

# CHALLENGES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY TEACHER EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

“No educational system stands apart from the society which establishes it. It has purposes that must be achieved if that society is to continue in the right direction. Education is meant to be embedded in its social context drawing inspiration and nourishment from it, and in turn, contributing to societal opportunities for growth and renewal”. (Grant, M. 1960). This paper will take a look at a brief history of higher education for Nigerians in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Nigerian educational system on teacher education and finally the challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher education.

## **Introduction**

The education of the young has been one of the most persistent concerns of man throughout the ages. The goal of education and its approach and methods have differed from place to place, from nation to nation, from people to people and from time to time.

The Greeks’ idea of an educated man fit to be a leader of state was one who was mentally and physically well-balanced. The Roman placed emphasis on oratory and military skills. During the mediaeval period in Europe, the knight and the priest were the elite, particularly in old England. In France, the scholar represented the pinnacle of achievement, in Germany, the patriot, and in Russia, it was the communist – scientist. In old Africa, it was the victorious warrior, the brave hunter, the nobility and the diviner.

In old Africa, the aim of education was clear. Parents taught their children practical arts: health and sanitation, farming, fishing, hunting, trading, folklore, rituals and other knowledge that related to day-to-day living.

Today, with the introduction of new methods in educational organisation, administration and contents, the goals of modern education in Nigeria are unclear, largely owing to the conflict between the metropolitan idea of education and the indigenous concept of education. (Fafunwa, 1971)

Nigeria, like other African countries, has reached a stage in development when it must wrestle with the problem of defining its educational goals in terms of its own concepts, needs and temperament.

## **Higher Education for Nigerians**

By western standard, the beginnings of higher education for Nigerians date as far back as the time of abolition of slavery and the resettlement of freed slaves in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1787. The first Nigerian known to have received some form of higher education was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was among the last groups of slaves sold in west Africa and who was repatriated to Sierra Leone in 1822. (Fafunwa, 1971)

The history of education in Africa is inevitably bound up with the history of missionary activities. As in elementary and secondary education, the Christian missions played a major role in early higher education in Nigeria. Consequently the early aim of higher education in Nigeria and other colonial territories was to train people for service in the church.

The primary aim of Christian missions was to make converts, and at first they were the sole agents of western civilization in Africa. Their chief emphasis was on religion. (Hailey, 1939)

Fourah Bay College has played a very significant role in the history of higher education in Nigeria, and this institution more than any other in or outside West Africa opened the way to higher education for students from all the colonies in British West Africa – the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and

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Nigeria. It produced early West Africa Clergy, Secondary School principals, school administrators, teachers and civil servants.

Private efforts were only second in importance to Fourah Bay College as major providers of higher educational opportunities for Nigerians from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. There was not a single higher educational institution in Nigeria, before 1930, and parents or sponsors had to send their children or protégés abroad for higher education.

Before the British government made Lagos a colony in 1861 and later the rest of what is now known as Nigeria, the missionaries had already started to operate in certain parts of southern Nigeria. They had built elementary and secondary schools and had trained several Nigerians, as ministers of the church.

### **Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE)**

Since a national policy on education is government's way of achieving that part of its national objectives that can only be achieved using education as a tool, no policy on education can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and objectives of the nation.

Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizenry and providing equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary secondary and tertiary levels, both within the formal school system.

In consequence, the content quality of instruction at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcating the values and skills necessary for attaining these ends.

For the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national objectives, it has to be geared towards self-realization better human relationship, national consciousness and national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, political, scientific and technological progress.

The desire that Nigeria should be a free, just and democratic society, a land full of opportunities for all its citizens, able to generate a great and dynamic economy, and growing into a united strong and self-reliant nation, cannot be over emphasized. Furthermore, to foster the much needed unity of Nigeria, imbalances in inter-state and intra-state development have to be corrected. Not only is education the greatest force that can be used to bring about such redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources. (Ozigi, 1978).

### **Nigerian Educational System and Teacher Education**

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 teachers. The main aim of teacher education is to produce highly motivated consciences classroom teachers for all level of our education system. It is also to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers and to help them to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives.

Another aim is 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. Our higher education programme is to enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession.

Teachers are trained in one of the following institutions:

- Grade II Teachers' College;
- Advanced Teachers' Colleges (now phased out);

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- Universities;
- National Teachers' Institute

These institutions train teachers at different levels. The National policy proposes that in future, when the six-year secondary course is in operation, students will be admitted to Grade II teachers' College only if they have completed the three-year junior secondary school course and that their course at the teachers' college will then be a three-year course.

The Advanced Teachers' College students were giving a three-year course to those who have had a full secondary education. At the end of it the successful students are awarded the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). The Federal Government intends that eventually the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) will be the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession.

Colleges of education follow broadly the same course, leading to the award of the NCE, as the advanced teachers' colleges. Some of these colleges train teachers in technical subjects. There are also courses for teachers in technical and commercial subjects leading to the NCE in some colleges of technology and polytechnics.

The universities' departments of education provide a three-year course which leads to the award of the B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) degree for products of ATCS/COES. The National Policy proposes that this course shall eventually be reduced to two years for suitably qualified holders of the Nigeria Certificate in education. Some Universities also provide courses which lead to the award of a B.A. (Ed) (Bachelor of Arts in Education) or B.Sc. (Ed) (Bachelor of Science in education). These first degree courses are broadly similar to B.Ed courses but provide greater opportunity for specialization.

University institutes of education provide one-year full-time or two-year part-time courses for graduate holders of a first degree which lead to the award of the post-graduate diploma in education (PGDE). These institutes also provide a variety of shorter in-service courses for serving teachers. Also the National teachers' Institute provides a great variety of courses for serving teachers.

### **Challenges for Teacher Education**

Many challenges are facing teacher education in Nigeria today. Among these challenges are these few:

- Poor conditions of service for teachers
- Lack of teaching facilities in the institutions
- Government reluctance to sponsor students/graduates.

These challenges are some of the stumbling blocks to the progress of teacher education in Nigeria. To clear these obstacles, government must face these challenges squarely in order to move our teacher education forward. First and foremost, government should look into the issue of poor conditions of service that teachers work in.

Lecturers/tutors in higher institutions must be given proper incentives. Lack of such incentive for the teachers is always a hindrance to achievement on the part the students. That is, where there are no proper care or concern from the government for the lecturers the quality of classroom activities will suffer. Proper incentives always ignite lecturers to perform very well on their primary assignment. But lack of them will cause serious degradation of the student's learning as the lecturers tend to abandon their primary duty to look for alternative ways of survival. But when government

gives greater attention to this part of the problem, there is every tendency for achievement of set objectives.

Teaching facilities in higher institution are another area of concern. Government's shabby approach to this concern is a great threat to the progress of education as well as teacher education in the country. So long as govt. continues to give a deaf ear to the demands of the education sector, so long will the quality of education generally and higher education in particular continue to deteriorate. Unless adequate and proper facilities are provided, one cannot see the possibility of getting many enough students and graduates to pursue higher educational goals. This is because where a government cannot provide essential facilities for the teaching, students or graduates cannot be attracted to further their education. This is waste of national time and resources as nothing in return will be achieved.

For functional and qualitative teacher education to be achieved, all hands must be on deck to rescue the dilapidating condition our educational sector is in now. A situation where much of the country's resources are expended on selfish projects that have no positive impact on the masses; but in the name of moving the nation ahead; where majority of the citizens are illiterate. The first casualty and the one needing to be resuscitated first if the country is to regain itself, is the education sector. A greater proportion of the nation's wealth should be allocated to that sector to produce the quality of manpower resources that will drive development. In almost all the developed nations, one will find that the citizens are mostly literate. They are provided all possible incentives and facilities to search for knowledge.

In one of the international conferences on teacher education organized by the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos (June, 2007), stakeholders in the education sector brainstormed on how to tackle the numerous problems confronting the teaching profession. The stakeholders sought for an overhaul of the teaching profession to improve students' performance. In his address to the conference, the chairman of the organizing committee of the conference professor Phimena Ikulayo explained that, the conference was meant to put stakeholders in a better global position to impart knowledge to students as well as improve and expand the knowledge base of teachers at tertiary, secondary and primary levels by exposing them to different innovations and best practices in teacher education.

The stakeholders make general comments on the stand of our education sector. Ajeyalemi (2007) opined that "our present education programme cannot serve adequately the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom". To him, innovation and best practice in teacher education demand that the practitioners embrace new educational function in order to meet contemporary societal needs, challenges, aspirations, visions and intended learning outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Below are some recommendations for improvements on teacher education.

1. There is the need for government to try as much as possible to see to the improvement of the poor condition of service of teachers.
2. Teaching should by all means be a profession like all other professional jobs in all ramifications.
3. Adequate training should be given to all teachers right from the grassroots level up to tertiary levels.
4. Government should also improved on the facilities on ground both for teaching and learning in schools and higher institutions, e.g. the restructuring of our primary, post primary and

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- tertiary institutions from their abject despair, where some school children sat on bare floor in their make shift classrooms.
5. Government should expand its policy on training to all level of teachers in order for them to improve on their knowledge.
  6. Upon all these, workshops and seminars should always be organized by the government to keep teachers up to date.

### **Conclusion**

The facts indicate, not maximisation but rather gross underdevelopment and underutilization of our national human resource capital. This resource vital to our national development can only be made viable by a robust education system which, in turn, would depend on a robust teacher education system within it (Obiyade 1990). The thrust of government effort should be in the direction of redressing the current situation. A vital part of that effort should be vigorous improvement in the conditions of service of teachers at levels of education so as to attract to the profession the best minds in the country, not just those who would fit in somewhere else.

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