TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES; PROBLEMS OF QUALITY AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract

The university education system in Nigeria since 1948 has made unprecedented progress. However, the growth cannot be compared with development. The astronomic increase in the number of universities of recent has raised questions of quality. This paper examines teacher education at the university level against the background of contemporary issues and challenges, highlighting current policies and reforms that have been introduced into the educational system to check quality in university education. It also makes useful suggestions for the way forward. These challenges or problems of quality in university teacher education in Nigeria examined by this paper include improper funding, inadequate academic staff, over admission, inadequate and obsolete infrastructure, relevance of the curriculum etc. The policies explored include funding, quality assurance, access, governance and management. Based on the identified problems suggestions are made.

Education is a major tool of change, a pivot on which national development is built because education delivers individual from the shackles of illiteracy, poverty, etc. and empowers them to contribute their quota to national development. Nigeria had a system of education during the colonial era, which emphasized literary subjects and white collar jobs. Overtime, it became imperative that a new philosophy and a new system of education be evolved for the country. The guiding principle of the present education in Nigeria is the equipping of every citizen with such knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as to enable him/her derive maximum benefits from his/her membership in the society leading to a fulfilling life that contributes to the development and welfare of the community (FRN, 2004).

Teacher education can be viewed as the provision of professional education and specialized training within a specified period for the preparation of individuals who intend to develop and nurture the young ones into responsible and productive citizen (Umar, 2005). Maduewesi and Ofojebe (2006) also stated that teacher education is a process whereby the prospective teacher, pre-service teacher or intending teacher or aspirant teacher is provided the opportunity to develop cognitive perspective, affective dispositions and psychomotor competencies which will endow him or her with the qualities, capacities, and capability for teaching. Teacher education can be traced to the beginning of the western education in the country and the various church missions. University teacher education in Nigeria dates back to 1948 with the establishment of the University College Ibadan. It slightly increased to five after independence in 1960. The main purpose generally includes improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers; increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach; pedagogy and understanding of children and learning; and the development of practical skills and competences (Hillary, 2010). The success of an educational enterprise particularly in terms of quality depends to a large extent, on the regular supply of teachers in adequate quantity and quality. The dependent of manpower training and development on teachers and that teacher should be basically related to every phase of development in Nigeria. The widespread agitation for an expansion of access to university education and increased high-level national manpower requirement and technological development contributed greatly to the establishment of the second generation and other specialized universities. The placement of higher education under the concurrent list in the 1979 Constitution allowed the state governments to establish

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In 1993 private sector participation in university education commenced when a law which allowed the establishment of private universities was promulgated. Ever since then, the private universities are playing an increasingly important role in the provision of university education services.

In Nigeria, the university teacher education provides students with programs leading to undergraduate, post-graduate diploma, masters and doctorate degrees. With the bold step taken by the Nigeria government and allowing university institutions, the country can now boast of 16 federal universities, 6 federal universities of technologies, 27 state universities, 5 state universities of technology, 31 private universities and 23 other degree awarding private institutions all running education programmes (Jamb e-brochure, 2011-2012). There is no doubt that, with the tremendous growth of university teacher institutions, such an increase has its own toil on quality. The public and the private university institutions have been growing faster than the limited resources available can cater for their teaching and research needs to be able to produce teachers that are of high level value that can serve as an instrument of national development and social reconstruction.

Due to the stress put on the teacher education institutes in terms of demand as well as the limited expansion of physical facilities and academic staff to cater for this demand, a great decline on the quality of programmes at the university level has been recorded. Quality in the educational system includes quality of inputs, teachers’ instruction and evaluation procedures, quality assurance, management, amongst others and any deviation from these acceptable standards poses problems.

**Problems of Quality in the University Teacher Education**

Reduced quality in relation to the educational and academic provision in university teachers institutions are caused by the following:

(a) Reduced funding which has by implication a major problem of quality of education in many developing countries including Nigeria. Okebukola (2003) noted that when public funding becomes insufficient to maintain institutional performance, the institutions seek to supplement their funding with locally generated revenue. The bid for this, had led many institutions especially the state owned to charging high tuition and other fees in order to sustain academic work. This also led to the admission of students than the existing resources could carry thereby greatly reducing the quality of the product.

(b) Inadequate academic staff as well as academic staff members being forced to work in impoverished environments characterized by poor physical resources, teaching materials and remunerations and promotion prospects. The motivation of academic staff for many years has always been low and where special allowances are given, they are poorly implemented and bastardized due to in-fighting of parity among university institution staff and thus dampening the enthusiasm of the academic staff and in such a situation, the best cannot be given to the students.

(c) Offering of market driven programmes like part-time courses by the higher teachers institutes with low entry qualification due to concession given to age has greatly reduced teacher education quality.

(d) Overcrowding resulting from increasing demand, and over-enrolment arising from non-compliance with admission quotas and growth rate allocated by N.U.C to the university. Overcrowding has its negative impact on quality of programmes in Nigeria university teachers institution as well as their production.

(e) Problems of academic standards in terms of appropriate level of courses for the award of degree. This has influence on the currency of the curriculum and the extent to which the objectives of the curriculum are achieved. The current higher education curriculum does not only suffer from premature specialization and rigidity into the universities and non university education programmes but it also tends to be too theoretical and examination driven.
Inadequate / obsolete infrastructure with often crowded lecture rooms suffering from decades of neglect. The facilities have run down considerably but with the policy on the rehabilitation of these facilities beginning from 2004, it has brought to light inadequacy of the infrastructure for those currently seeking university teacher education.

Commercialization of the university teacher education with the students being viewed as customers. This is a situation which often impacts negatively on the quality of higher education particularly the private ones which admit students with lower cut-off points and deficiency in entry requirements in a bid to have students to keep the institution going.

Unethical practice such as cultism has over the years in our university institutions had its negative effect on the quality of teachers produced. Due to this unwholesome practice, students no longer have the passion for their studies and have parted their study time to secret cult. With this present problem of cultism, academic calendars are sometimes disrupted by them, lives of students and lecturers are threatened and are no longer safe thereby posing threat to achieving quality education.

**Policies and Strategies to Improve Quality**

Government having realized the dwindling quality of university education introduced reforms into the educational sector. Some of the reforms have to do with strengthening existing structures while others are completely new. They are.

1. **Funding:** In order to maintain the tuition fee policy of 1976, the federal government set a policy that requires federally funded universities to generate at least 10% of their total recurrent budget internally. The quantum of funds allocated to the federal universities has increased tremendously from about #8 billion to #53 billion in 2006 (Ibidapo-obe, 2007). Major parastatals and organizations involved in funding university education are the Education Trust Fund (E.T.F), Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) and Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) amongst others. Also part of the government policy of funding includes cost sharing whereby there are student support costs. Funds generated from hostel accommodation, health, etc have also contributed to the total teaching cost per student across disciplines to enhance quality. The private sector participation of the hostel development and management initiatives has also recorded some success even in some state universities as a boost to further subsidize academic cost (Okebokola, 2003).

2. **Quality assurance:** A quality assurance scheme is the systematic management and assessment procedure in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality output and quality improvements (Zuhairi, 2007). Quality assurance offers many benefits. It facilitates recognition of the standard of awards; serves public accountability purpose; helps inform students’ choice; contributes to improved teaching, learning and administrative processes; and helps disseminate best practices, leading to overall improvement of higher education system (Belawati and Wardni, 2010). Quality assurance is maintained in the universities through the process of accreditation of academic programmes under taken by Nigeria Universities Commission to ensure relevance of curriculum by assessing the content, inputs, process and products periodically irrespective of ownership. This will give a guarantee to the public as to the quality of university education in Nigeria. The quality assurance law gives powers to Nigeria University Commission to suspend admission into programmes with denied accreditation status. As a way of ensuring quality, the Nigeria Universities Commission has also directed all universities to step down over enrolment beyond their carrying capacity. In order words, institutions involved in teacher education should limit admission of students to what the facilities can support. To this end, available facilities for teaching will not be overstressed to ensure better attention to the students and quality. To have quality admission, the universities, following the approval by the Federal Ministry of Education and the Institutional Regulatory Agency introduced the post-UME screening test for candidates seeking admission into the universities. The result of post-UME is encouraging using University of Benin as a case study. The
University is now at its sixth PUME screening and it is worth noting that for the first time in the history of the university, 50% of the students in the 100 level passed all their courses as compared with about 10% in previous years of no post university matriculation examinations (PUME) (Vice-chancellor Convocation Address, 2007).

There are so many new universities in the recent past and more are to come up and this has raised fears of quality depreciation but with the quality assurance properly adhered to, quality in aspects of academic standards in terms of appropriate level of courses for the award of degrees to which they lead can be assured. Also quality in learning in terms of quality and motivation of academic staff, quality in material and physical resources can also be assured. The relevance of research, consultancy and other scholarly activities should be built in the courses offered. Workshop and seminars on teaching and assessment methodology should continuously be organized to improve teaching processes.

(3) Access to university teacher education: In Nigeria, due to high population growth and the expansion of the secondary education as well as the increase in the rate of students seeking admission into teaching education at the university level especially graduates from colleges of education, the universities have been put into a tight corner in admission. The facilities available in the institutions are already constrained because of the overwhelming demand for university education. To reduce the pressure on access to university education the national Open University was re-opened in 2001 to offer education through open and distance learning to enable more people enter the universities while working and living in locations away from the institutions.

Advances in information technology have made the increasing volume of infrastructure more accessible, effective and powerful. The ICT provides the integral element for all industries especially education and the general way of life. In the universities today, lecturers access ICTs to deliver lectures. Students also access various programmes in the institutions of higher learning throughout the country in order to make the universities relevant to national and global needs. The ICTs have considerable potentials but they are not without costs and could widen the gap between technologically –oriented and technologically skeptical countries, and between the industrially enhanced and less- advanced ones. For Nigerians to respond to these global realities by effectively participating and playing a prominent role in the emerging information age, a policy for information technology has been put in place (Yakubu, 2005). The globalization and the ICT revolution are the major forces imparting on the relevance of university education all over the world. The establishment of national digital libraries in some Nigerian universities has also increased the number of current books, journals and other referenced materials and computerized library services which have helped to improve the quality of teaching in the universities as well as enhance access to academic libraries linking the education communities in Nigeria to global library and information resources.

(4) Improving governance and management in university teaching education: The success of a higher education institution (university for instance) depends on the versatility, creativity openness and effectiveness of its governance (Kasozi et al, 2004). Without an effective governance and management at the university level, the concept of granting a greater degree of administrative, academic and financial autonomy to federal universities and to make them more accountable to their students and the community at large will not be successful. (Okebukola, 2003).

Conclusion

Clearly, we are in a time of significant change with respect to quality issues in university teacher education. It is unarguable that university teacher education has been undergoing reforms globally. These reforms in the policies and strategies to strengthening the existing structures include increasing the quantum of funds that go into the university education, quality assurance, widening
access to university education as well as enhancing internal efficiency through effective governance and management. This paper has noted that factors such as inadequate funding, over admission, inadequate and obsolete infrastructure, unethical practices etc. are some of the main impediments affecting quality in university teacher education. In addition, some suggestions or recommendations were made to enhance the quality of teacher education.

**Suggestions for Improvement**

In order to maintain quality in university teacher education, the following suggestions need to be considered.

- There is the need to establish the specific levels of institutional management in both public and private universities in order to enhance the quality of education offered.
- Universities should improve their institutional accountability by institutionalizing external quality control in their method and criteria of students’ evaluation. This will ensure the authenticity of their programmes and evaluation criteria as well as help in managing the public perception of the quality of their education and graduates.
- Public and private universities teachers should formulate a research policy in all their programmes and allocate resources accordingly.
- Internal self-evaluation of institutions will monitor compliance with minimum standard requirement on a continuous basis. This should be made a necessary requirement for all university teachers’ institutions to check decline in quality (Ibadapo-obe ,2007).
- Establishment of policy review mechanism that meets every two to four years to consider reform proposals from academic and non-academic departments and from students.
- Encouragement of students to assess their lecturers and thus help suggest ways of improving skills and knowledge.
- Teaching methods should be continuously reviewed as well as make them relevant to contemporary needs.
- There is the need for general improvement and remuneration as well as conditions of service for teachers. This will provide enough incentive in order to get the best from them.

**References**


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