REFORMS AND INNOVATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract
Teacher improvement programmes are predicated on the cardinal assumption that, the quality of education in any nation or society cannot be better than the quality of teachers operating in that nation's or society's school system. This paper focused on reforms and innovation in teacher education, the way forward. The roles of the Nigerian teacher and parents in qualitative education are fully discussed. The major reforms and innovations discussed here include the criterion for teacher selection and training, distance learning and sandwich programmes, minimum qualification of NCE teachers for teaching in primary school, appointment of teachers with education background to lecture in colleges of education and the introduction of teachers’ salary scales structures. Investment in teacher's education is investment in qualitative education. The mass production of teachers through regular teacher education programmes, the Distance Learning Studies (DLS) and the sandwich programmes is intended to supply teachers for qualitative education. On the way forward, the government, parents, community, corporate organizations, wealthy individuals and school personnel must assist these efforts to succeed.

Introduction:
Teacher improvement programmes are predicated on the cardinal assumption that, the quality of education in any nation or society cannot be better than the quality of teachers operating in that nation's or society's school system. Furthermore, since education is the basic starting point for social, economic, political development, the need to invest hugely in teacher education cannot be over emphasized.

The advent of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 made it imperative for the training of teachers to be intensified in order to keep pace with the staggering enrolment figures at the primary school level. It became also logical to step up teacher production for the secondary and tertiary levels of education. The expansion of the faculties of education in the Nigerian universities was a positive response to the need to produce more teachers for the school system.

The initiative of some Nigerian universities to start distance learning and sandwich programmes to improve the
knowledge and qualification of teachers was hailed, not only by the teachers themselves, but also by the school proprietors. The teachers were to study while on their jobs or to go to school during the long vacation. In this way, the loss in man hours which is the usual case with full-time studies was forestalled.

The present increase in the variety and frequency of conferences, seminars, workshops and in-service programmes for teachers is an indication of the abiding faith which the various tiers of government have in the need for teacher-improvement.

Meaning of Teaching, Teacher and Education:

In the words of Clark (1995:2) teaching is the interaction between a teacher and student under the teacher's responsibility in order to bring about the expected change in the student's behaviour.

Alaezi (1990:1) describes teaching as the business of all those involved in the act of changing human behaviour and transformation of society for better, particularly when their actions render them perceptibly significant, respectable and recognizable to others because of the consequences they accomplish and the unique manner they do them. This definition of a teacher implies that he must possess knowledge and methods of imparting it, that could bring about positive change in the learner's attitude and behaviour. Before one answers the name teacher, he must consciously attempt to receive training in the act of teaching that will equip him with the requisite knowledge, skills, techniques, aptitude and methods necessary for the job.

Education in general terms, is the process of transmitting societal cores, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another. Education seeks to socialize individuals so as to equip them with the desired mode of behaviour that is in conformity with the way of life of the society in which they live.

Nwagwu (1976) sees education as the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage in order to foster continuously the well being of mankind and guarantee its survival against the unpredictable, at times hostile and destructive elements and forces of man and nature.

Challenges of Teacher Education in Nigeria:

Teacher's education in Nigeria has come under serious stress in recent times. Some of these challenges are in the area of social and economic values, fallen standard in education, inadequate textbooks and library facilities, poor quality of teachers, domination of curricula with academic contents, screening and selection of teachers, inadequate provision of teaching facilities, among others.

❖ Social and Economic Values:

The Nigerian teacher like his counterpart in developing and developed countries is the protagonists and the catalyst in the teaching-learning process. His title as a noble person has actually undergone some erosion since it
is nothing more than a lip-service when some people still refer to teaching as a noble profession. The profession is still noble perhaps, but the social and economic values attached to it have never been impressive. They have in fact diminished severely.

- **Fallen Standard in Education:**
  The Nigerian teacher is an endangered species. If educational standards are said to be falling, the teacher is to be blamed, though other agencies like the home, church or mosque, society, mass media, peer groups and the government's provisions also influence learning and standard. If the incidence of juvenile delinquency and moral decadence invade the society, the teacher is called upon to eradicate the incidence or if he fails he stands condemned. In some parts of the USA, parents have filed suits against teachers for the failure of their children who had to withdraw from school on the ground of poor academic performance. The teachers were sued because the academically incompetent children failed, not only to get jobs after dropping out of school, but also suffered some mental distress as a result of shame. But when precise educational standards do not exist to be used as a criterion for determining the case, then teachers have to be exonerated from blame. The teacher cannot cause miracles to happen if a child is not intellectually endowed to attain a particular standard in school. Nigerian teacher is blamed for the failure of a child who goes to school regularly but refuses to work hard to pass examinations. A university lecturer should not be blamed solely for a student who graduated from a programme of study and lapsed into semi-illiteracy within three years of graduation. Probably, this student had developed highly sophisticated techniques of cheating, and so was able to pass the examinations without being caught, but he really learnt nothing to last.

- **Inadequate Textbooks and Library Facilities:**
  Most Colleges of Education in the country meant for producing teachers are not provided with the required number of current textbooks in core subject areas. Parents cannot afford these textbooks for student teachers. It is the library that should help them out. Akpan (2007) however, reports that the libraries in many colleges were not functional. Olaoye (2004:4) agrees with the above when he reports that the libraries available in most of our teacher's institutions cannot boast of modern textbooks. The inability of students teachers to have access to necessary modern textbooks has adverse effects on the quality of teacher education in the country. Etim (2004) has stressed that teachers colleges should have enough computer sets and all teachers should be computer literate in order not to be left behind by others who have acquired Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

- **The Quality of Teachers:**
  Matched against the lofty goals and objectives the nation has for the respective levels of her education (the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education), the quality of teachers, right from the period of training is generally poor. Udofot (2005)
observed that trainee with low academic qualifications go into teacher education perhaps because they lack alternative professional choices. On the other hand, those with high academic scores and grades would prefer alternative professions like medicine and law.

- **Domination of Curricula with Academic Contents:**
  In teacher education institutions the curricula are dominated with academic contents some of which are not needed in the schools. This is so because of the poor entry academic standards of the trainees. This is usually done at the expense of attention to the professional preparation of the student-teachers. At the end, the student-teachers leave the institutions poorly prepared for the classrooms. In the same vein, the teacher education curricula like the school curricula lack relevance to the needs of the students and those of the society. Those who teach students-teachers and students generally tend to see their curricula as being relevant to examination boards requirements.

- **Inadequate Provision of Teaching Facilities:**
  The inadequate provisions of teaching facilities are serious challenges to the teacher's capacity to function effectively and produce functional educational results. For example, institutions teaching science and technology generally lack adequately equipped laboratories and technical workshops. Where these materials are provided, there are problems of inadequate electricity and water supply.

**Reforms and Innovation in Teacher Education:**

- **Screening and Selecting Teachers:**
  The teaching profession has been invaded by an army of pseudo teachers who entered the profession as a stop-gap just to wait and see what better jobs would surface. These transit teachers sometimes decide to hang around for a while for want of another job. This results in low productivity since (their attention is focuses elsewhere. Screening of teachers who possess the teacher personality before admitting them into the profession is an innovation that has been introduced into the system. A good teacher is both born and made. But the risk and cost involved in making a teacher who was not born are very high. It is easier and more natural to graft the necessary training on a stamp that was born with the characteristics of a good teacher than to try very hard to train somebody who is alien to the profession. The essential qualities desirable in an effective teacher includes: -Human-oriented attitude, patience, sense of humour, sensitivity to other people's feelings, temperate use of language, neatness, honesty and fairplay and high intelligence.

The following criteria should be adopted in choosing teachers in the profession:

1. Qualification and age (education based);
2. Motives for choosing teaching (external motives and internal motives) as a profession and
3. Interest

After administrating the instrument on teacher characteristics, the teacher should be scored along these lines:
Personal qualities, professional training and a practical selection test can be conducted to ascertain the teacher student classroom behaviour. If properly used, such instrument shall expose the teacher’s worth, his use of praise, his sense of humour, his humanistic attitude in class, flexibility use of language, leadership potentials, his effort to promote democracy in the class and the use of learning techniques which he has acquired.

Distance Learning and Sandwich Programmes:
One of the greatest reform and innovations in teachers' education is the advent of distance learning and sandwich programmes. As the demand for admission to post secondary institutions rapidly increased over the years, students' enrolment rapidly outstripped the available institutional space. It increasingly became doubtful whether or not the traditional universities in their structure and resources capacity can cope with the aspiring millions of Nigerians who sought tertiary education, particularly university degrees. Examples of distance learning include, the University of London General Certificate of Education (GCB) and External degrees which many Nigerians undertook.

The sandwich programmes was introduced in the late 70s and early 80s to offer a second chance to those who for one reason or another could not complete their education. Teachers that enrolled in the programme can stay on their job and still go to school during the long vacation, the sandwich programme has been hailed by most teachers as the greatest innovation to improve themselves professionally.

Mass Production of Teachers:
The mass production of teachers through regular teachers education programmes in Colleges of Education and Universities across the country is another reform and innovation in the education industry. Compared to the 70s and 80s, there is no state in Nigeria today without a University and College of Education. They help in turning out large number of teachers every year; as the minimum qualification for teaching in primary school is Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Another area of reform and innovation is in the appointment of teachers to teach in Colleges of Education. Only graduates who are professionally trained as teachers are appointed to teach various courses.

Proposed Enhanced Teaching Salary Scale:
The yet to be implemented enhanced Teacher's Salary Scale (TSS) will be the greatest reforms and innovation when finally implemented. This will raise the social and economic status of teachers. Also, payment of the enhanced salary will reduce brain drain and will make the teaching profession lucrative.

The Way Forward:
1. Nigeria aspires to play the big league in the global economy by the year 2020AD. This is a mere aspiration. For it to be translated into reality, the urgent agenda must include positive reforms and innovation in the educational sector.
The reforms should be mirrored in all facets of the educational system beginning from areas of research and the training of teachers.

2. Mere provision of a variety of school subjects in the curriculum may not solve the problems of transmitting the national values. More visionary, motivated, imaginative and innovative teachers must be trained and employed in the system, who will apply more practical, individualistic and problem-solving approaches in their teaching. What the teacher teaches and how this is administered should be relevant to what Nigerians need.

3. The Nigerian teacher, knowing how much expectations are being held of him by the society, must employ up-to-date methods of teaching, capable of motivating even the least motivated child. Children must not be bored. To risk boredom is to risk pandemonium. The Nigerian teacher must develop the qualities of an effective teacher. It is true that teachers are both born and made. Those who are born with qualities of an effective teacher such as love for the children, patience, fairness to all, sense of humour, objectivity, creativity and other teaching skills must maintain them in addition to the skills acquired through training. Those teachers who lack such qualities should learn and try to develop them so as to fit their job description.

4. The recent massive efforts towards teacher-production are innovation. The Nigerian teacher should take advantage of the training programmes for self-improvement as well as professionals enhancement.

5. The present severe economic austerity measures and world food crises have brought some temptation to sway the Nigerian teachers from dedicated service. Some of the teachers, in fact, permit off-school economic activities to dominate their mind and behaviour. In higher institutions some teachers get involved in sorting and selling of illegal textbooks and handout. If qualitative education is to be realized, the various tiers of government must drastically improve the working conditions of the Nigerian teacher to perform maximally in teaching. Teachers Salary Scale (TSS) must be implemented.

6. The teacher should remember that he is acting in loco parentis (in lieu of parents) to the school children. In the absence of the parents, the teacher has to play the role of the parents in correcting the child's behaviour, motivating him where need dictates and showing enough love, affection and care.

7. As the world has become a global village as a result of trinity of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), modern facilities are required for effective teacher education so that teachers will catch up with the rest of the world in improved teaching methods and technical education, among others. Hence, private sector in Nigeria should be more involved in teacher education by providing materials support in the area of equipment, infrastructure, modern textbooks, establishment of endowment funds, scholarship or
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bursaries for in-service training of teachers.

8. Qualified and experienced teachers are needed in the teaching of Introductory Technology. These are the teachers who themselves can make use of the machines installed in the workshops and also produce simple items. As stressed by Buchi-Smith (2002), the paucity of experienced and qualified teaching staff has greatly hampered the development of technology education in Africa. Government and private investors should train and re-trained Introductory Technology Teachers to help them acquire the skills that will enable the effective teaching of the subject to teacher trainees.

9. Distance Learning Programmes, among other external programmes should be restructured so that honest and qualified teachers are appointed to teach in the various centres. This will stem incidents of malpractices usually observed in some of the centres.

Conclusion:

So many teachers are needed to cope with the soaring enrolment figures of students in pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions; the Naira cost of training teachers is quite high. To manage half-baked teachers in order to save cost is to lower the quality of education. Adequate funds should be expended to produce well-trained, visionary, motivated, imaginative and innovative teachers who, all being well, are most likely to raise and maintain the standard of education. Apart from paying teachers a reasonably good salary for their significant contribution to man power developments, they should also enjoy a good housing policy and other forms of social welfare services. The teacher’s spiritual reward is often said to be in HEAVEN, but since Heaven does not talk about materialism, let them enjoy a bit of material reward on earth like everybody else. Even if this will add up to a double close, they still deserve it.

References


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