

QUALITATIVE TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND INSIGHT INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Kenneth Uzochukwu Ezugwu

Abstract

This paper looked at qualitative teacher education in Nigeria with regards to certain issues to be addressed. In so doing, the goals and challenges of teacher education in Nigeria were discussed. Also, some relevant steps to be taken, to restore sanity to the teacher education process were also treated. It is concluded (that, if these steps are taken, teacher education will receive a big boost in Nigeria.

Introduction

The 21st century possesses a lot of challenges to teachers in the sense that with the advancement in information and communication technology, new facts and skills and knowledge are emerging. This has direct impact on the teacher with regards to the content of the lesson and the methodologies of instruction.

The Nigerian teacher is further challenged by other issues as competencies, output capabilities, public outright lack of recognition and other logistic problems (Maduewesi, 2005). IV: the teacher to perform in Nigeria, certain obstacles on his part have to be surmounted.

This paper there-fore, examined qualitative teacher education in Nigeria: issues and insight for the 21th century. In doing so, the goals and challenges of teacher education in Nigeria were analyzed and certain issues that call for urgent attention were equally discussed. It is surmised that when these basic issues are given due attention as deserved, teacher education and indeed [teaching profession will regain her lost glory,

Goals and Challenges

Teacher education occupies an important position in the educational sector of a nation-. This is so because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2004).

It is in recognition of this fact the national policy on education (FRN, 2004), outlined the objectives of teacher education in Nigeria to include:

1. Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system.
2. Encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
3. Help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
4. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations.
5. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (FRN, 2004: 39).

The essence of outlining the above goals rests on the fact that the teachers have a cardinal role in achieving educational objectives. The teacher is the catalyst that translates planned policies and programmes of education into teaching and learning, as the human point of contact with the quality education by bringing life to curriculum and inspiring students to curiosity and self-directed learning.

The importance of the teacher in determining the tempo of teaching and learning otherwise known as curriculum and methodology cannot be underestimated (Mgbodile, 2002). It is also as a result of the importance of (the teacher, that the government made provision for innovation for teachers taking cognizance of changes in methodology and curriculum_ and providing opportunities for in-service training. The policy also stated that only academically and professionally qualified persons can be appointed as teachers and head teachers (FRN, 2004). In an attempt to highlight the importance of teacher, Uka (2003:13), had argued that: Since the teacher is the greatest single determinant of educational quality, their numbers, training and experience will act as impact on the student's programme and experiences since the ideal of Nigeria education as perceived in 1975 was the effective education of all the children of and the people, teachers normally must present a credible sign post for the children in their academic and social adventures.

In the light of the above, the realization of the philosophy and objectives of national education can only be possible where there are quality teachers. A teacher that possesses desired abilities, competencies, attitude and

values will be of great assistance in transforming educational policies into practices. The teacher defines the quality of the educational system. The quality is dependent on the relevance, functionality, efficiency and effectiveness of teacher education (Aguokogbuo, 2003). A system that has a solid policy framework for teacher education and an accompanying seriousness in its implementation will have a sound educational system that will be a pivot for national growth and development.

In spite of the sound policy framework for teacher education in Nigeria, there have been expressed concern and fear with regards to the quality of teachers being produced for our schools. This was recently expressed by the minister of education, Mrs. Nora Chinwe Obaji, at the recently held convocation ceremony of Federal College of Education, Okene.

The problem of quality and standard in Nigeria educational system has been traced to societal attitude towards the teacher. This is because teaching is being seen as a job for those that failed to secure employment in other sectors. It equally has to contend with overgrowing class size, a cramped up school time table and ever growing variety of techniques etc. (Maduewesi, 2005). During the process of training, the teacher might not have been exposed to meeting such mentioned above.

Issues and Insight for the 21st Century

The 21st century, has thrown a lot of challenges to the teacher in terms of effective delivery and quality assurance in schools. The teacher is largely responsible for the translation and implementation of educational policies, curriculum or course offerings, instructional material packages and assessment of learning outcomes as achieved by the learners. The teacher also exerts a lot of influence on the character formation process of children within the learning environment (Maduewesi, 2005).

The teacher is even more challenged to achieve more in an information technology and globalize era. One cannot claim that all is well in terms of the realization of the educational philosophy and objectives as outlined in the national policy on education. In fact, Maduewesi (2005), has lamented that the quality of teachers produced in Nigeria fell far short of national expectations.

Quality or degree of excellence of any product is very important to both the producers and users of the product. This is even truer with teaching when one considers that the product of a school system form the buck of leadership of a given society (Oyeukwu 2000). In view of the task before the teacher in the 21st century, Ukeje (1991), as cited by Ngada (2003), asserted that:

If a doctor makes a mistake, a patient may die; if an engineer makes a mistake, a bridge may collapse and when a lawyer makes a mistake, his client may lose his liberty; but if a teacher makes a mistake, it will affect generation yet unborn.

Therefore, for a teacher to meet the challenges of the 21st century, certain fundamental issues in teacher education deserve urgent treatment as will be discussed below.

Student Teacher Recruitment: The problem of teacher education in Nigeria begins with selection of trainees into teaching. Those selected in most cases are not usually among the brightest in recent times. Baike (2002), had opined that teachers in this country are selected from failures. This is because when a youngster fails to get admission into the university, he then goes into teacher training institutions. This resulted in schools being staffed with failures. Similarly, Ngada (2003), had cautioned that (those being enrolled into teacher training institutions and those employed in the teaching sector will ruin the nation's educational system due to their academic backwardness. Their products are half-baked teachers that are near illiterates. The need for high standard in teacher education has to start with the placing of high value on the criteria and process guiding the selection of entrants into the teacher education process. It is through the selection of intelligent, qualified and interested student-teachers into schools and colleges that can lead to the production of sound teachers with competence to handle school population explosion, advancement in instructional technology and dynamics of suitable methodologies for a complex world of the 21st century (Nwagbara, 2002).

In order to ensure (that the selection is thorough) Onyeukwu (2000), called for a more rigorous and meticulous process of selection. This process has to include oral and written examination/interview and upward review of the minimum ordinary level requirement to live credits at the WASC/GCE level; and this should include English language.

Teacher Education Process: The teacher education process, as it is presently constituted, has two components of theoretical and practical dimension. The theoretical component of teacher education based on the minimum standard especially at the colleges of education level is adequate. The recent mandate to technical colleges of education to start primary education studies is a welcome development as this will further boost teacher production at the primary level. It is though worrisome that examination malpractice has eaten deep into the

system with active connivance of academic staff of institutions. This explains why many students scale through the theoretical training process with high grades even when such successes came through fraudulent acts.

The practical component of teacher education comes through microteaching and teaching practice. At present, micro teaching is not receiving serious attention due to misconception or apathy on the part of institutions training teachers. Teaching practice is an integral part of the student-teacher in actual teaching. It is doubtful if this exercise is accorded the importance it deserves in assessing the competence of student-teachers (Baïke, 2002).

Thus, if certification process of the student-teacher is carefully done in a way that those not professionally sound in the theoretical and practical components of the training are sources out and sent out of the respective institutions, a lot of sanity will return in teaching. This will enhance the dignity and status of teacher.

Acquisition of Information Technology Skills

Computer acquisition and use have become an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. This importance can be seen in individualized instruction, problem solving, information retrieval and administrative data management (Barde, Bzugwu, Muhammed and Mustapha, 2003). Also, (the acquisition of and communication technology (ICT) will:

- a. Facilitate the production of well motivated teachers with personal and professional discipline, integrity and competence for all the levels of the education system; and
- b. Foster the production of professionals who can combine the use of conventional teaching strategies and the world's unfolding ICT in the generation and imparting of knowledge and skills (Yusufu, 2005).

Therefore, if the teacher is to function properly, the teacher education process must make adequate provision for individualized computer training for the student teacher has to be religiously and vigorously pursued.

On the Job Training: One major area where teaching is lagging behind when compared to other professions is in the further training for teachers. This is dangerous because if teachers as human resources developers do not undergo the job training or orientation from time to lime, **their** Knowledge will become absolute (Nwagbara, 2002).

Therefore, if the teacher is to be able to surmount the challenges as posed by information and communication technology, continuous assessment and public examinations, helping to light examination malpractice, drug abuse and cultism in schools, then there is need for adequate and instant retraining (Maducwesi, 2005). This is even outlined in the National Policy on Education but never taken seriously especially at the lower level of educational system.

Conclusion

The question of quality control and quality production of teachers in Nigeria has been a source of concern to many. This worry is borne out of the fact that the educational sector is very important as the manpower producer for the economy. If the production process is not adequate, the entire country suffers through the production of mediocre. It is therefore, posited that for proper functioning of teaching/learning process, the student-teacher selection process and requisite training should be high standard.

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