

QUALITY EDUCATION: A FUNCTION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

A sound educational system is accepted the world over as the bedrock of human development and progress. This statement taken together with the maxim that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers and that no nation can rise above the level of its teaching staff, serve to prove the key role teachers play in any progressive society. This paper discussed these concepts. Quality in education and teacher education and also identified the vital role of an ideal teacher via teacher education in promoting quality in education, it concluded with some suggestions on the improvement of teacher education.

Introduction

In the words of Denga (1991) education is qualitative if the learner exhibits the expected competence to solve relevant socio — personal problems and carry out tasks that are designed for their educational and other developmental needs. We can deduce from the above that quality of education can be determined by the extent to which learners are able to acquire same to achieve the various developmental tasks they are oppurtuned to be in contact with.

Fafunwa (1972) fully endorses the above when he opined that education is “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are positive values to the society in which he lives⁵”. It is in respect to ensuring the achievement of the above that the National Policy on Education, NPE (1981) expressed in strong terms, that:

all leachers in our educational institutions from pre - primary to university will be professionally trained. Teacher education programmes will be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties.

It basically becomes very clear from the above stand, that some scholars have categorised the National Policy on Education (NPE) as an impeccable document, progressive or fair. Since the NPE became effective and operational nationwide in 1981, experience, common sense and research have confirmed that therefore continued to be a steady decline in all the indices of leading educational indicators, especially as they concern quality, quantity, variety of education but more imptly as they concern teacher education. The NPE extols the supremacy of the teacher in our process of education but having neglected the teacher education continued to decline. The emergence of standards in Nigerian educational system started after the sensitivity enshrined in the NPE, that education could become an instrument par excellence for national development (NPE, 1977). In this case, standard become necessary not only as stimulants for aspiring towards excellence but also as indices of common meaning for quality . The justification for the pursuit of standards are as .easily accessible as they are convincing from the above. It is understood that teacher education will harmonize the realization of the national objectives and the philosophy of Nigerian education through activities and attitudes that will ensure self realization, better human relationship, individual and national consciousness (patriotism) national unity as well as social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. (Adapted from NPE, 1981: 1). This paper rather than remaining at the side asking popular questions like: how much of these policy provisions have been implemented? Have teachers been receiving adequate professional training,? Are the present structures in the teacher education programme adequately equipping teachers for effective performance of their duties, charted a new course for the country in historical perspective to the present as the present day Nigerian society requires massive re-orientation and redirection. Because for over three decades, we have been classified variously as a third world, under developed or more benevolently as a developing nation. In support of this view, Ukeje (1975)

said, we have drifted and even retrogressed and asking, when shall we graduate from the third to the second world, or from underdeveloped or developing to a developed nation. He further reflected on Nigerian's past when he said, that in certain aspects we may be developing but in others we are certainly retrogressively. But on the aggregate, we may continue the present status of underdeveloped or developing in perpetuity or *even* retrogress globally, unless we do something drastic and urgently to improve the quality of our education through the improvement of teacher education and training. This view succinctly put, that teacher is the pivot on which any educational development and quality hangs, so any attempt to improve the quality of education in any country must involve a well articulated teacher education programme.

Concept Of Quality In Education

This paper fully endorses the views of Paul (1980) on quality, when he explained that quality relates to pre - eminence in characteristics that are taken to be distinctive of the thing in question which are thought to be important or valuable because of their instrumentality to human purposes. Coombs (1985), also agrees with the above view, when he noted that "the quality of education and learning achievement of students depends on competence, personality and dedication of the teacher." Quality as used here means the amount of knowledge and skills the individual is assumed to have acquired by virtue of his qualifications but also refers to his competence in real terms, his personality and dedication to duty.

In the furtherance and support of this view, what National Policy of Education (NPE, 1981) sets out to accomplish is in agreement as it states the criteria for qualitative education in Nigeria. In it states that quality in education may be measured in terms of relevance to the needs of the society concerned. Relevance in this context refers to functionality, fitness and appropriateness to the needs of daily life, the hopes and expectations for tomorrow and preparations for the uncertainties and challenges of the unknown future. The concept of relevance here implies that every student in every part of the country and in every school must be giving the type of education suited to his needs.

Denga (1991: 21), once observed that teacher improvement programmes are predicted on the cardinal assumption that the quality of education in any nation or society cannot be better than the quality of teachers operating in the nation or society's school system. This observation goes to prove that more quality of education prevalent in Nigerian today reflects directly the quality of the teachers operating our educational systems. This therefore, means that if Nigeria is unsatisfied with the economic, social, political and agricultural output etc. The only realistic way out is to improve the quality of teachers in these fields.

According to Amadi (1986), quality in teacher education can be understood in terms of level of efficiency or performance relating to some ideal standards. In order to improve the ability of teachers to render services that will maintain a high quality of education in the country, teacher education programmes must equip each teacher with a repertoire of teaching skills which we can readily apply in organising and presenting materials effectively to his students.

Lassa (1992), maintained that quality connotes differentiation according to standards and standards constitute the essential yardsticks for the assessment of values and for comparability, interpretability and harmonization. Thus, the concept of standard is implicitly interconnected with the concept of quality and scarcely will one faithfully discuss quality without reference to standard and vice versa.

Bello (1990), opined on quality in education when he referred to quality of education as "Fitness for purposes". Thus the quality of education to any community at any point in time must take reference from what that community perceives as the purposes of education. Similarly associated with the quality of education will depend on the extent to which the society values education and its custodians (i.e the teachers) with regard to resource allocation to the development and maintenance of educational institutions and the welfare of the teachers.

Hansen (1990), conclusively supports the assertion, that teachers are the necessary conditions of and the basis for development in the educational sector, as it is they, who owing to previous experience are in a position to change education so that it meets the requirements of the society.

Indeed half a century ago Livinstone (1944), lamenting, for the world that had apparently gone adrift had declared that "life without standard is the most barren life of all, sweet in the mouth

but bitter in the belly”. Livinstone at his time gave a clarion call for standards in education, if education were to retain some relevance or worth whileness.

Therefore standards in teacher education become critically important, if it is accepted that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers.

Mallison (1975: 16) in his contribution, suggests that the quality and calibre of teachers that service the educational system of a country can serve as an index of development and progress for that country. Also he said, “As is the school, so is society, and as is the teacher so is the school”. Ukeje (1991), puts this same idea in a slightly different way. According to him:

If the child is the centre of the educational system, the teacher is the pivot of the educational process. This is because in any educative process, there always stands the teacher, in front or at the back, at the centre or at the side, what lie knows and does can make a great difference and what he does not know, cannot do or fails to do can be an irreparable loss to the child. For it is the teacher in the final analysis who translates policies into practice and programmes into action. Infact a teacher affects eternity.

Based in the above, we could say, that the efficiency of sound education to developing any individual or nation’s potentialities to the realization of self reliance, sound character formation, orderly social co-existence of the citizenry and total national emancipation from colonial and neo - colonial devices through political, economic and scientific inventions, is clearly not in doubt. It is also a truism that no nation can rise above the level of its education, that no educational system can rise above the effectiveness of its teachers, that teachers hold the key to the door of sound education and that sound education is the most critical instrument for change in any society.

Ukeje (1991), maintained as he summarised saying, that the means to sound education, when he wrote that “the quality of education provided in any society and the nature of the change affected by that education are both dependent on the quality of teachers and the effectiveness of their teaching in the schools.

The Concept Of Teacher Education

Teacher education as a concept has been viewed differently by different scholars. According to Yates (1972), teacher education as institutionalized educational procedures which aims at the purposeful, organized preparation or further education of teachers who are engaged directly or indirectly in educational activities as their life work and career. This view of teacher education epitomises the vitality and the essence of purposeful or qualitative preparation.

It is factual to say from the above, that teachers are the hub of any school system. This is because the success of any system of education depends to a large extent on the number of teachers, their quality, their devotion to duty and their effectiveness on the job.

Teacher education will harmonize the realization of the national objectives and the philosophy of Nigerian education through activities and attitudes that will ensure self realization, better human relationship, individual and national consciousness (patriotism), national unity, as well as social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress, (NPE, 1981: 1). The above put succinctly, our vision of teacher education in Nigeria is the type that w'll produce, in adequate numbers and quality the teachers whose service will:

promote professional growth,
provide methods of improving pedagogical skills,
contribute to curriculum development and orientation (Isikuamen
1992: 10).

The above cardinal vision for an ideal teacher that could contribute immensely to quality in education is properly applauded in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981) as seen below.

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- (a) to produce highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education systems,
- (b) to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers,
- (c) to help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives.
- (d) To provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their country, but in the wider world.
- (e) To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

From the above stated National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981) on teacher preparation objectives, we could say that, in order to improve the ability of teachers to render service that will maintain a high quality of education in the country, teacher education programmes must equip each teacher with a repertoire of teaching skills, which he can readily apply in organizing and presenting materials effectively to his students.

The ideal teacher education programmes must therefore, cease to be loaded with routine facts that teachers have learnt over three years. They should now focus on the competencies required for the performance of the teacher's role.

Suggestions For The Improvement Of Teacher Education In Nigeria

It is overtly made clear that the tasks before a teacher is enormous, challenging and demanding. And it is also obvious that teachers are the hub of any educational system. This is because the success of any system of education depends to a large extent on the number of teachers, their devotion to duty and their effectiveness on the job. Based on the above factual points, this paper suggests for teacher education improvement as follows:- that all institutions in training or preparing teachers should ensure addressing various tasks of the teacher professionally, for them to fit into the system. The paper further urged the stakeholders in preparing and producing teachers to fund the programmes properly and also institute an official administrative mechanism to run and oversee the teacher education programme nationwide. Finally the paper critically viewed the teacher education programme which it suggested that, that teachers have learnt over the years but should focus on the competencies required for the performance of the teacher's role. This suggestion was predicated on the societal expectations which is, accountability from the stakeholders of teacher education.

Conclusion

This paper said quality in education as a realistic function of a sound teacher education. Our attention has been drawn to several references to the vitality and relevance of a good teacher which could result to a qualitative education in Nigeria. This was succinctly expressed that "no educational system can rise above the quality of its teacher and no nation can rise above the level of its teachers staff. The teacher from all ramifications was extolled as the hub of any school system, this is because the success of any system of education depends to a large extent on the number of teachers, their quality, devotion and effectiveness on the job. This, the paper finally concludes is predicated on a sound and ideal teacher education. Finally the paper raises a few suggestions on the improvement of teacher education programmes.

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