

TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE YEARS 2000 PLUS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Adokiye Adolphus Okujagu

Abstract

It has been generally asserted that no nation can rise above the caliber (i.e quantity and quality) of its teachers in terms of development. The reason being that the National Policy on Education of any nation contains the national philosophy and aims or goals of that nation. These philosophy and aims are usually a reflection of the problems, needs, hopes, yearnings and aspirations of the society. The translation of these philosophy and aims into reality is the major concern of the teachers. In this regard teacher education becomes paramount in the scheme of things. Hence, this presentation seeks to dwell on teacher education and its provision. Certain issues, challenges and prospects of teacher education were examined and then recommendations were made.

Introduction

The teacher serves as a pivot for purposeful, meaningful and effective teaching and learning. For this reason, emphasis is being placed on teacher education via teacher training among others. It is the teacher that translates the broad national goals of education to reality. This he achieves by splitting these goals into achievable objectives at the classroom level. At the classroom level, he uses his expertise; to mobilize both human and material resources to enable him achieve the objectives he has stated for his class. Thus the teacher's job ranges from adequate planning of instructional activities, effective implementation to evaluation of learning outcomes. It is only a teacher who is worth his onions that can carry out these assignments creditably and effectively. Hence, there is the need for a type of education that will expose and equip teachers with the needed skills and dexterity to perform this holy assignment.

This paper discussed teacher education, its objectives and the provisions made for teacher education. Issues, challenges and prospects of teacher education were reviewed and then recommendations made.

What is Teacher Education?

A literal answer to the above question indicates that teacher education is the education given to a teacher to make him incline to professionalism. The above implies, that some specialized and organized educational programmes are institutionalized for teachers to enable them undergo professional training which will help them educate young people and youth.

Teacher education according to Okafor (1988) is that form of education which is properly planned and systemically tailored and applied for the cultivation of those who teach or will teach, particularly but not exclusively, in primary and post-primary levels of school.

Teacher education therefore is institutionalized procedure aimed at purposeful preparation of teachers or all those persons who are engaged directly or indirectly in educational activity as their career. It encompasses all such programmes which are designed to give professional training, particularly, to those who will be engaged in teaching and generally to all those who will be involved in other professional activities of education (Mbakwem, 2000:5).

The above definitions indicate among other things, that the training to be acquired by teachers is to make them to become professionals by acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and values that are desirable in the teaching profession. Again the definitions reveal that the knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitude and values to be acquired will enable teachers to transmit culture from generation to generation as well as shaping the destinies of both individuals and society at large. From the foregoing, teacher education appears indispensable for a nation that wants rapid development and progress. In recognition of this, FRN (1981) enunciates that teacher education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher.

Objectives of Teacher Education

The FRN (1981:38) specified the following as the purpose of teacher education:

- To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives;
- To provide teachers with the 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;
- To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Provisions Made for Teacher Education

In order to achieve the above objectives of teacher education, the policy document stipulates that teacher education programmes will be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties and the following institutions will give the required professional training: i. Grade II Teachers' colleges; ii. Advanced Teachers' colleges; iii. Colleges of education; iv. Institutes of education; v. National Teachers' institute vi. Teachers' centres.

The policy also provides that in addition to making all future Grade II trainees complete the 3 years junior secondary before being admitted into teacher training colleges, that the NCE will ultimately become the minimum basic qualification for entry into the teaching profession. Another landmark provision made for teacher education is in the area of curriculum. According to the document, the curriculum of Teachers' Colleges will continue to be structured on the following components:

- (a) General studies (basic academic subjects);
- (b) Foundation studies (principles and practice of education);
- (c) Studies related to the students' intended field of teaching (e.g English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Physics etc.);
- (d) Teaching practice.

And for the primary school teacher training programmes, the general studies component will be made up of Social Studies, Mathematics, Language, Science, Cultural and Creative Arts, Health and Physical Education, Religious and Moral Education. Furthermore, teachers will be introduced to participate more in the production and assessment of educational materials and teaching aids, the planning and development of curriculum, school buildings and furniture, and evaluations of technical innovation and new techniques. Lastly, evaluation based on continuous assessment has been introduced or used to replace the one-shot examination evaluation system.

Regrettably, the objectives of teacher education and provisions made appear to be very laudable and effective on the pages of the policy document bearing them. This worrisome situation and matters arising from them will form the next segment of this presentation.

Issues, Challenges and Prospects of Teacher Education

Learning is a process that has been identified to be facilitated by an agent for it to positively impact on the learner. This makes the teacher the major link between the learner and what is to be learnt. A teacher according to Peretomode (1992) is a person trained or recognized and employed to help learning in a classroom situation in order to achieve set educational goals. Harding (2002) in Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) states that the job of teacher education is developing the capacity to enquire sensitively and systematically into the nature of learning and the effect of teaching. A teacher is one who learns from teaching rather than the one who has finished learning how to teach.

In defining whom a teacher is, Mkpa (1987) asserts that the trained teacher is someone who underwent and completed in a formal teacher training institution, a planned programme of training, among other areas, in the principles and practice of education, and was exposed to an observed period of internship either after or as part of the period of training.

The foregoing definitions are indicative of the fact that a teacher must possess abilities such as fluency, flexibility, mastery of subject matter, creativity, originality, resourcefulness and vision. Above all, he must have a pleasant personality and must be motivating. In the face of all these, government has, shown concern about teacher education and its progress.

On the other hand, however, a number of factors have constituted a clog in the progress wheel of teacher education, These factors will be examined one after the other.

(a) Welfare and Condition of Service

The welfare package and condition of service of Nigerian teachers are very poor and these have resulted to the negative disposition of teachers. There has been incessant strike and work-to-rule actions occasioned by non-payment and delays of salaries and other allowances. It is wonderful to note that teachers are the last people to be paid in a democratic society such as ours. Leave allowances and other bonuses paid to other civil servants are denied teachers. Infact, salaries and allowances are paid when inflationary effects have acted much on them. The cumulative effect of all these makes the teacher discouraged, not motivated and reinforced to perform his noble assignment of teaching. Incessant non-payment and delays in salaries and other allowances puts the teacher in a state of disequilibrium, and this state results in lack of interest among teachers, and invariably in the frustration of teacher education. In short, ensuring the production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers as indicated in objective one remains a problem with this trend of affairs.

(b) Battered Image of Teachers

This point is closely related to the above discussed welfare and condition of service of teachers. Because of the treatment given to teachers in terms of welfare and condition of service, the Nigerian teacher has a negative or bad stigma in the society. Often times he is seen as a poor man who could not find a lucrative job, but to resort to 'suffer head work' as teaching. During the pre-independence and early post-independence eras, teachers were well respected and regarded in the Nigerian society. They were well consulted in governance and other administrative issues because of the much knowledge and skills they possessed. No wonder the elite classes in the society then were more of teachers who were also used as administrators and policy makers by different governments. In the second republic, teachers also formed the bulk of politicians so much so that the first executive President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari, is a trained teacher.

Unfortunately, the hard work, patience and humility of teachers have been misunderstood and taken for granted by some people on the 'fast lane'. The 'get rich quick' syndromes of ritualists and politicians have come to be valued more in Nigeria than the patience and hardwork of teachers. The result is that most young people are aversive to the teaching profession. This battered image of teachers is inimical to teachers' commitment to the teaching profession as stated in objective five.

(c) Teachers' Training Programme

The training programme for teachers is a vital issue for teacher education. This is because teachers are expected to impart in the children the spirit of inquiry, creativity and initiative. Therefore, they too must be trained to be creative, innovative and inquiring. The training for teachers are tenable in institutions and centres specified in the National Policy on Education. Teacher training constitutes a source of concern due to students' poor achievement or performance. The question here remains whether teachers are really exposed to all the components of their training programmes. This question is pertinent because most institutions for the training of teachers lack basic infrastructure and instructional resources/materials. Instructional materials such as non-prints (Visuals, audios and audio-visuals) are conspicuously absent in the teacher training colleges. The available prints (books, journals,

magazines, newspapers etc.) are all obsolete. Hence, it is difficult for the trainee teacher to be abreast of modern knowledge, skills, techniques and methods in the career he is training for. Consequently, the practical component of teacher training is not adequately emphasized. Teachers graduate as mere theorists to the neglect of the practical component of the training programmes. These reasons account for why teachers, especially in primary and post primary schools, loathe practical subjects like physical education, creative and cultural arts among others. In-service training for teachers are also such that teachers do not have adequate time to study, explore and interact with their environment and imbibe the spirit of enquiry. Little or no time is available for the trainee teachers to develop or acquire the skills necessary for improvisation and resourcefulness. This condition can hinder creativity and initiatives thus endangering teacher education.

(d) **Politicization of Education**

Education in Nigeria, especially at the primary level, has been politicized to a large extent. Administration and funding of primary education have suffered some setbacks. Primary education was much neglected during the Second Republic. Government in a bid to revitalize it, promulgated Decree No. 31 of 1988. This decree established the National Education Commission, (NPEC) at the national level and Primary Schools Management Boards at the state levels. These had the mandate of running, funding and managing primary education.

By 1991, another decree (No. 3) was also promulgated, and this handed over the funding, running and management of primary education to the Local Government. This action rendered the NPEC moribund. After about two years again NPEC became reconstituted by Decree No. 96 of 1993.

Currently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has been launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30 September, 1999 in Sokoto. The UBE bill has since been passed into law by the National Assembly. By the passage of the bill into law, UBE is now a full-fledged commission that is responsible for funding, running and management of primary education among other things.

Teacher education in like manner has also suffered from poor funding. This is a perennial problem. A visit to Nigerian teachers training colleges will reveal the amount of neglect the trainee teachers suffer. An analysis of all these is capable of undermining the enthusiasm of would-be teachers. This is because these teachers might feel that government does not have any good agenda for the teaching profession, and so may not take teacher training or education seriously.

(e) **Mode of Admission into the Teaching Profession**

This issue presents a very serious problem to the survival of teacher education. It has been observed over the years that the area of teacher education has been made a dumping ground for candidates who could not measure up in other professional areas. Worst still, some candidates take to teaching as a last resort. The implication here is that they are not genuinely interested and so they are also not enthusiastic about the job or career. In addition, candidates who have low cut off marks or points in public examinations such as the University Matriculation Examination (UME) and admission examinations into polytechnics and colleges of education conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), are often times transferred and admitted to read education based courses. This category of students are the group that want to obtain a degree certificate for the fun or sake of it. Teacher education in this wise will suffer because the trainees here are not genuinely interested and aroused to undergo any form of training. Hence, there will be lack of commitment on the part of candidates in the various components of the Teacher-Training Programme.

To compound the already existing problems, admission into colleges of education and even faculties of education in Nigerian universities is being influenced by politicians. In the process, all manner of 'wrong' candidates are admitted to do teacher education. These developments portend danger for the education of teachers.

(f) **Curriculum for Teacher Education**

Defining curriculum, Tanner and Tanner (1975) stated that it is the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the auspices of the school, for the learner's continuous willful growth in personal social competence. This ordinarily means that curriculum is the totality of experiences to which a learner is exposed under the guidance of the school. Teacher education curriculum may rightly be described as the totality of experiences, activities and training, which are systematically planned and tailored towards a professional training for all (those who are engaged in the preparation and development of the young and immature person of the "society" (Mbakwem, 2000).

The above reveal that what curriculum offers or the experiences, to which teachers are exposed, to a large extent, determine the caliber and quality of teachers. Simply put, good curriculum offerings are basic to making a teacher viable.

FRN (1981:39) stipulates that the curriculum components of teacher education include:

- (a) General studies (basic academic subjects). These include all such courses that expose the student or trainee-teacher to a broad spectrum of academic learning, which will help him, become grounded in academic subjects. These include courses such as Use of English or Language and Communication, Science, Life and Technology, Man and Society, Use of Computer, Basic Mathematics etc.
- (b) Foundation studies (principles and practice of education). This component covers all learning experiences, activities and methodologies presented to learners which initiate them into the teaching profession. Foundation courses such as Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education, History of Education, Measurement and Evaluation, Curriculum Development, Research Methods, Teaching Methods etc. fall within this component.
- (c) Studies Related to the Students' Intended Field of Teaching (e.g. English, History, Mathematics, Physics etc). The focus of this component is on trainee-teacher's areas of specialization in which he will be certificated e.g. Economics/Education, History/Education, Biology/Education etc.
- (d) Teaching Practice: This component is central to teacher education. This is because it is a period when teacher trainees observe their clinical experiences by practicing the theoretical aspects of the courses learnt in course of their training. Stone and Morris (1972:10) see teaching practice as the process of initiation in which the teacher-trainee acquires through observation, imitation, practice, the teaching skills, performance, personality and attitudes of the master teacher.

It is the belief of the author that this teacher education curriculum has not been reviewed to embrace certain emerging issues. Emerging issues such as nomadic education, migrant fishermen education, population and family life education and multigrade teaching action are not familiar to student teachers. Hence teachers will find it difficult to apply certain concepts in these emerging issues or areas when the need for such arises.

Recommendations

To reverse the ugly trends in teacher education, the following recommendations are made: Teacher's welfare should be viewed with seriousness. Government should be committed to enhancing and improving the welfare of teachers. This will motivate them to put in their best in the discharge of their noble assignment. Motivation in this context can be seen as those propelling forces that energize and direct behaviour. Oladele (1989).in Okujagu (1997) opined that it is a process by which an individual's internal energies are directed toward various goal objects in the environment. An enhanced welfare package will put a check to the incessant strikes and work-to-rule actions usually associated with the teaching profession. Similarly, frustration and low morale of teachers will be a thing of the past due to motivation.

The patience, hardwork, diligence and humility of teachers should be recognized and appreciated by not, only paying them an enhanced and improved welfare package, but also by paying

all the accruable benefits as and when due. Serious commitment also should be shown by government in all these payments. This measure will improve teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

The teacher-training programme should be reinvigorated to incorporate elements of creative teaching and learning and efficient classroom control and management. Teachers and teacher-interns should be well exposed to activity-based and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers and their trainee counterparts should be exposed to skills required for resourcefulness and improvisation.

The establishment of the National Commission of Colleges of Education (NCCE) to co-ordinate the academic programmes and activities of colleges of education in Nigeria is commendable. Government should improve upon and sustain the present tempo. The National Teachers' Institute, (NTI), Kaduna should in the same vein, be made to oversee the academic programmes and activities in all teacher training colleges throughout the country. Summarily, government should be focused on teacher education through effective funding.

For teacher education worth the energy, time and resources expended, government should make it a policy for all colleges of education, faculties and institutes of Nigerian universities and other teacher training centres across the country to conduct their own selection examination to ensure that only candidates who will be committed to the teaching profession are selected for admission. This measure will help reduce mediocrity.

The curriculum of teacher education should be reviewed to incorporate new emerging issues in teacher education such as multigrade teaching, nomadic and migrant fishermen education, population and family life education etc. The fact remains that trainee-teachers on graduation are likely to find themselves in places where they will need to apply concepts from these emerging areas to become efficient in their assignment.

Conclusion

Having discussed teacher education, its objectives and provisions in the current dispensation, the matters arising from the analysis could be taken care of if the recommendations are meticulously adopted. Therefore, government, corporate bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agencies and well meaning individuals should put all hands on deck to ensure high standard in teacher education through adequate funding. Quality teacher education is desired by any nation that wants rapid progress and development.

References

- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN) (1981). National Policy on Education. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information.
- Mbakwem, J. N. (2000). New Perspectives in Teacher Education. Owerri: Hudson-Jude Nig. Ent. Mkpa,
- M. A. (1987). Curriculum Development and Implementation. Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd.
- Okafor, F. C. (1988). Nigeria Teacher Education: A Search for New Direction. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Okujagu, A. A. (1997). Resource Book on Instructional Process and Procedures. Ibadan: Rescue Publication. Peretomode, V. F. (1992). Introduction to the Teaching Profession. Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd.
- Stone, E.; and Morris, S. (1972). The Assessment of Practical Teaching. Educational Research, 14 P. 15. Tanner, D.; and Tanner, L. N. (1975). Curriculum Development: Theory Into Practice. New York: Harcourt Brace. UBEP (2003). Cluster Teacher Professional Support: A Training Manual for Teachers, Head Teachers and Teacher Educators. Ibadan: Stiring-Horden Publishers Nigeria Ltd.

