Child-Care and Primary Education and Basic Education**

Two schools will be formed out of the present School of Education. A new school to be known as the School of Early Child-Care and Primary Education will be created by all colleges (Akale, 2006; F.R.N., 2006). The current Primary Education Studies Department will form the foundation of the school. The responsibility of the school is to prepare students to teach the subjects in the national curriculum.

The proposed school will comprise of two major divisions namely Early Child-Care Education (ECCE) and Primary Education Studies. The two divisions will prepare teachers for Pre-Primary classes, Basic Education 1 - 3 (Lower Primary Classes) and Basic Education 4-5 (Upper Primary Classes) respectively.

On the other hand, the School of Basic Education will prepare students to teach the National Curriculum two years B7 - B9 i.e. the Junior Secondary Schools.

It follows therefore, students will at the point of entry chose the particular educational segment within which to train and later serve. It means students will be specially trained as teachers for the respective levels of education.

The advocates of the proposed review contended that the NCE teacher-training programme is largely knowledge-based and the essential pedagogical skills are absent (Akale, 2006; Tahir, 2006). It was also disclosed that the proposed segmented training that emphasized on practical skills is in line with what obtains in countries like South Africa and United States of America (F.R.N., 2006; Nwadiibia, 2006).

### **Implications of Training Teachers for ECCE, B1 - 3, B4 - 6 and B- 7- 9**

Teachers will be effectively trained to serve at particular levels, those teachers will be focused and productive. It is apparent that once a teacher is trained for a particular level e.g. B1-3, that he will remain as a teacher at that level for the rest of his teaching career. If this is the case, then, there is every likelihood that many young people would not want to go into the NCE programme. Thus, this will aggravate the problem of teacher supply.

### **Recommendations**

It is evident that reform in teacher-education is acceptable to all, at least in principle. Resistance to the idea of reform revolves around the modalities. Thus, the following recommendations are forwarded for the purpose of refining the content of the reform agenda. -

- a) The existing entry qualification into NCE and Pre-NCE programmes should remain as they are.
- b) The second model of the proposed teaching practice scheme should be adopted on condition that:
  - (i) allowances be given to the teachers-in- training;
  - (ii) practice schools be provided with adequate working materials;
  - (iii) permanent teachers in the practice schools be re-trained e.g. through refresher course before the inception of the new scheme. This should be coupled with close monitoring of the school teachers by officials of the Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), to ensure that they teach in accordance with the professional ethics, in order to facilitate the proposed institution-based teaching practice; and
  - (iv) both the college and institution-based teaching practice supervisors should be adequately remunerated.
- c) Opportunities for further education should be provided to the NCE graduates. This can be achieved by establishing Universities of Education from among the existing Colleges of Education in the country. Such university will be primarily concerned with the training of all categories of teachers.
- d) Attractive salaries, comparable to those in the oil and banking industries, should be given to ECCE and Basic Education 1 —9 teachers. This will revitalize the image of teachers in the society and motivate them to be more productive.

## **Conclusion**

It is factual that the development of any nation rests on the quality of its educational system. Quality education depends on the quality of teachers because what pupils learn is directly dependent on what and how teachers teach, which in turn depends on their knowledge, skills and commitment. Thus, any realistic reform in teacher education is a welcome development. However, the reform proposed by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was viewed by many as too radical. Indeed, one of the stakeholders concluded that some of the proposals appear to be designed to destroy rather than strengthen the NCE programme (Umeh, 2006).

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