

ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Kasimu Sanusi Mohammed
Department of Foundations of Education,
Federal College of Education,
Katsina.

Abstract

The teacher is a person who because of his experianc or education in a given fild is able to contribute to growth and development of others who come in contact with him. Thus, the extent to which educational objectives are realized depends on the quality and quantity of teachers. Teacher education remain the single crucial section not develop productive citizens and the human resource base that will in turn, produce workforce that iss required for the realization of economic, political and social goals. In the Nigerian context, the teacher is not able to met these challenges because of a number of factors notably among which are infrastructural challenges, low image of teacher, his economic status in the society. The paper also argues that it is not changing educational system that will bring about improvement in educational delivery. The real factor is the teacher and political will.

The caliber of teachers provided by any society to teach in her schools reflects the perspectives of that society on education. Each society gets the type of education it deserves by what it does or does not do. The development of any nation depends on the quality of her educational activities. Ukeje in Okeke (2007) noted

Education is power, it is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitude, actions and achievement; it is a process of developing the child's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual powers for his contribution in social reform ...

In the same vein Adms in Wingo (1975) had this to say:

Human nature with all its infirmities and depravities is still capable of great things. Education makes a greater difference between man and man than nature has made between man and brute. The virtues and powers to which men may be trained by early education and constant.

Education is the most important catalyst for development. Enoh in Mohammed and Iyela (2001) observed that "education is the greatest stimulus for development because it trains the required manpower in which other development depends". However the teacher is at the centre of the education system. Ukeje (1995),

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asserted that education unlocks the door to modernization, it is the teacher who holds the key to the door.

Issues in Teacher Education

The importance of teacher education is emphasized in the national Policy on Education (2004). It categorically stated that "no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers". In the same documents, the following are stated as the purpose of teacher education:

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

Teacher education constitutes the basis of educational development and reforms. It is the teacher who translates policies into practices and programmes into action. UNESCO in Umar (2011) stated that teacher education is the "training of those who are directly responsible for the education of pupils or students". Teachers are determinants of quality of education. However, comments, observations and reports from various stakeholders suggest that Nigeria suffers from poor quality teachers. Akale (2006) reported that research evidence indicates that learning achievements of pupils/students are generally low and the performance of many students remained unsatisfactory. Many teachers lack innovative strategies that stimulate creativity.

The quality of teaching has steadily declined. This condition is more severe in primary and secondary schools. Intellectual achievements has also declined steadily. Results obtained from national examination bodies consistently show poor overall performance. Most of the students have been failing English and mathematics. Musa (2011) reported that:

In 2009 and 2010, less than 8% of state government-run public school students qualified for university admission compared to between 14% and 18% of private schools. Overall, all the Nigerian secondary schools are under-performing, with less than 15% of graduating students qualifying for tertiary admission where credits in mathematics and English language are required ...

The conditions that lead to poor performance is attributable to under-teaching in our schools. Students engage in examination malpractices. This point is collaborated by Musa (2011) who reported the resolution of a subcommittee of education committee of the national Assembly thus:

The summit noted that the quality of teachers is a strong determinant of students' learning achievement and felt concerned about the effectiveness of initial training given to our primary school teachers ... through the Distance Learning (DL) programme. It was observed that the competency of the programme recipients is in doubt; the qualifications of teachers trainers at various centres are questionable, while the teaching environments are suspect ... in this circumstances the summit recommends that the initial training of primary and secondary school teachers should be full-time and college-based.

Challenges to the Teacher Education Programme

The managers of education enterprises across the country are in agreement that education institutions are grossly underfunded. Evidence exist on the degree of dilapidation that characterizes the primary and secondary schools buildings in parts of the country. The school environment is extremely important to teaching and learning. The school environment should consists of elements that provides comforts to students and teachers. The learning environment should be stimulating, friendly to people around. In addition, a standard school should have a laboratory for acquisition of scientific skills, a standard library, sanitary facilities, potable drinking water etc. The provision of these items are likely to enhance teachers effectiveness and productivity.

The introductory part of national Policy on Education recognizes that "no nation can rise above the quality of her teachers". The long-term effects of poor quality teacher are better imagined than experienced. All reforms and innovations in education are expected to be actualized by the teachers yet, they are not sufficiently motivated to implement the curriculum which is the sum total of all the experiences the school provides for students.

The teacher is expected to impart skills that assist students to live happily and strengthen co-existence among the diverse people of Nigeria. Upsurge in juvenile delinquency, increase in moral laxity in the population are expected to be controlled through the process of teaching. The situation on ground is that teachers are involved in aiding and abeting examination malpractices dealing to the sanctioning of many examination centres by external examination bodies in the country. There need for positive attitude to work, the desire to acquire skill and appreciate the value of competence and excellence.

Competence is an important quality in any job. An incompetent cook for example may spoil the meal. The same could be said of an incompetent teacher. Many students with bright academic potential failed to actualize their life ambition due to incompetent and ineffective teachers that taught them in schools. Teaching is specialized job. For one to be a good teacher, a formal training in teachers' training institution is necessary. Training is necessary in order to acquire the basic skills required for teaching. It is in recognition of the need to equip the teacher adequately for his job that Diltz in Mudueke (1997) stated:

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If anyone wishes seriously to help pupils, he can do so best by helping the teacher to improve his teaching in the classroom where mind meets mind. One area for this activity could be the curriculum and the other, the teacher education, and whether we like it or not, both areas should be of national concern.

Quality of our teachers need to be enhanced. The products of our school system are ground by teachers. Failing standard of education in Nigeria can be caused by failing standard of teaching and learning by the students, if the teachers are poorly trained they cannot impart skills they did not acquire while in school. Poor quality teacher education will produce ill-prepared teachers. Consequently mediocrity would set in and mar the education system that would only produce a vicious circle of mediocre. Clear manifestation of mediocrity would be seen in almost all aspects of life. For instance, a vibrant economy would not be sustained, social services would not be efficiently maintained, collapse of buildings would occur at regular intervals. To avert such situation, the issue of quality teacher education should be seriously addressed.

Prospects to Teacher Education

The future of this country or any country lies in the educational system of that country. If meaningful change to happen in this country education has to instill certain qualities in people such as positive attitude to work, the desire to be competent and perform well in any given tasks. Therefore the government has to improve conditions of service of teachers in order to keep the few qualified and dedicated ones on the job. This will also attract brilliant one into the teaching profession. Remunerations for these teachers should be improved so that teaching should not continue to be used a stepping-step to other endeavours.

Teaching and learning should be active. The present teaching-learning situation is dominated by teacher talking to passive learners. Teaching and learning materials should be provided in sufficient quality. This will provide opportunities for independent work by students, move collaborative and group activities, long-term assignments, public exhibitions of work, portfolios etc.

Conclusion

Every society gets the type of education it desires by what it does or does not do. The most important requirements to reposition education in Nigeria is a political will. That political will must be sincere and focused. The needs of the teachers and their welfare and material needs must be adequately provided. The national Policy on Education (2004) noted that "No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers". The situation on ground at all levels of education is not achieving the goals of education in Nigeria. What we have so far is a vague aspiration. Dedicated teachers are ingredients for a prosperous nation.

Recommendations

Qualitative teacher education programme is the most vital requirement in the revitalization of education in a democratic Nigeria. The solutions to teachers inadequacies, poor training, poor facilities, weak inspection and supervision will tend to create enlightened, disciplined, initiatives, creative and well balanced citizens. In the light of the above, the following recommendations for improvement are made:

1. A good working environment with accessories that relaxes tension, provide comfort and ensure dignity for the occupants.
2. In the management levels of education, individual should be placed in places they are most capable.
3. Teachers should be adequately prepared and have at their disposal variety of aids for effective teaching.
4. The problem of increasing and maintaining the quality and quantity of teachers is a central issue that must be addressed. In addition, they must be made comfortable.

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