Teacher Education—Experiences and Challenges

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Teacher education is fundamental to the attainment of the objectives of education of any nation. In Nigeria for example, research reports indicate that during the past 18 years, the quality of teachers produced from the Nigeria’s various teacher education institutions has dropped significantly. This paper examines the various teaching experiences acquired through training including new skills gained and challenges encountered in the current teacher education programme in Nigeria that have contributed to the decline in teacher quality and experiences. It was discovered that poor quality of candidates admitted, lack of interest to take teaching as career, poor funding, poor public image of the teacher, high incidence of examination malpractice among student-teachers, and lack of motivation and good incentives among teacher educators are some of the challenges on teacher education. The paper recommends that Government at all levels and all nations should increase funding of teacher education, high quality students should be admitted, and Government should initiate programmes that can enhance the status of the teaching profession etc.

Keywords: teacher education, experiences, challenges

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of national and sustainable development. It is an important instrument for social, economic, and political transformation and sustainability in the society. Through the various educational system, human beings as raw materials are transformed into finished products and sent to the labour market for society’s development. For this reason, education is an important instrument for national development, environmental sustainability, human capital, and capacity development. It is responsible for molding every individual in the society to work towards earning a livelihood for sustainable and contribution towards national development. The standard and quality of education in any nation does not only depend or count on policy directives but as well as depend and also count on those elements (teachers) who contribute in so many ways to give quality educational inputs and resources that implemented educational policies and carry out the teaching activities at the school level. They are the spindle that rotate the educational process and the pivot on which experiences will be gained, skills acquired in order to eliminate the crisis rocking children’s learning in the classroom. Therefore, any attempt made toward better teacher education will help to achieve education beyond the crisis, adoption of new skills, enhancement of children’s rights to education; better teaching contexts provided challenges bedevilling teacher education are eliminated as these will help to transform Nigerian economy.

Furthermore, the fundamental purpose of teacher education is not only to give teachers skills which will improve their results, but also to equip our trainee-teachers at all levels, with the capability of self-learning, in
order to be creators, originators, and inventors of information rather than consumers of information. Teacher education is a professional education of teachers towards attainment of better experiences, attitudes, skills, and knowledge considered desirable so as to make them efficient and effective in their work in accordance to the needs of the society at any point in time (Osuji, 2009). Olaitan (2002) observed that teacher education is setup to inculcate the right kind of attitudes, relevant to the ever-expanding horizon of knowledge, and personal attitudes such as self-discipline, understanding, sympathy, and a pride in the profession.

Teachers drive educational programmes because they are the actual implementers of educational outcomes. For teachers to survive in a globalized world there is need for the mastery of some basic survival skills and experiences in science and technology, agriculture, entrepreneurship, ICT, and global competitiveness. This according to Obanya (2004) will enable them to meet global learning needs.

In Nigerian universities, for instance, Federal Ministry of Education (2007) observed that adequate preparation is made to improve professional teacher education through the establishment of Institute of Education and Faculties of Education. Similarly, other institutions that offer professional training for teachers include: Colleges of Education, National Teachers Institute, Schools of Education in Polytechnics etc. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The importance of teacher education cannot be overemphasized. Afe (2003) maintained that the focus of any educational programme should be on the teacher who is crucial in translating policy into practice. Equally, Ofojebe (2006) posits that any nation that is serious about manpower development must pay particular attention to the education of teachers than that of any other fields because the teachers are more directly related to the development of manpower through the impartation of knowledge, skill, and expertise needed to equip one into useful living in the society. The above mentioned variables will enhance gaining of experience because experience they say is the best teacher.

**Teacher Education**

Teachers are the distinct occupational group of people specially equipped by training to undertake the task of educating in institutions socially designed responsibility for education. Teacher education according to Federal Ministry of Education (2007) refers to the education and training in specialized areas of knowledge known as Education, History of Education, Psychology of Education, some administrative techniques as well as in subject contents and in the actual practice of the work of the teacher. Teacher education is not a one-shot affair that ends when the formal programme of study is completed and a certificate is awarded. A good deal of what constitutes teacher’s education is learnt in actual teaching situations after the completion of the formal programme of education.

One is however, a teacher when he/she successfully completes a specially designed and organized set of learning experiences for a given teaching certificate. Such learning experiences can be undertaken either within or outside the institution but it is always under the auspices of some institutions.

**Approaches to Teacher Education**

Approaches to teacher education refer to the pattern or mode by which the assignment of educating teachers is undertaken. One can take pattern or mode of teacher education to refer to one or the other of pre-service or inservice teacher education. Pre-service teacher education according to Kanu (2008) refers to the education for teaching undertaken prior to first appointment into teaching. Kanu further stated inservice teacher education on the other hand refers to teacher education received while already in the teaching service.
Pre-service education provides the initial and foundational knowledge for teaching as well as the basic certification that earns the individual the title “teacher”. Inservice education on the other hand serves to provide basis for upgrading the teacher.

**Teacher Experiences**

Experience is the knowledge or mastery of an event or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it. It is familiarity with a skill or field of knowledge acquired over months or years of actual practice. Experience is knowledge or skill in a particular job or activity which one gains because he has done that job or activity for a long-time. Therefore, adequate experience will enable the teacher to perform the following roles:

- Sound subject matter mastery,
- Curriculum development,
- Instructional management,
- Curriculum/learning evaluation,
- Interpersonal collaboration,
- Student counseling,
- Professional self development.

As a result of experience that enables the teacher to perform these roles, crisis in the classroom learning due to poor method of teaching will be eliminated, new skills will be enhanced, and children’s right to education will be assured.

**Position of Education in Nigeria**

How things are with Education in developed countries may have sharp contrast with that of the developing countries which Nigeria our country is a case study. For instance, in Nigeria, the number of applicants vying for teaching vacancies is always in astronomical progression. Prospective teachers who pass out from teacher education institutions are not employed due to Government attitude to education. This has created unemployment among trained teachers. As a result of this Government action, schools have fewer teachers serving in the system. Even when the applicants are later recruited into teaching service, they are paid mega salary. These poor remunerations make them to live below poverty level thereby resulting to low standard of living. More so, in Nigeria, teacher education institutions have been turning out teachers in their numbers while Government on her part has not been able to engage them into service. This has led prospective teachers not to take teaching job seriously therefore, the position of education in Nigeria as one of the developing nations has not been receiving the needed attention.

**Challenges of Teacher Education**

The following are some of the challenges confronting teacher education in some of the third world countries. They include:

Quality of students admitted for the programme: One of the basic challenges of the present day teacher education particularly in Nigeria is the gross inadequacy of the entry qualifications of the candidates admitted into the programme especially at the NCE levels.

Complete lack of genuine interest in teaching as a career: Most of the entrants into teacher education programme in some nations of the world do not have any significant interest in the teaching profession. They
just see it as a stepping-stone to more lucrative professions or as a matter of last resort. This observation is in line with Akinbote (2007) who reported that 87% of all the students enrolled in Colleges of Education in Nigeria either used the college as a stepping-stone or could not be offered admission by any institution.

Poor funding of education in African countries: Education in general and teacher education in particular has not received the necessary attention it requires in some of the African countries and Nigeria inclusive as it affects funding. For instance, UNESCO has recommended that 26% of the total budget of a nation should be allocated to education. But Longe Commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of recurrent budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has never exceeded 10%.

Poor public image of the teachers: The poor public perception of teachers and the teaching profession in some countries is one of the greatest challenges of teachers-education in the 21st century. This poor public perception of the teaching profession is as a result of combination of several factors including poor entry qualification, politicization of education, gross starvation of education with funds, and shabby treatment of teachers of all cadres.

High incidence of examination malpractice: As a result of the academically weak, students enrolled in most teacher education institutions, coupled with congested examination halls, low morale of teacher-educators, and so on; there is an observed high incidence of examination malpractice among the student-teachers.

Conclusion

Teacher education is very crucial in the nation educational system because it is through the instrumentality of the teachers that the curriculum finds its actualization. Teachers are the major agents through which knowledge is passed from generation to another and therefore, they are very fundamental in any human resource development effort. However, it has been observed that the quality of the products of our current teacher education programmes is on a serious decline. Teachers who are academically weak and ill-motivated are being produced as a result of a combination of several factors including poor quality of candidates admitted, lack of genuine interests to taking teaching as a career, poor funding of teacher education institutions, poor public perception of teachers and teaching as a profession, high incidence of examination malpractices among student-teachers, and so on.

Recommendations

Considering the importance and the critical position of the teaching profession in national development, Government at all levels of every nation should as a matter of urgency take immediate steps to address some if not all the challenges identified to safeguard the future of teacher education in all nations. This if done, could help teachers to acquire relevant experience, make education crisis free, develop new skills in teachers, and offer children the right to education and teaching context.

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