QUALITY IN TEACHER PRODUCTION: THE KEY TO QUALITY IN THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

In this paper, the researchers maintained that quality of education in Nigeria as in every other place is intricately connected with quality in teacher production. Through an analytical method, the researchers x-rayed the concrete and existential conditions of the Nigeria teachers as well as Nigeria’s mode of recruiting individuals to the teaching profession. It thus argued consistently that Nigeria has no need for a one or two year academic crash programmes as a way of producing and recruiting half-baked teachers when millions of her NCE and B.Ed graduates roam the streets in search of teaching employment. Let these graduates be employed and let the conditions of teachers in Nigeria be improved so that paucity of teachers and intellectual porosity as recorded among teachers in the present universal basic education programmes be reduced to the barest minimum.

No matter the kind of philosophical underpinnings of an educational system, no matter the nobility of its objectives, the breed of and the competence of the teachers to translate its philosophy and objectives into concrete realities is “Conditio sine qua non” for the success or failure of that educational system. Even the pragmatic education that tends to de-emphasize the primordial import of teachers in the classroom merely for the
purpose of giving credence to its demand that absolute freedom be accorded to the child
in a child-centered education cannot countermand the glaring fact articulated in the
Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004), that is, “no education system can rise
above the quality of its teachers”.

In essence, production and productivity of teachers should be seen as interlacing
and intertwining issues, which are cardinal prerequisites for the emergence of qualitative
universal basic education in Nigeria. Contextually understood, production of teachers
refers to raising of adequate number of teachers to man the various segments of the UBE
whereas productivity of teachers involves the competence and quality of those to be
regarded as teachers. Both production and productivity of teachers require first and
foremost, educating rather than training desired number of teachers for the UBE
programmes.

Five value – objectives of teacher education enunciated in the National Policy on
Education suggest an all – round development of the teacher’s capabilities. There are:
1. To produce highly motivated conscientious and effective classroom teachers for all
   levels of our educational system.
2. To encourage further the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers.
3. To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and
to enhance their commitment to national objectives.
4. To provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their
   assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life
   of their country but in the wider world.
5. To enhance teacher’s commitment to the teacher profession (FGN 1977, 1981, 1989

It therefore follows that a tripartite vision of a teacher constitutes a paradigm for
assuring quality in the UBE. Such a paradigmatic teacher is:
i. A teacher with sound knowledge and understanding
ii. A teacher who possesses desirable skills and techniques
iii. A teacher of worthwhile personal qualities.

The above call for a reassessment of teacher production and productivity in
Nigeria in the light of teacher numerical strength (quantity of teacher) teacher
competence (quality of teachers) and professionalism in teaching.
Teacher Production – Quantity

Recruitment of the desired number of persons into the teaching field has always posed obstacle to education the world over, Nigeria inclusive. The general reasons for this are traceable to some factors.

i. Nigeria seems to be the first of the countries of the world that projects a pauperized image of teachers. Where teacher’s comfort, happiness and overall well-being are shrouded in ambiguity and salaries, remuneration’s and other conditions of service of teachers are below subsistence level, where the dignity and glories of teaching are not guaranteed by inherent striking economic and material poverty; where life of perpetual drudgery, social tension and personal disillusionment breed uncertainty to the future of teachers; finally, where the lot of teacher is to depend on public benevolence for daily bread, then, paucity of teachers for the UBE scheme is the unfortunate but inevitable outcome. Lassa (1999:58) puts it succulently thus: “Perhaps the most formidable problem of teacher education in contemporary Nigeria is the height of aversion that post-secondary school levers manifest for the teaching profession. Nobody wants to be a teacher because of the poor image associated with the profession.

ii. Even if the above negative conditions are reverted to the positive side, “prioritization’ of values and appreciation of higher values as distinct from a crazy quest for quick material acquisition are by no means easy orientations, which Nigeria must undergo.

iii. Manipulation of census figures for political gains, large proportion of rural areas, lack of modern medical facilities and inaccurate documentation of birth/death rate impede dependable educational statistics, which is necessary for proper planning of educational programmes.

Successive Nigeria governments have had to grapple with the task of providing adequate number of teachers in the Nigerian schools. In the year 2000, the Federal Government of Nigeria approved an annual recruitment and training of thirty thousand teachers with three credits in secondary school as basic qualification (Okorosae – Orubite in Kosomani 2000). This ad hoc arrangement which hurriedly trains and accepts most intellectual dwarfs into the teaching profession is a mere injection of quacks and quackery into the main stream of our education. Against this lowering of standard in the teaching profession, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FGN 2004:39) had already decreed that the “NCE will ultimately become minimum basic qualification for entry into the teaching profession”.

Worse still available statistics indicate that the number of NCE and B.Ed graduates who roam the streets in search of teaching jobs is sufficient to fill teaching
vacancies in the UBE programmes. The conundrum here is: why should Nigeria create a one-year haphazard academic forum for the selection of half-beaked teachers when enough of her NCE and B.Ed products with sound educational backgrounds languish for want of employment? Surprisingly, the same Nigeria Government recruited in 2006 ten thousand NCE graduates for the UBE scheme. Therefore, the answer to our conundrum is simple:

There are very many NCE and B.Ed graduates roaming the streets unemployed. They should be employed and the teachers made more attractive to attract better-qualified candidates, not secondary school dropouts. The Nigerian educational system cannot afford another crash programmes like the one of September, 1974 which produced ill-witted teachers and signaled the beginning of persistent nose-diving of the quality of Nigerian education (Okorosaye – Orubite in Kosomani 2000:55).

Teacher Productivity – Competence or Quality

Competence can be defined as the ability to accomplish whatever one claims to be able to do when verified empirically (Ayemi in Nigeria Journal of Educational Philosophy 2005). Competence in teaching simply implies the ability of the teacher to accomplish his duty as a teacher of which teaching is the central part. Here comes this question – with what barometer can competence of a teacher be measured? Ayemi (2005:48) postulated that “the teacher’s competence in each case is determined by his methodology, sense of vision, and interest n sharing knowledge” and we may add by way of modification that teacher’s competence transcends mere interest in sharing knowledge. It actually demands active participation in the transmission of knowledge in which process the teacher exhibits mastery of the subject matter.

A thorough line of demarcation may not be drawn between competence and quality. But quality we know in philosophical parlance refers to the essence, quality or substance of a being. For the utilitarian, pragmatist, positivists or the existentialist the measure of essence (quality) is functionality, workability, satisfaction or utility. Thus implying that the quality or essence of a teacher is assessed by his ability to function as a teacher and produce satisfactory results. On the contrary, for the essentialist or the idealist, essence is intrinsically good and not measurable by extrinsic outcome. That would also suggest that the quality of a teacher is intrinsically embedded in the teacher himself. These are two warring camps in philosophy and we may not follow them rigidly in this paper.

Nevertheless, by way of utilizing their intellectual conflict for the benefit of our enterprise, we hold that the extrinsic quality of a teacher as exposed by the pragmatists are manifestations of the intrinsic qualities of a teacher, understood in the lexicon of the essentialists.
Philosophical reflection apart, what are the factors that determine the quality or competence of a teacher in the classroom? This we feel is the quintessential section of our work. Hence we shall approach it by discussing the following as they affect Nigeria: - criteria for recruitment of teachers and salaries/remuneration of teachers.

Criteria for Recruitment of Teachers

We have already noted elsewhere in this paper a pit fall in Nigeria’s mode of selecting candidates for the teaching profession. We see criteria for selection of teachers as the underpinning for quality teacher production as well as the bases for assurance of quality in the UBE scheme. Throwing the doors and windows of the teaching profession open to every manner and stuff of individual goes to prove the assumption that teaching is the last hope of the common man; the very dangerous assumption which has constituted a blot to the entire gamut of the Nigerian education. In the words of Ukeje (1991:4):

The recruitment and retention of competent people into the teaching profession is a perennial problem the entire world over. But the case of Nigeria particularly is serious and disturbing. We are reaching a point where teaching is fast becoming the last hope of the hopeless, that is the profession for those who have nothing else better to do. This phenomenon has to change in order to usher in a new social order in Nigeria.

In theory, Nigeria specified that candidates for NCE programmes must possess a secondary school certificate or the teacher Grade II or their equivalent with five passes at a sitting and at least three credits in the candidate’s main subject of study. In addition the candidate must have a pass score in the selection examination conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, JAMB, (NCCE 1990).

As a matter of fact, this can be regarded as a sound academic entry behaviour desirable as a background for the preparation of candidates to carry out a noble and intellectual task as teaching. But in practice, most of NCE awarding institutions are below 1000 numerically, staff and students inclusive. In their pursuit of population, there is an easy temptation to throw over board the already set high academic behaviour. In its place, most teachers/lecturers in the colleges of education will quickly acknowledge that many of the students admitted in our colleges of education have no academic credentials; that many of them who have cannot be bold to wave them about. Reason: they are extremely poor and very far beyond the academic prerequisites for admission. Another of its kind is that even the grade of pass that is expected to be obtained by candidates for NCE programmes from JAMB is converted to a derogatory exercise. The reason for this is that the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) sends candidates to the colleges of education only when the results of the selection examination for university candidates must have been released. Thus there
exist structural intellectual/academic barricade between the NCE (academically inferior) students and the university (academically superior) students.

As we consider the criteria for the educants or trainees into the teaching programmes, we should not lose sight of the quality of the educators of the educants. The logic here is that if highly and academically qualified candidates are to be educated as teachers by academically or intellectually porous individuals, the aftermath will not be different from a production of substandard teachers. Watts (1989) was clear on this point when she wrote that the status of the teaching profession is intricately connected with criteria for selection into the profession. Six years ago or thereabout, the Nigerian government directed that teachers in the tertiary institutions must be possessors of higher academic degrees. In the United Kingdom, the principles for the selection of candidates for teacher training demand that applicants should be seen in a face to face situation and certain personal qualities and characteristics like optimism are regarded as being more desirable than others (Wilson 1989). This kind of situation should be applicable to candidates wishing to become teachers in Nigeria. In addition to optimism, intellectual precocity as shown in the candidate’s academic credentials must be tested through interpersonal relationship, otherwise called oral interview.

But what is actually on ground in Nigeria is that most of the teachers in the colleges of education and other higher institutions of learning got automatic employment with mere letters, notes or phone calls from “high quarters” directing the provost or vice chancellors to give immediate teaching appointment and to treat such persons as “sacred cows”. And if we purse and ponder, we must be able to see the danger which such “sacred cows” pose to the quality of our education be it at the UBE levels or beyond the UBE.

**Salary and Remuneration of Teachers**

It is surely undeniable that when a man engages in remunerative labour, the impelling reason and motive of his work is to obtain property and thereafter to hold it. If one man hires to another his strength or skills, he does so for the purpose of receiving in return what is necessary for the satisfaction of his needs (Leo xiii 1990:9).

Applying the above workers’ charter to the conditions of the Nigeria teachers, it becomes expedient to ascertain whether the salaries and remuneration of the Nigerian teachers are such that extricate them from the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class. Or do their salaries and conditions of service evince the hard-heartedness of employers who lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself. We teachers know and it must be widely accepted that the answers to the first option is in the negative whereas
the second alternative is “ad rem” (in line) with the teachers’ mode of being in the Nigerian world.

Having saved sparingly out of a slender salary and derogatory conditions, can a Nigeria teacher have any meaningful property to show as evidence of his youthful energy, which he sincerely committed to the service of his nation? Or is he to continue depending on the good will of his kinsmen even unto death without a piece of land of his own to be buried in.

These and other sins of injustice committed against the Nigerian teachers are not in consonance with assurance of quality in teacher production. As a matter of fact, no one has interest in exerting his talent, skills professional ability or industry where they will be gathered for the need of others, leaving himself to the pressure of indigence and destitution. Therefore, quality in teacher production as well as quality in the universal basic education will be far cry if teachers’ salaries, remunerations and other conditions of service are not seen and treated as conditions for assuring quality in teacher production.

**Professionalizing Teaching Profession in Nigeria**

There are already theses, manuals, books, seminars, oral debates, etc. on whether teaching in Nigeria should be regarded as a profession. These writers distance themselves from such debates. Our summary position is that if teaching has not become a profession in Nigeria, then Nigeria must have been lagging behind. And if teaching is a profession in Nigeria, it should be made more rigorous and stringent as to preclude any individual who lacks the desirable teaching background and qualification. It has to be said without minding whose ox is gods that it is an aberration and the greatest absurdity of our time to find some individuals masquerading as lecturers in our COLLEGES OF EDUCATION when they are in actual fact devoid of teaching experience and qualification. Would be teachers should be trained, prepared or better put educated by REAL teachers. It is a misnomer for would be teachers to be educated (trained) by non teachers.

Teaching has method and techniques, which are known only to teachers. Exemplifications of the teaching methods and techniques in the classroom are the competence unique to teachers. Hence if teaching is to be done well and teachers held responsible for their actions or inactions in teaching, then teaching must be an exclusive reserve of teachers. Therefore, assurance of quality in teacher production in Nigeria as a gateway to assuring quality in the universal basic education means that the job of teaching needs not be executed by amorphous or faceless individuals neither should it be left in the hands of neophytes to the ways of teaching. It rather should be an assignment worthy only of those who have been thoroughly grounded and initiated into the acts of
teaching. Such persons will be held culpable and punished for falling short of their duties when judged within the ambient of the ethics of the teaching profession.

**Conclusion**

This paper has laid bare the surest factor, (namely, quality in teacher production) to securing quality in the universal basic education. Discussing quality in teacher production in Nigeria is to say the least an arduous tasks. Arduous in the sense that it is an issue which many, perhaps the covetous and grasping men at the corridors of power, know too well the solution but think themselves, materially disadvantaged to adopt it. To be precise, they feign ignorant of the fact that Nigeria has enough NCE/B.Ed graduates who should be employed to assure quality in the UBE. They deliberately set out to create ill-mannered and half-beaked one-year academic programmes for recruitment of teachers in the mischievous intent of paying less and amassing great finance. Thus numerical strength of qualified teachers is not one of Nigeria’s problems in her match to quality in teacher production. If at all we need to be blunt, the inescapable roads to arrive at quality production of teachers as a necessary ingredient for assuring quality in the UBE in Nigeria are:

i. Investing more of her annual income on education so as to make teaching an enviable undertaking.

ii. Erasing the feeling that teaching is the last hope of the common man by professionalizing teaching.

iii. Educating rather than training would be teachers.

**References**


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