

ENSURING QUALITATIVE TRAINING OF TEACHERS FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper examined some of the practices associated with teacher education in Nigeria and identified areas that need to be fine tuned for a more qualitative teaching force that can face the challenges of the 21st century. The areas highlighted include the meaning and objective of teacher education in Nigeria, some factors that inhibit the achievement of these laudable objectives, upgrading the quality of student intake for teacher education. Furthermore the paper looks at effective teaching practice exercise as a way of ensuring the quality in teacher education.

Introduction

Teaching is the oldest profession in Nigeria. Teacher training started with the missionaries with the establishment of a teacher training school in Abeokuta in 1853 which was later moved to Lagos in 1893 and then to Oyo as Si Andrews College. Ishaku (2005:5-11), later the colonial and pre-independent Nigerian governments took control of teacher education. It received more boost with effect from 1955 when the then Western regional government introduced a free universal primary Education (U.P.E). Expectedly the other regions followed suit which led to escalated enrolment in primary schools without a Corresponding increment in recruitment of trained teachers (Taiwo 1980:113-117). As years rolled by Teacher Education became exclusive role of the federal and state government having regard that teacher education is fundamental to the development of the educational system.

However, one cannot vouch for the quality of teachers currently being produced with any reasonable degree of confidence. There is a serious need to look at the practices associated with our teacher education with a view to introducing new ideas and practices that ensure qualitative that can face the challenges of the 21st century.

Teacher Education -Meaning and Objectives

Ipaye (1996), in Onyemerekaya (2002), sees teacher education as a process whereby the prospective teacher, pre-service, intending or aspiring teacher is provided the opportunity to develop cognitive perspectives affective disposition and psychomotor competencies which will imbue him or her with the qualities, capacities and capabilities for teaching. In addition he explained that "the cognitive perspective involves the acquisition of relevant knowledge in various discipline which will prepare the teacher to be mentally alert for the task ahead. From the affective, the act of teaching has to be seen as an interaction between two selves - teacher and learner, increased awareness of oneself and others and improved skills in human and interpersonal relations. The psychomotor competencies on the other hand enable the teacher to develop such transferable skills which the teachers pass on to their students in a way that they in turn become productive and generative.

The National Policy on Education (1998). In section 57 (a-e) outlined what the purposes of teacher education should be.

- a. To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classrooms teachers for all levels of our education system.
- b. To encourage further, the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teacher.
- 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 produce teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country but in the wider world.
- e. To enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession.

We cannot achieve these objectives if the training process of our teacher education

programmes falls short of what is expected.

Teacher Education Programmes

The quality of teachers determines the quality of teaching and learning in schools and this in turn depend on the nature of training received. To be effective the teacher trainees should be exposed to a well-planned curriculum. Based on this the national policy on Education (1981) indicated that curriculum should be structured based on the following component - General studies (basic academic studies), the professional studies (education foundations), studies related to the students intended Held of teaching, (d) Teaching practice.

The NPE further stated - that the following institutions among others shall give the required professional training provided they meet the required minimum standard

a) Colleges of education (b) Faculties of Education (c) National Teachers Institute (d) Institutes of Education (N.T.I.) (e) Schools of Education in polytechnics.

Agencies responsible for carrying out curriculum practices for all levels of education. incorporating teacher education include: Ministry of education, (federal and state) The National Teachers' Institute (N.T.I) THE National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Nigerian Educational Research and development Council (NERDC). These Agencies make policies on the development of teacher Education, i.e. national guidelines, and minimum standards.

Problems of teacher Education

These programmes and objectives of teacher Education are laudable and should ensure the training of quality teachers if vigorously pursued but a number of factors tend to hamper their achievement. These factors as outline by Onyemerekeya (2000), include under-funding, low status of teachers, poor communication skill, large number of students. Others are dwindling number of teacher educators, poor and inadequate infrastructural facilities.

Quality of Intake for Teacher Education

It is important to state that the quality of intake into a programme of study affects directly to a large extent the quality of the products. The unrestricted entry of all manner of people into the vocation is as a result of the fact that the standard of entry into the teaching profession is not particularly high especially on intellectual grounds. Faculties of medicines, Law and Engineering etc, admit candidates with the highest cut off points as decided by performance in JAMB examinations in any given year leaving those with far lower cut off points to settle for education. Balogun (1996:238), writing in support of the above view pointed out that it is not only that unqualified persons are admitted into colleges, but that the admission requirements appear to be somehow relaxed to the extent of attracting too many nonentities into the teaching profession. This phenomenon sets in motion a vicious cycle which produces other undesirable consequences for the profession.

Anwa (2005) points out that unqualified teachers contribute immensely to the much talked about failing standard in our education system. Since teachers are more directly related to development of any nation than any member of other profession, it becomes imperative that the standard of the intake into the faculty of education should be kept high as in the other faculties. For future development of the nation, the teachers will need greater depth of knowledge, increased skills in teaching, broad knowledge of the contemporary civilization, right attitudes, ideas and improved human characteristics and relationships.

The Need for Quality Control

In order to face the challenges of training quality teachers certain steps must be taken as outlined by Okoye (2000).

Responsibility for teacher education, selection of candidates for teacher education, retention of teacher education students, content of teacher education and the process of teacher education.

Responsibility here is considered in two aspects-institutional and societal. In future, the institution to be charged with the planning, operating, revising and updating of teacher education should be the colleges of education, under the supervision of the NCCE. Okoye (2000), went ahead to suggest that the college should be given autonomy of being solely responsible for the operation of

their programmes and its human and material resources.

Government in the future should assume the responsibility of funding teacher education by making adequate provision separately for teacher education in the annual budget. The selection of students for teacher education should be more rigorous than it is now. It needs a meticulous process such as competitive entrance examination set by the autonomous institutions.

This should be closely supervised by competent external examiners appointed by the institution working closely with the NCCE. The successful candidates should also be subjected to oral interview which will enable the college to ensure that the result of the entrance examination has been genuine. By this step one is able to ascertain those candidates who have the attitude and aptitude for teaching. Okoye (2000).

Having selected and admitted those to be trained, the college should devise a system of incentives to encourage the students to regard themselves as professionals in training and to graduate into the field as professional teachers. The incentives could come in form of awards like scholarship and financial allowances. Most importantly is the hope for job opportunities after graduation.

The curriculum of teacher education needs to be designed to meet the challenges of the future. It must be made to be relevant and engaging for the teacher. The practices and methods used in preparing the student teacher should encompass the theoretical and practical components. To prepare the students to graduate into the teaching profession the teacher educators should intensify the combination of lecture, teaching, tutorial, counseling and project methods. In addition, the discovery and problem-solving techniques should be utilized. These processes can develop in the student the attitude and interest to continue education himself as a practicing professional teacher.

Effective Teaching Practice Exercise as a way of Ensuring Quality in Teacher Education

Teaching practice is a period of guided teaching during which the teacher trainee assumes increasing responsibility for directing the learning of a group of students over a period of some weeks. During this period the student undergoes a period of apprenticeship under the guidance of a supervisor to put into practice what she had learnt in theory. This helps them to acquire skills, insight, attitude and responsibility which are basic to the teaching career.

While it has been recognized that teaching practice is a very important component in the professional training of teachers, yet over the years the programme has been saddled with a lot of problems. Its supervision has been a source of concern to many teacher educators. Sherman (1981) outlined some problems associated with teaching practice exercise to include:

- a) Teaching practice is allowed the shortest period of time in the teaching preparation programme.
- b) There is pressure of larger number of students to be accommodated on teaching practice than educational institutions can manage without strain on its staff.
- c) Supervising teachers in the co-operating schools are not usually involved in the teaching practice seminars..

Other identified problems include: the non-challant attitude of the student-teachers themselves. It is noticeable that most of them do not report to their practicing schools until the day they are expecting the visit of the supervisor.

Most of the colleges of education and faculties of education cannot boast of well-equipped microteaching laboratories. Experience has also shown that teaching practice is not properly supervised and evaluated in most institutions. This is due to lack of motivation for the supervising staff, transport and financial problems. Since students must be posted to schools in the remotest part of the state, supervisors should be provided with transportation and financial allowances during the period of supervision. Student-teachers who did not attend school during the period of practice should be made to repeat the exercise to serve as deterrent to other non-challant students. Micro-teaching is the first exposure to practicing teaching which the teacher trainee gets before the teaching practice exercise, therefore the National Commission for colleges of education should ensure that colleges of education and faculties of education have functional micro-teaching facilities.

Conclusion

The issues of quality and quantity of teachers have been topics for discussion for many decades in our country Nigeria. Progress has been made in the area of quantity but one is not confident enough to say the same in the area of quality. The factors of quality that has been highlighted in this paper are by no means exhaustive. Basically, the issues raised draw attention to the fact that there are still a number of matters arising that must be attended to if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st century with respect to required quality of teachers for our school system.

Furthermore, they remind educators, researchers, institutions of higher learning, other governmental and non-government agencies involved in education that we need to focus more on these factors that directly influence teacher quality if they must face challenges of the 21st century.

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