

RE-APPRAISING THE CURRENT NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION FOR FUNCTIONALITY AND SELF-RELIANCE: ISSUES FOR TEACHERS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Achieving excellence in educational activities is the major goal and objective of the national policy on education for functionality and self-reliance. The paper presents the Re-appraisal of strategies in teacher education on how to achieve academic excellence for national development. The influence of qualitative teachers in the implementation of educational programmes is considered the most important concept in this paper. Teacher Education is to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behaviors and skills they require in the classrooms. The quality of the work undertaken by a teacher has significant effects upon pupils and students. There are many ways to measure the quality of work of teachers. Assessment of teacher performance may be undertaken with the view to identifying teachers' needs for additional training or development, or in extreme cases, to identify those teachers that should leave the profession.

Introduction

Influence is power to effect actions. Teachers exert strong influence on peoples' behavior or development when qualitative teachers are produced. Quality is concerned with a standard that can be possessed or attained. Honesty, commitment, dedication to work, intelligence, compassion, right sense of judgment etc are qualities expected of good teachers. They are viewed in various perspectives as role models, leaders in the schools and classrooms among others.

A question arises; who is a teacher? A teacher is considered the very critical factor in the entire educational system being an implementer in educational reform from the grass root level. He joins the pupils and curriculum together and the success of the pupils

in learning depends on him. It is a well established fact that the academic qualification, knowledge of subject matters, competency and skill of teaching, and commitment of teachers determine the quality of education at various levels. It is also noted that no educational reform can be effective without the support and co-operation of teachers who are the chief executors and implementers of the educational programmes. They are catalysts who propel success in any educational programmes. No wonder, Nyerere's perception of teachers cited by Nwankwo (1988) was that "It is teachers more than any other single group of people who determine the attitudes of the society and shape the ideals and the aspirations of the nations. This is power in reality..." One of the roles of qualitative teachers is to expose the pupils to whole-some knowledge as stated in the aims and objectives of The National Policy on Education (2004). This represents the conception of what Nigerians need in order to achieve self reliance and be functional. It is hoped that the dream of great, free, democratic, rich and strong country will be realized through education. And the role education should play in realization of this dream could be transmitted through teaching and learning at all levels of education. Quality improvement in teacher education influences implementation of all national programmes in education. An example of such programmes is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) launched in 1999 by former President Obasanjo for policy reform, aimed at reforming the basic education sector in Nigeria.

The initial programme, Universal Primary Education (UPE), failed due to lack of qualified teachers among others.

Ocho (1988) stated that educational aims are not “hit or miss” affair (as in shooting). A teacher who is not transmitting what is worthwhile is not educating. The quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in schools.

Recognizing the deteriorating quality of education at various levels, efforts need to be intensified to accord adequate priority to the effectiveness of teacher education programmes, to enhance better performance of teachers in the classroom. The National Policy on Education (2004), in pursuit of the resolve to upgrade quality of teachers and standard of their services, emphasizes the training of highly motivated, conscientious classroom teachers at all levels of education and encourages potential and qualitative teachers to effect the implementation of the programmes. It standardizes educational services by assisting in training un-certificated teachers and advocates in-service scheme to enable the teachers obtain their basic requirements. Teacher educational programme being the integral part of the educational system needs to expand. Unfortunately, the existing teacher educational programme is not adequately responsive to the demands for quality education in the school system. Among the factors militating against the programmes are unsatisfied socio-economic needs and ideological principles, ill-defined theories and practices of teaching and learning, among others. Provision of adequate infrastructures in the training institutes, continuous in-service education of teacher educators and regular enrichment of curriculum contents should be ensured to keep pace with the trend of educational evolution.

What Constitute Quality Teachers?

Professional training and retraining constitute quality teachers. Quality teachers must

have undergone approved professional training in education at appropriate levels. According to (Johnson, 1999), teachers need continuous professional development to reflect upon their competences, maintain them up-to-date and develop them further. “Because the world that teachers are preparing young people to enter is changing so rapidly, and the teaching skills required are evolving likewise, no initial course of teacher education can be sufficient to prepare teacher for 30-40 years” (Wikipedia, 2010). The quality of teacher educational programme is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classroom. Since teaching is a systematic and organized process of transmitting knowledge, attitude and skills in evidence with professional principles, the National Policy on Education (2004) stipulate that, all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained and that, teacher educational programmes shall be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. It enumerated the institutions that should offer the required professional training. The institutions are: Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education among many others. The policy also stated the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession which is the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). It further emphasized that in-service training shall be developed as an integral part of continuing teacher education which shall take care of all inadequacies of those already engaged in teaching but not professionally qualified. Such people shall be given time within which to qualify for registration or leave the profession (FRN, 2004). Training helps teachers develop special skills, and prepare them to meet specific wider responsibilities, bridges the gap of communication, and thus influences the implementation of educational programmes.

Characteristics of Teachers

Teaching is a noble profession. Noble as defined by Webster (1999) is exalted in character

or quality, excellent in behaviour, worthy, characterized by indicative of true magnanimity, imposing in appearance, magnificent, grand, precious and pure. A qualitative teacher, who poses as a noble man must possess these qualities to enable him assume his duties effectively. He is employed and assigned to lead the class. The skills and knowledge he possesses in his subject area makes him a master of his subject. He knows more than his pupils who look at him as an encyclopedia of knowledge (Dubey and Patrick, 2002). Personality of the teacher should not be left out as he should be committed to his calling, consistent in his behaviour to all his pupils, and colleagues. Some specific characteristics of a qualitative teacher are; being sensitive to the feeling of others, while at the same time, considerate, helpful, responsive and friendly, strong with self confidence, loyal to his ideals and ideas among others. Excerpts from Bagauda Seminar (1980), read that, if teachers 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 dangerous.

Problems of Teacher Education

The process by which teachers are educated is the subject of political discussion in many countries, reflecting both the value attached by societies and cultures to the preparation of young people for life, and the fact that education systems consume significant financial resources (Wikipedia, 2010). However, the above statement, suggests that, bad ideological principles, unmet socio-economic needs as well as ill-defined theories and practices of teaching/learning are some of the problems of teacher education. (Sarsani, 2004) added that the population pressure which remains a prime factor for the rapid expansion of education also affects teacher educational programme. He further concluded that, universalization of elementary

schools, vocationalization of secondary educations, higher and professional education and overall quality of education are major challenges before any country's educational scheme.

Strategies for the Improvement of Teacher Education

A sound programme of professionalism in teachers' education is essential for qualitative improvement of education. For (Ocho, 2010), improvement in education should start with teachers. The quality concern of teacher education relates to the policy formulation, planning, development and management of teacher educational programmes. According to (Sarsani, 2006), teacher education, being the integral part of the educational system, has to expand along with the rapid population growth in educational system in order to cater for the fast emerging needs of any country. (Ocho, 2010) stated that, since only candidates rejected by other faculties in university admission opt for education, government can reverse the trend by offering scholarship to cover tuition and boarding to all student of education up to PhD level, to make enough teacher educators available. He further opined that, anybody that is not a registered teacher should not be allowed to teach at any level of education from nursery to university level. There should be improvement on regular in-services course organized to improve the knowledge of teachers in their areas of specialization, and every lecturer in education should be computer literate. Although some good qualities of effective teachers cannot be taught, teachers should continue to have their training received because contribution from highly educated teachers are very important to make effective improvement on teacher education. The teacher educators should keep themselves abreast with current professional training, which includes course work, revision of notes, adding new materials and referring to new books etc.

The teaching process of prospective teachers must include more interactive methods and self directed study where they would be encouraged to ask questions, give comments, elaborate their personal experiences relating to education, preparing papers for reading and discussions in seminars and to undertake relevant field of surveys and case studies relating to theoretical topics (NCTE,1998). Such kind of experience will enable them to develop a better perspective regarding understanding the relationship between theory and practice. Pre-service and in-service training must be considered a fundamental right for teachers in order to remain up-to-date. Since the explosion of knowledge is at an unprecedented speed, there must be possibilities of teachers to broaden their skills and knowledge of their teaching subjects (NCTE, 2004). Teacher educators should be accommodated to have experiences in unknown areas of knowledge where the reactions can be objectively ascertained and evaluated for better involvement in teaching in the future.

Conclusion

An eminent American, Henry Kissinger (Wikipedia, 2010) once said that, a teacher has the ability to take people from where they are to where they have never been before. A teacher as a leader needs both a growth vision and relentless communication. A good teacher will always be secured in whatever political or administrative battle raged around the education system and it is upon the good teacher that the future of education depends. The teacher with such quality will enrich a society and make the learner definitely more competent and capable as well as resourceful and creative for making a country's economy highly productive and immensely illuminating.

In a nut shell, teachers can only influence educational programmes positively in Nigeria, when teacher education is properly re-appraised and given ultimate improvement.

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