

TEACHER PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The teacher factor is central and fundamental in the process of education. Teachers are generally regarded as major agents of the education process. This means therefore, that the importance of teachers and the roles they play are enormous in the provision of quality and quantity education. In view of the crucial role teachers perform in the educational endeavour, their education and quality became imperative. In order to ensure the quality of teachers, the National Policy on Education (2004) has prescribed the Nigeria Certificate of Education to be the minimum qualification for the Nigerian teachers. The aim of this paper is to examine some issues pertaining to teacher preparation and its implications on Universal Basic Education as well as the role of teachers in the Universalisation of Education in Nigeria. The paper made some recommendations, such as, Primary school teachers need to be sensitized on the existence of the programme, with a view to making them more familiar with the goals and mission of the programme.

Introduction

The Universal Basic Education is an educational programme, which was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999 in Sokoto. The programme was launched with the noble aim of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as to enhance national socio-economic development, political consciousness and national integration and cohesion in the society. However, according to the federal Ministry of Education (2000) the specific objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme are, namely:

- developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.

- the provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- reducing drastically, the incidence of dropout rate from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
- catering for school dropouts and out-of-school children and adolescents, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Furthermore, in seeking to achieve the objectives of the UBE programme the Federal Ministry of Education (2002) identified nine factors that will be vigorously pursued so as to facilitate successful achievement of the stated objectives, the factors are as follows:

- public enlightenment and social mobilisation, for all community involvement.
- data collection and analysis.
- planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- teachers: their recruitment, education, training, retraining, motivation.
- infrastructural facilities.
- enriched curricula.
- textbooks and instructional materials.
- funding.
- management of the entire process.

However, if the above factors are effectively addressed, it is expected that the objectives of UBE programme will be achieved. For any educational programme, it is common for the general public and teachers to talk at different fora on what government should do or what the government is doing. Sometimes teachers tend to forget to ask themselves about their role when there is a new educational programme like the UBE. Teachers have a crucial role to play in the Universal Basic Education. They should also not forget that whatever the government provides in terms of the infrastructural facilities and the teaching and learning materials, the key factor for the success of the programme is the 'teacher factor'.

However, the aim of this paper is to discuss the issue of teacher preparation and as it relates to the UBE programme. In order to do this, the paper discusses issues such as teachers education, the role of teachers from the sociological viewpoint, Universal Basic Education programme and the role of teachers for the success of the Programme in Nigeria.

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Teachers Education and the Universal Basic Education

The importance of teachers and the role they play in the education process are central and fundamental to the success of any educational endeavour. Teachers are enormous agents of knowledge. This, therefore, means that the education of teachers is crucial for any educational programme. It is only when there are quality teachers that any nation can expect quality education. This therefore, means that there is need to train and retrain teachers for efficient teaching and learning endeavours. In addition, the popular saying that 'No nation can rise above the level of its teachers is always relevant. This therefore, means that, efforts should be intensified towards the production of quality teachers for enhanced professional competence.

In all these efforts the fundamental issue is that of professional growth of teachers, for efficiency and effectiveness in the Universalisation of education in Nigeria. The professional growth of teachers entails that teachers are not only to learn the various school subjects and topics or concepts but they should also be trained as professional teachers. Therefore, for them to have the professional training and grounding, they should learn, for example, some aspects of Sociology to enable them understand the environment in which the child lives and learn. Let us not forget that the schools are established in the society, for the society and by the society. The teacher should therefore familiarise himself with the society in which he is operating. This means that the teacher's knowledge of the society or community is enormous in the discharge of his duties. The teacher should again study Psychology so as to conceptualise properly how the child grows and learn. In addition there are other courses he is expected to study in teacher education programme, such as, Educational Administration and Planning, Philosophy of Education, Guidance and Counselling, Test and Measurements and so on.

The National Policy on Education (2004) has made it categorically clear that, since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. It can be explained that this bold step of the government is in consideration of the place of teacher education as a corner stone for qualitative and quantitative education as well as the role of education in national development.

In addition, the NPE (2004) has made it clear that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education. The National Policy on Education has also pointed in clear terms, the direction to which government wanted the country to go with regard to teacher education. In the light of this, the goals of Teacher education in Nigeria as contained in the NPE (2004, p.39) are, namely:

- to provide highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- to encourage further, the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers,
- to help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations;
- to enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Furthermore, the government in its effort toward professionalizing teaching, it has set up the Teachers' Registration Council with a view to control and regulate the practice of the profession. The NPE (2004, pp.40 - 41) stated that, those already engaged in teaching but not professionally qualified shall be given a period of time within which to qualify for registration or leave the profession.

In addition, the NPE (2004, p. 41) mentioned that, the newly qualified Teachers shall serve a period of internship one (1) year for degree holders and two (2) years for NCE holders. That is not all, the Federal Government in the National Policy on Education (2004, p.41) has made it clear on how government will intensify effort towards the improvement of quality education at the primary and secondary levels, such as the following:

- appointment of academically and professionally qualified persons as teachers and head teachers;
- regulate in-service training programmes for teachers and head teachers.

However, in view of the importance of the academic and professional competence of teachers, the Federal Government of Nigeria has structured its teacher education programmes with a view to equipping teachers for effective and efficient performance of their responsibility. The government through the NPE (2004, p. 40) states that the following educational institutions as the ones that are charged with the responsibility of providing the required professional training for teachers and prospective teachers in Nigeria.

- Colleges of Education, which are charged with the responsibility of turning out holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), which as we saw earlier is the minimum qualification for teaching in Nigeria.
- Faculties of Education in Universities are to produce holders of B.Ed., B.A.Ed, B.Sc. Ed and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE).
- Institutes of Education
- National Teachers' Institute.
- Schools of Education in the Polytechnics

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- National Institute for Nigerian languages (NINLAN)
- National Mathematical Centre (NMC).

Furthermore, it may not be out of place to mention that on the training and retraining of teachers, the Federal Ministry of Education (2000) explains that all training outlets for teachers should be limited or restricted to the approved institutions for such training. Examples of these outlets as contained in the Universal Basic Education proceedings of the Education Mini Summit, as follows:

- Local programmes on regular basis, obtainable in Universities, Colleges of Education, National Institute for Nigerian Languages and other Teacher educational institutions so approved by government.
- Serving teachers should be involved in seminars, workshops and in-service programmes on identified themes, such as curriculum implementation and innovation, management techniques, guidance and counselling services, social mobilization, methodology of teaching, instructional materials and computer literacy.
- Teachers Associations such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers and training institutions should continually organize career improvement programmes for all categories of teachers for enhanced productivity of teachers.
- Sandwich programmes, as well as training outlets for teachers, is an opportunity for training and re-training of teachers. It is emphasized that the institutions offering sandwich programmes should be duly accredited and that such programmes are comparable in all respects and standards to the approved regular or conventional programmes.
- Pivotal Teacher Training Programme is also aimed at increasing the number of teachers for the Universal Basic Education. It is part of the various Teacher education programmes that are mounted by National Teachers Institute Kaduna.

All these steps and measures are meant to produce efficient and effective teachers who have adequate professional knowledge and understanding, professional skills and techniques, as well as certain personal qualities which are expected of an ideal teacher in the society. However, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria in collaboration with International Labour Organization Action Programme on Education (2004 – 2005: p. 2) recent reforms that would influence decisions on teacher recruitment, training and employment are, namely:

- Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, which provides for 9 years basic education (6 years primary and 3 years junior secondary). Education at this level is free, universal and compulsory - the UBE law

- has provision on appropriate sanctions for parents who fail to send their children to school and also sanctions for States;
- Establishment of the teachers registration council;
- separation of junior from senior secondary schools;
- introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) into the school system;
- prescription of minimum number of subjects to be taken by SSCE candidates;
- prescription of French in the primary and secondary school curriculum as a second official language;
- integration of basic education in the programme of Qur'anic schools, to ensure equal opportunity and effective implementation of UBE;
- repositioning of science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national education for optimum performance; and,
- establishment of the Federal Teachers' Scheme.

The Role of Teachers: A Sociological Viewpoint

The teacher, like any other member of society performs many social roles in accordance with the different statuses he occupies both in his private and public life. However, the nature of the teacher's occupation places him in special position of having a complex set of roles in connection with his occupation. The teacher is, as it were, in between the worlds of youth and the adult, trying to meet the claims of his pupils while reconciling them with the expectations of their parents and relating both to the needs of society at large (Ottaway, 1966). In addition, the teacher has, on one hand, an academic role concerned with scholarship, and on the other hand, he is a character-trainer who is concerned with the development of the child's whole personality aimed at producing an able useful member of the society.

Furthermore, Emile Durkheim (1858 - 1917) as cited in Meighan (1986) identified the role of the teacher as follows:

- encourage in pupil's group involvement, allegiance and responsibility.
- enable pupils, where necessary, to recognize that their allegiance to societal goals and values comes before personal or familial concerns. In this regard the teacher may have to work to re-socialize those children whose previous formative experience has taken place in an environment which celebrates sectional rather than collective interests.
- develop and extend in pupils those skills which society needs in order to function and which the children need in order to survive in the society.

In another development, Durkheim (1858 - 1917) in Meighan (1986) added that:

- teachers are agents of transmission of knowledge and culture and they themselves are under obligation to the same societal requirements.
- teachers, are also moral models and moral beings.
- the destiny of a nation is shaped in its classroom, and therefore, it is the teacher who is the central instrument in moulding or shaping that destiny.
- the teacher personality must reflect the characteristics of good citizenship for good and better society.

Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

Section 3 of the National Policy on Education (2004) clearly conceptualized Basic Education as follows:

Basic education shall be 9-year duration comprising 6-years of primary education and 3-years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of-school youths. The specific goals of basic education shall be the same as the goals of the levels of education, to which it applies (i.e. primary education, junior secondary education, adult and non-formal education) (p.13).

The Federal Ministry of Education (2000) through the proceedings of the Education Mini Summit further described basic education as:

The foundation for sustainable life-long learning, it provides reading, writing and numeracy skills. It comprises a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners to acquire functional literacy. In the Nigerian context, basic education includes primary, junior secondary and nomadic education, as well as adult literacy (p.1).

Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Education (2000, p.1) stated the aims of basic education to learners as follows:

- live meaningful and fulfilling lives;
- contribute to the development of the society.
- derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society; and
- discharge their civic obligations competently.

The above aims of Basic Education to learners are enormous, thus, making the task or role of teachers a very crucial one. It therefore means that quality, efficient, effective and professionally trained teachers are indispensable to the successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Teachers and the Universal Basic Education

The importance of teachers in the success of the Universal Basic Education cannot be overemphasised. Since no system of education or a programme can rise above the level of its teachers, it means that teachers are the main factor in ensuring the success of any new education programme. It has also been observed that many laudable educational initiatives have failed mainly because they did not take due account of the "teachers factor." Therefore, for the success of the current UBE programme, teachers have to be major part of the whole process. This is possible by ensuring the training and retraining of teachers for enhanced efficiency and productively.

In view of this the Federal Ministry of Education (2000) through the UBE Proceedings of the Education Mini Summit in 1999 maintains that to raise the level of general education, teachers education will have to be pursued, broadened and intensified. Added to these, is the very crucial issue of career-long professional development of serving teachers. This should cease to be an ad-hoc affair. Teachers Association, Universities, Colleges of Education and the National Teachers Institute should be mobilized to develop a more systematic and career improvement oriented, and education programmes for all categories of teachers. Furthermore, it is pertinent to consider briefly two basic issues namely: production of teachers for primary schools and for junior secondary schools section of Universal Basic Education.

Training Teachers for UBE Primary Schools: This implies training and re-training of teachers to be capable of handling the children for the gigantic programme. The training programmes should cover aspects of academic teaching subjects, educational foundation (Sociology of Education, Educational Psychology, Educational Administration and

Planning, Guidance and Counselling, Educational Philosophy and so on) courses and primary school teaching methodology or pedagogy. The programmes should be mounted by faculties of education in Universities across the country, Colleges of Education, N.T.I, and Institutes of Education in Universities. Hence, politicians should leave the training and re-training of teachers in the hands of experts and specialists devoid of interference and political promises and pledges that are often not met.

Training of Teachers for Junior Secondary Schools Section of UBE: This refers to the need for massive recruitment of teachers to teach in our Junior Secondary Schools across the country. Those teachers, who are not professionally trained to teach, should be given the professional training and grounding on the job (in-service training). They should be sponsored or allowed to acquire Postgraduate Diploma in Education if they are graduates with BA/B.Sc. or HND holders. The state Ministries of Education across the country should endeavour to liaise with faculties of education in Universities to organize this type of training and retraining.

Recommendations

For the success of teacher preparation for national education reform, the following recommendations are put forward in the context of the enormous role of teachers in the Universal Basic Education programme.

Primary school teachers need to be sensitized on the existence of the programme, with a view to making them familiar with the goals and mission of the programme. There should be constant supervision and inspection with a view to providing teachers with professional guidance and help.

Since teachers are always the focused persons in this programme, then their conditions should be highly improved in terms of their economic status and teacher competence.

Pedagogical skills of teachers should be improved through regular workshops and seminars organized by Ministries of Education and Local Government Education Authorities. Teachers should be made to attend workshops or refresher courses on new innovations in teaching methods or some common observations on teacher's weaknesses which are identified by inspectors and supervisors. These workshops could be organized during long vacations so as to avoid interrupting the school calendar.

The morale of teachers needs to be increased. This could be by way of providing more allowances and incentives to teachers. A sound and promising

teachers' welfare package should be provided with a view to entice them to remain in the job and to do the job effectively and efficiently.

There should be frequent and regular training and re-training of teachers, which will ensure available and capable human resources to manage the programme.

The government should remove and or stop the politicization of transfers of teachers, Head teachers, Education Secretaries, and Principals in view of the enormous role of education in nation building and development.

The issue of motivation is an important aspect of teachers' role in ensuring the success of Universal Basic Education. Teachers' salaries and other benefits should be paid as and when due.

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