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Teacher Education: A Panacea for National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The teacher is an indispensable tool for national development. It is in realization of this fact that teacher education occupies a position of prominence in the educational enterprise. In the light of the above, this paper discusses the concept of teacher education and national development. Also, a number of challenges confronting teacher education are examined. The paper concludes by drawing the importance of teacher

education for the development of a nation and relevant recommendations were proffered to reposition teacher education and the teaching profession.

Key Words: Teacher, Education, Profession, Teacher Education and National Development

Introduction

There is no doubt that education is generally regarded as a means to better life and the upliftment of the society at large. Hence, it is seen as a potent instrument for social, economic and political transformation of the nation. This development has thrust a lot of responsibilities on teachers who are the major operators of any education system. It is therefore not an overstatement that the professionalization of teaching and making the teacher the centre of educational reform in Nigeria, will enhance teachers' productivity, reduce the systemic problems in the educational sector, ensure effective service delivery, engage other sectors of society as well as place education as instrument par excellence for national development (Okemakinde Adewuyi & Alabi, 2013).

Essentially, teachers have obligation to the development of education and teaching as a profession and these noble objectives can be realized by the training and retraining of teachers through in-service education (Eduwen, 1992). In recent past, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous expansion in the teacher education programmes. It is expected that a well-designed teacher education programme should strive to achieve the set objectives of societal demands and expectations. Teacher education is even evolving and dynamic and it is imperative for the government at all levels to ensure adequate preparation of competent teachers to face these challenges in a fast changing society like Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Teacher Education

Teacher education is an organized institution designed for the professional training of those who engaged in the art and science of teaching. Osuji (2009) opined that teacher education is the professional education of teachers towards attainment of attitudes, skills and knowledge that will make them efficient and effective in their work, in accordance with the need of the society at any point in time. It includes training/education of service (pre-service) and education/training during service (in-service or on the job). Also, teacher education can be defined as the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom and the wider society.

According to Imogie (1992), teacher education is therefore a formal programme designed to produce academically qualified and component corps of

personnel who will continue the process of transmitting worthwhile knowledge to the present generation through the different levels of the school system. This is aptly articulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy of Education when the goals of teacher education were stated as follows:

- i. To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system.
- ii. To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- iii. To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community, and society at large and to enhance their commitment of national goals.
- iv. 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, and
- v. To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

The Concept of National Development

According to Egwu (2007) as cited by Adeyera (2011), national development is the establishment of a viable and buoyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the enthronement of equality and social justice and the building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethics, religious and geo-political identities develop a collective sense of imagination that they are one. In the same vein, national development, in the word of Emeh and Ogaboh (2010) in Okemakinde, Adewuyi and Alabi (2013) involves the total transformation of society making humanity the focus of the development drive and seeking to develop man's potentialities in a total sense. It includes reduction of poverty, wealth creation, equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring nutrition and health, housing and auxiliary services, social security and welfare. This presupposes that national development is an all embracing entity on the part of individual and societal change with such indications as quality food, gainful employment, and wealth creation, power reduction within the ambit of such framework as equality, dignity, social justice and equity.

Hence, a nation cannot be said to have developed when a significant percent of her population are not literate and there is decay in the country's educational system. National development must therefore route for change in all areas of culture which include the economy, technology and environmental in such a way that the physical and mental abilities of the citizenry are best positioned to achieve beneficial change (Ani, Onyia and Iketaku, 2013).

The Role of Teacher Education in National Development

Teacher education is an indispensable key to national development. Okemakinde, Adewuyi and Alabi (2013) asserted that for national development to be

attained there is need to give priority to investment in human capital through teacher education. If people are educated in the real sense of it, they would not wait for government to provide them with job, they will engage themselves in profitable ventures (economic emancipation) thereby enhance the development of their milieu by liberating themselves from the grip of poverty and unemployment. As a matter of fact, the vital institutional mechanism for developing human skills and knowledge is the formal educational system via teacher education.

The services of a teacher towards modernization and sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore clear that no professional and adequate training of manpower for the education sector can be successful without competent teachers to handle the training programme. Hence, teacher education deserves the highest priority in the training and education of teachers. No wonder, Eduwen (1997) asserted that teachers are the essential elements recognized by the society to be in charge of the art and science of training manpower for the teaching profession.

According to Kolo (2013) education is the mainstay of human capital development. No doubts, no national transformation can take place without an obvious human capital agenda. And, obviously, human capital development is a function of education at all levels. Education, itself can only be human capital development oriented if it is functional, qualitative and knowledge-economy driven, a delivery that can only be done by teachers produced from a dynamic and innovative teacher education system. This scholar asserted further that of all instruments or approaches to national development and transformation, functional and quality education remains the most potent tool, but the system must be subject to reforms and repositioning as static education system do not transform societies. Herein, education can only be re-worked and utilized for national development if teacher education can only be re-worked and utilized for national development if teacher education is equally re-planned and up-scaled to serve the purpose. The mistake often made is to see interventions in the education sector as directly capable of enhancing quality and functionality without the equally required competent teachers to drive the input process for desired outcomes and outputs. In Nigeria today, teacher education has to be refocused in several respects to be of utility value to National Development Transformation. The importance of teachers to national development through poverty reduction and employment opportunities and employment opportunities is acknowledged worldwide. As a matter of fact, everyone agrees that second only to the students, the teacher is the heart of the education process and the main determinant of the quality and effectiveness of its results. The supply of good teachers is the bottle-neck of improvement.

Challenges of Teacher Education in Nigeria

Over the years, teacher education in Nigeria has witnessed tremendous challenges resulting from socio-economic, political and technological advancements. It is against this background that the challenges affecting teacher education can be thoroughly examined.

1. Intake and Appraisal of Students

The criteria for the recruitment and appraisal of students into teacher institutions have been a matter of controversy all over the country. It is the contention in many quarters that it is the less competent students who choose teaching as a career. It has also been said that it is only by a process of elimination that the students select teacher education as the form of higher education he or she will pursue. In Nigeria today, there is an oversupply of aspiring teachers for most subject areas, the exception being the sciences and technical disciplines. Therefore, the way to ensure quality control and professionalism is to evaluate and assess the individual qualities or intake characteristics of students as well as to focus the programmes on the abilities of students which are valued by those who eventually employ these teachers.

2. The Quality of Teacher Education Programme

In Nigeria today, the quality of teacher education is very much in doubt. Teacher educations have not been innovative in relation to instructional methods. Obsolete textbooks and teaching methods are still very much in vogue. The curriculum practices are theory oriented rather than actual practice in the world of work. In addition, the quality of the programmes is also largely determined by those who teach the teachers. It is a matter of regret and lamentation that most teacher educators cannot be described as professional teachers since they possess degree such as B.A. (Hons), B.Sc. (Hons), etc. in single subject discipline without educational background. The implication of this for teacher education is decline in academic standard. Quality assurance can be described as planned and systematic programme designed to ensure that quality is maintained or improved. In Nigeria, teacher education has no well-defined system of assessing its quality and evaluating its outcomes. Kolo (2013) posits that the sole purpose of setting up the NCCE and by extension other tertiary education regulatory agencies (NUC and NBTE) which have supervisory functions over teacher education programmes in their respective institutions is to institutionalise quality assurance and evaluation. For whatever reason, these agencies have solely utilized the accreditation approach than the more dynamic approaches of holistic stakeholder evaluation and peer-review mechanisms. For teacher education, the later approaches ensure more of the institutionalization of quality assurance and evaluation for both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. Indeed, experience in Nigeria

only shows that the accreditation approach to quality assurance in teacher education only fosters make shift quality make-ups in institutions with no follow-up measures of outputs and products of programmes accredited.

3. Teaching Practice

Teaching practice is a vital component of teacher education programme. Unfortunately, little attention is devoted to the effective organization of teaching practice in our teacher colleges. There is indeed a wide variation in the amount of time that students spent on teaching practice. Some institutions organize teaching practice for a whole term, some in six weeks and some in a whole year. These consequential differences affect standard and invariably quality of teacher education in the country. In addition, teaching practice supervision is susceptible to numerous biasing factors. In the first place, some teaching practice assessment instruments are subjective and interpreted in various ways depending on the supervisor's orientation, training and disposition.

According to Imogie (1990) supervisors cannot know to what extent a student teaching is constrained by pressures from the class teacher or how much help the class teacher has given, they cannot know how much a class has been 'primed' nor can they make fair comparisons between students teaching in different schools.

4. In-Service Education

Whatever administrative arrangements or curricular proposals are made, change in the educational system ultimately depends on teachers. As a matter of policy, this requires the handwork of well-trained and dedicated teachers in Nigeria school system who are agents of civilization and teachers of the nation. Therein, improving the quality of teachers and establishing innovations in education are the rationale behind in-service education. According to Nwangwu (1992) as Nigeria's institutions of higher learning design regular programmes for those within the prescribed age, those above the normal school age and the adults already serving in junior staff capacities feel neglected. They are afraid of being laid off from work because of lack of relevant credentials in the current wave of retrenchment and poor economy. A need therefore arises to design educational programmes for adults that are capable of helping them acquire new skills, attitudes and values that would enable them fit into the society and upgrade their knowledge.

5. System of Institution Accreditation

The system of accreditation of teacher education programmes in Nigeria at the various institutions and faculties leaves much to be desired. They are in the hands of diverse bodies that are crisis ridden and bedevilled by administrative bottlenecks. As a matter of fact, it is sad to note our present system of accreditation of faculties and

institutions for the running of teacher education programmes is haphazard and unsatisfactory. There are too many uncoordinated and uncooperative agencies and authorities involved such as University Senates, the National Board for technical Education (NBTE), the National Universities Commission (NUC), Federal and State Ministries of Education through such bodies as the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCC) the National Council for Education Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the Teachers registration Council (TRC) that maintains a national register and code of conduct for teachers.

6. Poor Funding

Teacher education is bedevilled by poor funding from all levels of government. This has resulted in the inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials, obsolete textbooks, dilapidated school buildings, overcrowded classes and ill-equipped classrooms lacking in sophisticated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems. In fact, it is sad to note that the Nigeria Government devote less than 26% of her national budget to education that is far below the standard prescribed by UNESCO. As a result, the quality of products from this system is in doubt.

7. Professionalization of Teaching

The need for the professionalization of teaching has become imperative in view of the advent of new technology and knowledge explosion that demands better trained teachers at the various levels of our educational sector. Essentially, professionalism should be seen as the ability of the practitioners of an occupation to enforce its rules and regulations in terms of the autonomy and prestige, ethics, work conditions, admission into the field, training, certification and registration. Unfortunately, teaching in Nigeria is yet to be fully accorded the full recognition as a profession because it has no direct and systematic control status, poor remuneration of teachers, and lack of political will on the part of teachers' registration council to enforce its code of ethics and standard.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of teacher education as a panacea for national development in Nigeria. In addition, the challenges confronting teacher education in its quest for national development ranging from intake and appraisal of students, quality control, teaching practice, in-service education, system of institutional accreditation, poor funding to professionalization of teaching were ex-rayed. There is no doubt that there is need for much improvement and repositioning of the present day teacher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

From the foregoing discourse on teacher education and national development, the following recommendations are made. In view of the invaluable role of teachers in the life of any nation the government should increase the funding of teacher education sector by devoting a minimum of 30% of its annual budget on the training and professional development of teachers through in-service training, seminars, conferences, workshops on ICT programs and provision of infrastructural facilities.

There is need to re-organize the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) as presently constituted to be more proactive in enforcing the code of ethics and standard of the teaching profession.

The entering qualification of candidates for training as teachers should be reviewed upward to a minimum of five credits including Mathematics and English. Therein, education would cease to be a dumping ground for candidates that regard teaching as the last option.

Government need to be more committed to the welfare of teachers through regular salaries and allowances, improved conditions of service, regular promotions and recognition of teachers in decision making process on matters affecting their profession.

Finally, teachers themselves should guard against unhealthy rivalry and disunity among its members. A major weakening force in the teaching profession today is the proliferation of organizations within the parent body of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) such as All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (NACOPSS), Conference of Primary School head teachers of Nigeria (COPSHON), National Association of Classroom teachers (NACT) and the latest being the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools (ASUSS).

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