

THE ISSUES OF QUALITY & QUANTITY IN NIGERIA'S TEACHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Introduction

The importance of quality in teacher education is well recognized in Nigeria as in all education communities all over the world. Its National Policy on Education affirms that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (Nigeria, 1977; revised 1981, 2004). In fact nothing is as important to learning as the quality of the learner's teacher.

Thus, teacher education (pre- and in-service) must prepare teachers for this role. However, there is no coherent teacher education policy in Nigeria; there are uncoordinated disparate attempts by Federal and State governments to address the problems of teacher quality, demand and supply and the attempts are largely a matter of institutional provisions only (FME, 2007). Only recently, the Independent Development Partners (IDPs) have shown interest in helping Nigeria develop a Teacher Education Policy (TEP) and specifically, USAID/ENHANSE has in fact submitted a draft TEP which was presented at the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) Reference Committee Meeting in July 2007. It is enroute to approval by the National Council on Education (NCE) later in the year after recommendation by the JCCE Plenary Session.

In this paper, we shall review current teacher education programmes for Basic Education (Primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS)) and post-Basic Education (mainly Senior Secondary) as they relate to the problems of teacher quality, demand and supply in Nigeria.

Teacher Education for Basic Education

Basic education in Nigeria is offered at the primary and In order to enhance the quality of teaching, the Federal Government prescribed the National Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum qualification for teaching in the primary and junior secondary schools (Nigeria, 1977; revised 1981, 2004). Hitherto, the minimum teaching qualification for the primary school was the Grade II certificate obtained from a five-year post-primary school course in the Grade II Teachers College.

The NCE is obtained after a three-year post-secondary school pre-service teacher education programme in a College of Education (COE). There are at present 83 of such institutions running the NCE programme in the country, including some polytechnics, and enrolling about 400,000 students and graduating about 60,000 yearly. The establishment of the COE was recommended by the Ashby Commission in 1959 in order to increase supply and improve on the quality of teachers especially for the lower forms

of the secondary school. A National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was later set up to supervise, monitor and accredit the COEs to ensure some uniformity in standards of curriculum and implementation.

The National Teachers Institute (NTI) was also set up to upgrade serving Grade II teachers to the NCE level through the distance learning method. Also some of the COEs run part-time or 'Sandwich' NCE programmes either for serving teachers or some candidates desiring the certificate. All Grade II teachers in service were given a deadline of December 2006 to upgrade to the NCE or leave service. However, as at the deadline there were still over 150,000 teachers without the NCE nationwide. The deadline had to be shifted by another two years during which a Special Teacher Upgrading Programme (STUP) has been introduced for the teachers to acquire the NCE with emphasis on primary education.

It is clear that, the NCE programme from inception was not intended for the production of primary teachers but for non-graduate qualified teachers for the lower forms of the secondary. That is, prescribing the NCE as qualification for teaching in the primary school without restructuring the curriculum of the COEs to suit the requirements of primary education introduced some weakness into teacher quality at that level. It was only recently that Primary Education Studies (PES) was introduced into the NCE curriculum as an option for student teachers intending to teach at the primary level. Even then very few (less than 10%) elect to choose PES. Consequently, there is a shortage of qualified teachers with the appropriate NCE at the primary school level in Nigeria; majority of teachers at this level have the NCE appropriate for teaching at the junior secondary level.

To compound the problem of quality and quantity in teacher education for Basic Education, very few candidates apply for admission into COEs relative to those applying to universities (ratio is about 1:9) and usually it is those with four Credit passes in the O'Level and who are not qualified for admission into universities who reluctantly choose to train as teachers. In order to solve the problem of inadequacy of candidates seeking entry into the NCE programme, the COEs mount a one-year pre-NCE programme for otherwise unqualified candidates (with fewer than four Credit passes in the O'Level) who are enrolled into the NCE after passing the pre-NCE examinations conducted by each COE.

Furthermore, the colleges are poorly funded resulting in poor quality teaching/learning infrastructure and facilities. The training programme, even for the NCE for teaching at the JSS, is also criticized as being too theoretical with little opportunities for skills development; the duration of teaching practice is short and supervision is poor. This means that possession of the NCE may make teachers qualified but may not necessarily make them competent to teach at the intended levels of education.

The implication of all these is that there is a shortfall in the supply of teachers with a preponderance of under- and un-qualified teachers at the basic education level. This results in low levels of pupils' performance in the final primary and JSS examinations.

The Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) studies of 1998 and 2003 indicate that learning outcomes in Nigeria at this level are far below nationally expected standards (Ackers, 2006). According to Obanya (2006) also, Teacher-Pupil Ratio (TPR) at the primary level is 1:40 putting Nigeria in the median among African countries. However, there are wide discrepancies among States, e.g., ranging from as low as 1:19 in Enugu to a high 1:111 in Yobe State.

Teacher Education for post-Basic (Senior Secondary) Education

The universities are responsible for training teachers for the Senior Secondary at the post-Basic level. This may be through a four-year post secondary or a three-year post-NCE or GCE A'Level B.A. Ed./B.Sc. Ed./ B.Ed.degree programme in a Faculty or Institute of Education. These universities also run the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for Bachelors degree graduates in pure Arts, Sciences and Social Science subjects to make them qualified as teachers. There are 49 of such universities today, including two Universities of Education, which are upgrades of COEs, enrolling about 150,000 and graduating about 50,000 yearly.

As with the COEs, few candidates elect to study Education and the assigned quota by the National Universities Commission (NUC) is always made up from candidates who could not secure admission into other more lucrative courses as Medicine, Engineering, Law, Accounting and Business Administration. That is, the “bottom of the barrel” candidates are mainly in teacher education courses in Nigerian universities (Ajeyalemi, 2002). The NUC is the regulatory body for university education as the NCCE is for COEs and it has prescribed a Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for Education and other courses.

Recent studies have shown that most of the graduates from the system in the last 15 years are incompetent as teachers. They are incompetent in the knowledge of subject matter content as well as in teaching, including communication skills (Ajeyalemi, 2002; Okebukola, 2007). The courses emphasise more of theory than practical, especially lacking in teaching skills acquisition through adequate teaching practice. Thus, possession of the Bachelors degree in Education does not necessarily make such “qualified” teachers competent to teach at that level. Obanya, etal. (2004) had found that secondary school teachers in four Nigerian States studied (Enugu, Kaduna, Lagos and Rivers), including the “qualified”, demonstrated poor quality teaching dominating classroom activities 67% of the time.

In terms of quantity, Obanya (2006) had found shortfalls in the supply of teachers in the four States studied for virtually all secondary subjects, including the “soft” options of Religious Studies, Commerce, etc. let alone in the difficult options of Mathematics and the Sciences, and he concluded that we are “teaching without teachers” at the primary and secondary levels.

We may then conclude that the Basic and post-Basic Education system in Nigeria is in short supply of teachers, that effective teaching, which is a product of quality teachers and teaching, is the exception rather than the rule and that teacher education has failed to meet with expectations by not producing effective teachers for the system.

The situation is compounded by the virtual lack or inadequacy of continuing professional development (in form of in-service) programmes for teachers in both the Basic and post-Basic Education system. Most in-service programmes are for up-grading qualifications (e.g., from Grade II to NCE or NCE to Bachelors degree) and few ad-hoc but short programmes exist for skills up-dating.

The Way Forward

Having accepted that teacher education in Nigeria is not meeting the expectations, there is a need to go back to the drawing board. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has proposed reforms in the Teacher Education sector, developing a 242-page *National Strategy for Teacher Quality and Development* document, which has been approved by the last National Council on Education meeting in April 2007. Already, the new TEP developed with the assistance of USAID/ENHANSE, which specifies standards for admission, curriculum, teaching practice, basic infrastructure and facilities, qualifications for academic and non-academic staff, etc. for pre- and in-service teacher education as well as conditions for registration, licensing and motivation of teachers is about to be approved. All these will ensure that a proper foundation is laid for teacher education and teaching. We must produce teachers who can, are able and are willing to teach (Obanya, 2006).

Also, the clinical experience through effective teaching practice, mentoring and licensing must be integrated into the training of teachers. Already, the FME through the NCCE is proposing a longer period of teaching practice for the NCE programme and the NUC is proposing a five-year Bachelors degree programme to provide for mastery of content, longer internship and licensing by teachers. Also, the current trend of transforming COEs to Universities of Education should be promoted, while Faculties of Education should go Collegiate so that they can effectively control the teaching of content and pedagogy, including the clinical experience of student teachers as well as pursue postgraduate programmes. All these will improve the quality of pre-service teacher education.

Similarly for in-service education, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), the regulatory agency for the teaching profession in Nigeria, has designed a Mandatory Continuous Professional Development Programme for registered teachers and both the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the NTI have been funded and mandated to provide continuing professional development programmes for teachers in the Basic Education system. A similar programme for teachers in the post-Basic system must be put in place, perhaps when the proposed Basic and Secondary Education Commission (BSEC) is established by law to replace and expand the role of the UBEC.

If all these attempts are consolidated, we may begin to produce teachers who are able, willing and can teach.

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