

TEACHER EDUCATION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR SELF RELIANCE AND NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

A nation cannot rise above the quality its teachers, neither can it attain a reasonable level of technological development required for innovations, creativity, and economic advancement without properly trained teachers. It is on this premise that this paper looks at the concepts of Teacher Education and nation building, the objectives of teacher education programmes, the problems that bedevils teacher education programmes in Nigeria; such as inadequate funding, lack of teacher training personnel, crash teacher education programmes amongst others. The writer therefore posited that if teacher education programme is given the desired attention and priority, it could be tailored towards self-reliance, social and economic stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Teacher Education, Self-reliance and Nation Building

Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of any society, with the quality of its educators determining a nation's potential for advancement. This sentiment is echoed in the national education policy (FRN, 2014), which emphasizes the pivotal role of quality teachers in providing education at all levels. Section 5 b sub section 92 (a) underscores the ongoing emphasis on teacher education in educational planning and development within the country. Teacher education encompasses the preparation of new teachers and the enhancement of existing ones.

Dienye & Morrison in Onah, Akanimoh & Ndume (2021), note that education is recognized globally as a significant instrument for social transformation, technological advancement, cultural integration, national unity, and development. Similarly, Okoh in Onah et al. (2021) asserts that education serves as the means through which society's ideals and values are systematically transmitted across generations, fostering socio-cultural transformation and the advancement of humanity and the environment. Therefore, education is crucial for a nation's progress, making it imperative for every nation to prioritize its success.

The troubling state of education in Nigeria persists despite its commendable aims, objectives, and policies. It is essential to translate these objectives and policies into actionable steps for future leaders—the students. The teacher serves as the conduit through which these aims, objectives, and policies are transmitted to students, highlighting the critical need for their adequate preparation and motivation. Efficient and effective teachers capable of translating policies into actions require adequate education. There have been ongoing concerns about the poor state of education in the country, with the state of teachers potentially contributing to the educational challenges. Issues such as unqualified teachers, insufficiently skilled educators, and a lack of preparation for 21st-century pedagogical challenges abound, reflecting the current state of teacher education in Nigeria.

Faulty teacher education could have far-reaching effects on society, particularly in areas such as content delivery. Teacher education programs should be meticulously designed to meet societal

needs; failure to do so could result in educators who are ill-equipped to meet the demands of their communities. Education should foster self-reliance and sustainability, equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful contributions to nation-building. If learners cannot contribute meaningfully to society, the essence of schooling is undermined, potentially leading to disengagement and dropout rates. This paper therefore examines the concepts of education and teacher education, the challenges facing teacher education in Nigeria, and the connection between teacher education, self-reliance, and nation-building.

Concept of Education

The term "Education" traces its origins to the Latin roots "Educare" and "Educere." "Educare" refers to the act of training or equipping with specific skills, while "Educere" signifies the act of drawing out or leading out. The former portrays education as a means of imparting skills for specific tasks, whereas the latter portrays education as a transformative process, liberating individuals from their previous state. Hamilton, as cited in Onah et al. (2021), encapsulates education as any organized system of activities, formal or informal, aimed at preparing individuals with the necessary skills, attitudes, knowledge, information, and competencies to participate effectively in socio-economic activities within their environment. Buseri, as cited in Agih and Paulley (2020), emphasizes the normative implications of the term "Education," suggesting that certain standards and conditions must be met for something to be considered education. These include:

- i. The intentional transmission of morally worthwhile content to individuals who become committed to it.
- ii. The dynamic nature of educational content, which evolves according to the changing needs of society.
- iii. Clearly defined procedures for the transmission of knowledge.

Education, therefore, instigates positive behavioral changes in learners, freeing them from the constraints of ignorance. Consequently, any nation aspiring to achieve developmental progress must prioritize investment in education. However, such transformative changes can only be brought about by individuals who have been trained for this purpose. Not everyone possesses the capability to effect such change, leading to the crucial question: who is qualified to provide education, and what is the role of the teacher in the educational process?

Who is a Teacher?

In its simplest terms, a teacher is commonly perceived as someone who imparts instructions. However, this definition falls short of capturing the full scope of what teaching truly entails. Buseri, as cited in Agih & Paulley (2020), offers a more comprehensive definition, characterizing a teacher as an individual who assists others in learning, whether in a classroom or formal educational setting. In addition, Okafor as cited in Bwala (2013) describes teaching as a process of Education whereby an individual (the teacher) facilitates the learning of factual knowledge, values and skills using methods that involve the conscious and active participation of the learner. For the purpose of this paper and Professionally, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) defines a teacher as someone who has undergone approved professional training in education at appropriate levels, equipped to impart knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills to learners. This professional designation underscores the importance of formal training in determining who can rightfully be considered a teacher.

In every society, educational goals and plans are established, typically outlined in national education policies. Taiwo, as cited in Omotayo (2002), suggests that it is the role of the teacher to interpret and align these aims, goals, and plans of education, ensuring that learners are guided toward achieving them. Throughout this process, certain characteristics are expected of teachers, as summarized by Aluede, as outlined in Unachukwu & Nwosu (2014). These characteristics include being a guide, creator, authority figure, evaluator, community builder, and storyteller. Despite the multifaceted nature of these roles, the teaching profession is not open to just anyone, as the TRCN has established clear requirements for professional teachers, the TRCN has clearly stated the requirements for a professional teacher. These according to FRN (2002:11) include;

- i. One who has been professionally prepared (trained)
- ii. One who has passed all prescribed courses in Education and a teaching subject
- iii. One who have been certified at least with the minimum qualification of NCE
- iv. Been registered and licensed by the regulatory agency (TRCN)
- v. Must have participated in supervised teaching practice and
- vi. Has other values and orientations prescribed by the national policy on education.

Furthermore, other qualities essential to professional teaching, as highlighted by Buseri in Agih and Paulley (2020), encompass a positive attitude, patience, discipline, good temperament, subject matter expertise, familiarity with curriculum, and exemplary character. Moreover, effective teachers are expected to possess engaging personalities and teaching styles that captivate students' attention. Additionally, teachers are viewed as role models, embodying virtues such as honesty, loyalty, joviality, humility, perseverance, kindness, and self-restraint.

Given the extensive responsibilities entrusted to teachers, it is no exaggeration to assert, as Ukeje, cited in Omotayo (2002), does, that education cannot surpass its teachers, and neither can a nation rise above its teachers. Teacher education, therefore, lies at the heart of the entire educational system, as all learning processes depend on teachers as facilitators. It is imperative to recognize that every professional embarks on their journey to professionalism under the guidance of a teacher. Thus, to fulfill the significant responsibilities placed upon them and contribute meaningfully to nation-building, teachers must undergo proper formal training to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills through teacher education programs.

Concept of Teacher Education

The role of a teacher is laden with numerous responsibilities, demanding proficiency and competence. Achieving this competence is only possible through teacher education. As outlined by Akintade & Eyengho in Unachukwu & Nwosu (2014), Teacher Education entails providing professional education and specialized training to individuals preparing to nurture young minds into responsible citizens. While this definition excludes in-service training, UNESCO (1990:2) offers a broader perspective, encompassing both pre-service and in-service programs focusing on continuous career development. Buseri and Paulley (2020) further elaborate on teacher education, describing it as an institutionalized educational process aimed at preparing or further educating teachers engaged directly or indirectly in educational activities as their life's work. In essence, any organized training aspiring or practicing teachers undergo to become licensed or enhance skills post-licensing constitutes teacher education.

Teacher Education encompasses two fundamental forms: pre-service and in-service training. Pre-service training occurs before acquiring a teaching license, exposing aspiring teachers to educational principles and subject-specific theories. Such training is conducted in various institutions across Nigeria, including Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education in Universities, Institutes of Education, and specialized institutions like the National Teachers Institute in Kaduna. Upon completion, individuals obtain qualifications such as the National Certificate of Education (NCE), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), or B.A.(Ed), and B.Sc.(Ed.), with the option of a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for those without a first degree in Education.

On the other hand, in-service training involves on-the-job training undertaken during teaching assignments. This can take the form of workshops, seminars, and advanced degree courses in Education, aimed at keeping teachers updated with current theories and practices, as well as facilitating professional development. However, there is a tendency among teachers to prioritize allowances over the quality of training programs. Consequently, training programs lacking financial incentives often go ignored and remain unattended.

Teacher education holds utmost importance within any educational system and deserves significant emphasis. The essence of teacher education programs, as outlined in the national policy on Education (FRN, 2014), includes:

- i. Producing highly motivated, conscientious, and efficient classroom teachers across all educational levels.
- ii. Fostering the spirit of inquiry and creativity among teachers.
- iii. Facilitating teachers' integration into the social fabric of the community and broader society, enhancing their commitment to national goals.
- iv. Equipping teachers with the intellectual and professional background necessary for their roles and ensuring adaptability to changing circumstances.
- v. Enhancing teachers' dedication to the teaching profession.

While these goals are commendable and hold the potential to yield efficient and effective teachers, the reality falls short. Many teachers in classrooms lack motivation, creativity, and often exhibit unprofessional behavior. This indicates a failure to achieve the intended objectives of teacher education.

Various reasons contribute to this shortfall, as highlighted by Umar in Boucouvalas & Adriniyi (2008), including:

- i. Inadequate funding for teacher education programs.
- ii. Insufficient or lack of facilities necessary for effective training.
- iii. Unrealistic or misguided teacher education goals.
- iv. Disruptions in teacher preparation programs, such as irregularities in sandwich programs due to strikes and natural disasters.
- v. Issues with crash PGDE programs.
- vi. Lack of awareness regarding national development objectives among teachers, along with challenges in aligning national objectives with teaching objectives.

These challenges and others plague teacher education programs in Nigeria, underscoring the urgent need to enhance both the content and funding of teacher development initiatives. This call for improvement extends beyond the government to all stakeholders in the field of education.

Teacher Education for Self-Reliance and Nation Building

An effective and proficient teacher, through their professional training, plays a pivotal role in fostering self-reliance among students, thereby contributing to the development of a self-reliant and prosperous nation. Self-reliance, as defined in the Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology (2004), encompasses the ability to form and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships and to make independent judgments and decisions free from external influences. It entails relying on one's own abilities, judgment, and resources to navigate life successfully.

Emerson in Emeka, Onyebuchi, & Emeka (2023) outlines certain characteristics exhibited by self-reliant individuals, including resourcefulness, reliability, and resilience. These qualities underscore a self-reliant person's ability to find solutions, fulfill commitments, and bounce back from setbacks. It is incumbent upon teachers to instill these traits in learners, encouraging independent thinking and the pursuit of personal goals.

In an article on developing self-reliance, mental health counselor, Mandy Klopper cited in Morre (2019) suggested some steps towards achieving self-reliance. They include;

- i. Accepting oneself and being one's best friend
- ii. Fostering inner confidence
- iii. Making independent decisions, and
- iv. Recognizing and managing dependence.

As these traits are not always inherent, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students in their development. A self-reliant citizenry contributes to the development of a self-reliant nation, which does not depend entirely on external assistance but remains engaged with the global community.

Despite Nigeria's commendable educational programs aimed at self-sufficiency and national development, as articulated in the National Policy on Education, Ofoegbo et al. (2013) note that implementation has been hindered by entrenched colonial educational paradigms emphasizing white-collar jobs. They advocate for a shift towards functional education, particularly in science, vocational, and technology fields, facilitated by well-trained teachers. It is imperative to translate the policy statement of self-reliance in education into actionable measures to reduce dependency on other nations for domestic needs and alleviate unemployment, which contribute to Nigeria's current socioeconomic and political challenges.

Education for self-reliance finds practical examples in Nigeria and Tanzania. In Nigeria, Tai-Solarin's "Mayflower" secondary school adopted a "do it yourself" principle, engaging students in various practical activities. However, this initiative remained localized and did not become a national policy. Conversely, Tanzania's "Education for Self-Reliance" policy, spearheaded by President Julius Nyerere, integrated primary education with village agriculture and emphasized practical training in secondary and higher education. This policy was nationally implemented under Nyerere's leadership. These examples underscore the feasibility of education for self-reliance. However, for meaningful change to occur, there must be a fundamental shift in the philosophy and system of education. Teachers play a pivotal role in imparting necessary skills and knowledge to learners,

thereby shaping the trajectory of national development. As the adage goes, "no nation can rise above its teachers."

Education serves as a catalyst for self-realization, fostering national consciousness, promoting unity, and driving economic, social, cultural, political, and scientific progress (Osunde, 2011). This underscores the pivotal role of education in fostering self-reliance and facilitating national development. The outcomes of education are manifested in economic growth, progress, and overall national advancement. Low levels of education and skill development have been correlated with reduced economic and social development. Hence, Osunde (2011) asserts that education stands as a crucial instrument for both self-reliance and national development. Consequently, there is a pressing need to continually assess our educational policies and programs to ensure that they prioritize the cultivation of practical skills, motivation, and commitment essential for sustainable national development. This pursuit can only be effectively undertaken with an ample supply of qualified teaching personnel.

Teacher Education and Nation Building: The Way Forward

Teacher Professionalism: In order for teacher education to effectively contribute to nation building, the focus should be on fostering teacher professionalism. Presently, many educational systems are plagued by unqualified and uninspired educators, which falls short of the desired standard of professionalism. As of July 2023, Nigeria had a teacher population of 1.68 million in public primary and secondary schools, catering to a student population of 47 million (Punch, July 16, 2023). The total number of teachers registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was reported as 2.3 million across all educational levels. This underscores the urgent need for the recruitment of more qualified and licensed teachers. **It should be mandated that only teachers with TRCN licenses be employed as a matter of policy.**

Another critical issue is the disconnect between teacher education and manpower development. While tertiary-level educators may object to being labeled as "teachers," it's crucial to acknowledge that effective teaching extends beyond subject matter expertise. Mastery of pedagogy and educational theory is essential for delivering content effectively. Neglecting pedagogical training can result in graduates lacking essential skills, hindering national progress. **It is therefore recommended that all teachers irrespective of level should undergo teachers training programmes to equip them with pedagogical skills.**

Poor Knowledge of National Objectives: Another challenge lies in the limited awareness among teachers regarding national developmental objectives. Merely mentioning these objectives in the curriculum is insufficient; they should be ingrained in teachers' consciousness through dedicated instruction and memorization, akin to the national anthem. This would serve as a constant reminder of their role in advancing the nation's goals and objectives, both for themselves and their students.

Unstable Academic Calendars: the efficacy of crash programs and training initiatives requires scrutiny. Sandwich programs, once effective, now face challenges such as frequent strikes and scheduling conflicts with university calendars, leaving participants with insufficient time for learning before examinations. The adequacy of program content is also questionable, raising doubts about the depth of knowledge acquired by students and their ability to impart it effectively. **Government should therefore not allow strikes last for too long. There should be dialogue and prompt response to the needs of teacher educators to avoid long and incessant strike actions.**

Admission Requirements for Teacher Trainees: The admission process to teacher education programs also warrants attention, as it often attracts students who couldn't meet requirements for their preferred courses. **This should be rectified by raising admission standards to ensure that only high-quality candidates are admitted, thereby enhancing the overall quality and efficiency of teacher training.**

Teacher Training Personnel: Similarly, recruiting competent personnel to teach in teacher training institutions is vital, as these educators shape future professionals across various fields. Substandard training will only produce subpar professionals, which is detrimental to national development.

Teacher Education Funding: Inadequate funding poses yet another challenge to teacher education. Sufficient financial resources are essential for acquiring equipment, expanding facilities, improving teacher salaries, and investing in education-related research. However, Nigeria has consistently fallen short of the UNESCO-recommended budget allocation for education, hindering progress across all levels of education, including teacher training.

Conclusion

Prioritizing teacher education is imperative for achieving self-reliance and nation building. Policymakers must exercise caution and diligence in planning and implementing teacher education programmes, ensuring they evolve to meet the changing needs of society.

Recommendations

The programmes of teacher education should equip educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to effectively drive national development and self-reliant nation.

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