

Rethinking Teacher Education and the Challenges of Education for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The paper traces the genesis of teacher education in Nigeria and points out the pivotal role of teacher education as the arrow head of a sustainable and functional education needed for the development of a nation. It also looked into the challenges of teacher education for sustainable development such as in adequate quality of staff, and the profounded way forward is for the government to provide regular training and retraining opportunities for teachers.

Keywords: teacher education, challenges, sustainable development

Introduction

According to Osusu (2003), "Education world wide is a complex process of socialization that transforms individuals into social beings equipped with the necessary tools to participate fully in the dynamics of life." Therefore, the education of the individual must continue as long as the individual desires to adapt to new circumstances as he journeys through life. Recognizing the importance of teacher education as the fountain head of the education process, the National policy on Education (2004) provides that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. This catchy phrase can be extended even further, no nation can develop above the quality of its teachers. The quality of a nations teacher education is the bench mark for measuring the quality of education dispensed in its schools. This in turn determines a nations development or preparedness for development.

Teacher education in Nigeria (a brief history)

According to Adewole (1996) Teacher education in the formal sense started in Nigeria in 1859 when the church missionary society established a teacher training college in Abeokuta. This college, was moved to Lagos in 1867, when the missionaries were expelled from Abeokuta and relocated to Oyo at St. Andrew's college in 1896. It was an all male institution and fully residential. The Baptist

mission probably spurred by the church missionary society's example, established a Baptist Teacher Training College in Ogbomoso in 1897. Elsewhere in Nigeria, the Presbyterian church of Scotland in 1861, established the Hope Waddell Training Institute in Calabar. The institute was not an exclusively teacher training institute, but rather provided training for primary school teachers to become preachers, tradesmen and teachers. It was thus a seminary, trade centre and teacher training college rolled into one.

McNair (1994) also stated that formal teacher training did not start early in the North. The earliest of such attempt was under the auspices of Hanns Visoles, Director of education, Northern Nigeria, who established a teacher training college in Nasarawa in 1909. To feed these Teacher Training College were standard six certificate holders, who invariably must have served as pupil teachers for two or more years. Entry into these prestigious teacher training college was by a competitive examination.

During the 19th century, the training of teachers was the exclusive preserve of the Christian mission, which gave teacher education a religious bent in a religiously plural society, their aim being to produce teacher catechists for the purpose of Christian evangelism. There was the need for government intervention and the colonial government did intervene by taking a measure of control over the training of teachers. The colonial government promulgated a memorandum on education in 1925 and in 1928, the Phelps S commission was set up. The commission's recommendation led to a two tier teach education programme for primary school teacher thus;

The elementary Training College (ETC) usually referred to as GRADE III Teacher Training College. This produced teachers who dispensed teaching at the lower forms of primary schools. They were known as Grade III teachers. The training lasted two years. The Higher Elementary training College, which was popularly referred to as the grade II Teacher Training College, produced teachers who manned the higher elementary classes. Much later, the grade I teachers certificate was introduced as an icing on the cake for ambitious Grade II teachers willing to upgrade their professional status, such teachers went through a one year agricultural course or sat for and passed the General Certificate A'level in two teaching subjects followed by a teaching practice exercise organized by the ministry of Education. The Grade I Teachers certificate enabled holders to teach in the lower forms of secondary schools.

There was a yawning need to produce teachers for secondary schools, which had started increasing in number. In 1932, the Yaba Higher College was established. This college, which was science and technology based, offered among other

courses, a three year diploma in education, thus producing science teachers for secondary education. The programme was discontinued in 1950, after the Yaba Higher College was merged with the university college in 1948.

Concerned about the paucity of higher education in Nigeria, the Government set up the Ashby Commission (1959-1960) with a mandate to conduct an investigation into Nigerians needs in the field of post school certificate and higher education over the next twenty years (FGN 1960: 2). The commission was particularly critical of the quality of teachers teaching in secondary schools, claiming that about half of the teachers at this level were not adequately or fully trained for their work. The commission thereafter recommended the expansion of the intermediate teacher training colleges to produce teachers for secondary schools. A fall out of this recommendation was the establishment of Advanced Teachers College in the early 1960s and now christened colleges of Education and producing Nigeria certificate of education (NCE) teachers. These teachers were at the inception of Advanced Teachers Colleges/Colleges of education expected to teach in junior secondary schools.

However, with the National policy on education specifying that the Nigeria certificate in education shall be the minimum teaching qualification, these colleges have positively responded to this policy provision by reviewing their curriculum to meet the challenges posed by this policy provision. Thus apart from providing specialized training in primary education studies, all trainees irrespective of course offering, are expected to offer courses in primary Education studies. There are now plans to increase intakes into the primary education studies programme of these colleges to enable them to teach at the basic level (i.e. the first nine years of formal education). The Nigeria council on Education (NCE) set 1998 as the year in which the minimum teaching qualification of National certificate in Education (NCE) will take effect, but this could not be attained (Education sector Analysis 2003). There are currently 67 colleges of education in Nigeria offering courses leading to the award of the NCE. Some of these colleges offer degree programme in education in affiliation with some universities. Currently all the regular universities in the country offer teacher education programmes, leading to the award of BA (Ed), B.Sc (Ed) B.Ed, and PGDE.

Teacher as the hub of the educational system

Brameld (1965) had argued that if Education is power the teacher as the dispenser of education, holds the secret to that power. Good teachers thereafter mean good education, which in turn translates into tremendous power in the hands of the people. That is, power to transform the society into a better place. Americans had long realized that whatever reforms a nation desires must first be introduced into

her schools and this must be reflected the school curricula. Teachers being the implementers of the curriculum must first and foremost be transformed to implement the curriculum. Thus, aware of the tremendous impact good quality teacher education could make in the scientific transformation of a nation, American educationists organized a national conference on teacher education just after the Russian sputnik was launched. Headerfieli and Stinnett (1961) quoted jack Allen as saying during the conference:

One of the prime functions of the school, indeed me chief function, is to provide a setting within which boys and girls can grow intellectually. This can only be accomplished through the learner's association with information, knowledge, facts. Books can help, so can numerous other types of learning materials. But always there stands the teacher, always on the stage, often front and centre. What he does not know can be an irreparable loss.

However, in Nigeria as Itotoh (1992) observed, sadly, too often through teachers who are expected to carry through reforms in schools passed through the old system of teacher education system that are now moribund. This probably explains why Ingawa (1998) suggests that any attempt at improving the quality of education must include the provision of effective competent and certified teaching.

General Characteristics of an ideal teacher

Mahuta (2009) Stated that, it is teachers are the main determinants of quality education. It is equally true that no education system can rise beyond the quality of its teachers. Hence, the need for quality teachers who are knowledgeable in the teaching subjects and are well groomed in pedagogy as well. However, it may not be out of place to mentioned that the quality of any education system depends largely on the competence, commitment and motivation of the teachers. An ideal or good teacher should display the following characteristics features:

- a. The teacher must be one of that has the ability to identify child difficulties and problems and must be ready to help them.
- b. An ability to be at peace with himself, parents, pupil and work mates or colleagues. An emotionally unbalanced teacher is usually displeased with everybody and rejects himself in the long run. Hence, such teacher lacks good self image, and therefore, the likelihood for such teachers to perform well is slim.
- c. The teacher most adequately knows his subject. It gives him confidence in his work.
- d. The teacher most be able to express himself and so carry out his ideas and feelings to others.

- e. The teacher must be ready to learn through criticisms by colleagues or pupils. He must first learn to accept such criticisms and so profit by them.
- f. The teacher must be interested in improving his teaching through reading, seminar, workshops, imitation, assimilation, innovation and so on.

Teacher education and sustainable development

According to Ukeje (1996) Nigeria can make use of the tremendous power of education, through quality teacher education, to tackle her numerous problems such as ethnicity, indiscipline, corruption and greed, and by so doing, achieve rapid national development. Teachers by the nature of their calling, inculcate societal values and norms into a nation's youths. Teachers are therefore at the vanguard of bringing about reforms in a nation's polity. The quality of education that teachers receive will in turn determine the quality and quantum of reforms that they can inculcate in a nation's youths.

It is a truism that the minds of human beings at their formative ages are influenced by their experiences with the external environment. These experiences in the form of values and attitudes are usually acquired through education in the school and it has the greatest influence on the child as a learner. If the teacher is pivotal to the child's proper upbringing, then his education is paramount to the proper dissemination of the right values to the child. It is in this context that the teacher derives his paramount import as the harbinger of a nation's development.

Quality teacher education equips the teacher to provide the enabling environment needed for a child to attain his full potential and to blossom. Thus, teacher education should be the arrow head and the spirit of renascent Nigeria. Our teacher education programme should be in harmony with our national aspiration for sustainable development.

Without doubt, the development of a nation depends on the human resources the nation is endowed with, and the quality of the human resources is inexorably tied to quality of education dispensed by the teachers. Quality teachers education is therefore invariably the yardstick to measure a nation's development.

Learning is believed to be experiences, but not all experiences result in learning. Teachers as the purveyors of education provide the right type of experience, which results in learning. The main goal of education is social change, which brings about sustainable development. This goal can only be achieved if there are good teachers nurtured by good teacher education programmes.

Good teachers dispense good teaching, which in turn produces good quality workforce engineers, medical doctors, architects, accountants, lawyers, name it, all working towards the achievement of national goal, that is sustainable development. Conversely, the consequence of poorly trained teachers is the production of half baked medical doctors who cannot treat the mildest ailment, engineers who cannot match theory with practice and lawyers who cannot move motion in court.

Educational Goals in Nigeria

According to NPE (2004) A nation's policy on education is government's way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. No policy on education, however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. The five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education (WPE 2004), are the building of;

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society.
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Education in Nigeria is an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. It has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities, and individuals as well as government intervention. It is therefore desirable for the Nation to spell out in clear and unequivocal terms the philosophy and objectives that underlie its investment in education. The National policy on education seek to fulfill that role.

Government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world.

Challenges of teacher education for sustainable development

According to Falade (2009) the ANCOPSS is deeply worried and concerned about the state of education in Nigeria today. As professionals in the field, the inadequacies constitute advancing challenges which stare us in the face daily in the discharge of our administrative responsibilities as school leaders. The stark reality is that the system is under resourced in Nigeria. The gross under funding manifests in various forms which include;

Inability to attract the best minds in the land to the teaching profession, because of the poor welfare package.

Inadequate quality staff

Low staff morale as a result of (1) above

Lack of regular training and retraining opportunities for teachers and school leaders,

Inadequate/dilapidated infrastructure

Lack of sufficient funds in the school for administrators to execute school programmes satisfactorily.

In addition to the tell-tale negative indices in the system are the problems of warped societal values system, policy flip flops, unwilling learners, examination malpractices, cultism, truancy and other forms of indiscipline.

Yet to my mind, the greatest challenges as far as the education sector is concerned in Nigeria today is how to raise teacher quality by checking brain drain to other juicy professions. The simple fact is that Nigerian youths just do not want to become teachers! This unfortunate development affect all levels of the system. Professor Labode Popoola, Dean, postgraduate school, university of Ibadan in the Thursday, 5th March, 2009 edition of the "Nigerian Tribune" cited by Falade (2009) had this to say on the desire of companies to employ first class graduates:

The best brains are being lured out of the university system by the industries. They are given mouth-watering and irresistible offers which the university system cannot offer them. How do you explain to a fresh graduate being offered ₦400.000.00 or ₦500.000.00? a professor does not even earn. What is the starting salary for a fresh graduate in some companies. Asking them to stay in the university system is like asking them to be sentenced to a life of penury (Popoola; Nigerian Tribune 5th March 2009).

This ugly scenario of poor welfare package, if allowed to persist in our education system, will eventually affect the quality of knowledge dispensers in our school as well as quality of school products. By extension, quality of life in the society will be affected as no society is better than the quality of its school which is largely determined by the quality of the teaching workforce. Any agitation for salary improvement by teachers, therefore, is indeed an agitation for the betterment of the educational system and the society.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

According to Okebukola (2007) sustainable development as defined in Wikipedia as balancing the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of the natural

environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future.

When the international union for the conservation of Nature published the world conservation strategy and used the sustainable development, the concept came into general usage following publication of the 1987 report of the Brundtland commission formally, the world commission on environment and Development set up by the United Nations General Assembly, the Brundtland commission coined what was to become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into four constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability and political sustainability. Hence, sustainable development does not focus solely on environmental issues. More broadly, sustainable development policies encompass three general policy areas, economic, environmental and social. In support of this, several United Nations texts, most recently the 2005 world Summit outcome Document, refer to the "inter dependent and mutual reinforcing pillars" of sustainable development as economic development, social development, and environmental protection.

In spite of the agreement among numerous scholars on the meaning of sustainable development as would be expected a good number hold the view that it is an ambiguous concept. The concept has included notions of weak sustainability, strong sustainability and deep ecology. Different conceptions also reveal a strong tension between egocentrism and anthropocentrism, the concept remains weakly defined and contains a large amount of debate as to its precise definition.

Recommendation

- Government should provide quality and quantity teachers in our education institution. Government should employ fresh graduates as a source of man power to education sector in order to meet the demand.
- Staff remuneration should be provided to meet with their counterparts in other professions like health workers and judicial workers etc.
- Government should provide adequate infrastructure and instructional materials.
- Adequate funds should be released to the training institution. That government should put into consideration that education is the fountain tool for national development, therefore, investing in education is the best option.

Conclusion

Teacher Education is the hub of the educational system and pivot of sustainable development. Where teacher education is relegated to the background, that nation's development is stunted and quarter baked professionals are produced, who cannot bring about any meaningful development. Quality teacher education is thus the harbinger of sustainable development by adequate training and remuneration of the teachers; since no nation can rise about the quality of its teachers.

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