

Attaining Quality Assurance in the 21st Century through Improved Teacher Education Standards

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Abstract: In contemporary times, quality assurance has become a topic of major discussions in the Nigerian education system. Every institution of learning tries to achieve and attain quality using every means available. Teacher education has been seen as an instrument for that purpose. Teacher education has transformed for over five decades of Nigerian's independence. However and sadly though, it has been on the down ward trend particularly in terms of its compromise of the societal core values that should inform quality assurance and improved educational standards generally in this country. Thus, our key institution values in viewing socio-cultural milieus, social interactions, economic pre-occupations and most of the facets of our educational systems which are expected to transform the challenges of development have also been on the down word trend and decline. This negative development largely derives from an ugly perspectives in winch our various versions of the education process have not responders in desirable national transformations. This paper is an attempt at addressing a number of the negative forces and problems against Nigerian dreams at registering quality assurance and improved educational standards, particularly in the areas of teacher education. It has also emerged with a number of strategies and some recommendations which, if implemented, could go a long way in reversing the present downward trend in teacher education in the 21st century. This paper therefore unveils how quality assurance can help in improving the standard of teacher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, 21st Century, Teacher Education and Standards

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher education is the same as teacher training. It can also be referred to as pre-service training for would-be teachers or in-service training for already qualified, certified and professional teachers. Teacher training therefore is one of the oldest fields of human endeavour, yet teacher education is surrounded by multivariate problems which affect the quality of teacher education adversely on one hand and the country's quest for national development on the other hand. This is because teaching is noble profession and the mother of all other professions because no profession in this world can boast of not undergoing one type of study or the other under the teacher. But in Nigeria, it is evident that teaching lacks the esteem that a profession ought to offer its members. The former Honourable minister of education Borishade (2002) has summarized the nagging issues that confront teacher training in Nigeria in the following way:

"The profession seems to be hijacked by all comers which makes it a damping ground for birds of passage who wish to hold on teaching for just a moment while they seek other jobs of their dreams. Persons who fail to succeed in other professions. Persons who desire a job that offers "spare time" that allows them to simultaneously engage in other businesses such as trading, domestic work etc. Persons who are contented with living their career lives without bothering to obtain even the minimum professional qualifications, initially qualified persons who seem to have forgotten that the relevance and dynamism of a profession are sustained by constant updating of knowledge, skills and values. The consequences of these he further observed include: Good prospective candidates avoid teaching like a plague: the best brains in the vocation leave in search of greener pastures, elsewhere; pitiable status of teachers; low morale; job insecurity; falling standard of education; loss of glory and credibility of the teaching profession and dwindling esteem of the teachers ; low rating of graduates of Nigerian educational institutions and their qualifications by the international community as reflected in the requirement for passing qualifying examinations for Nigerian graduates before being admitted for further studies abroad and the massive retraining when appointed by international organizations."

Similarly, other scholars and researchers have written a lot on problems that plague teacher education in Nigeria, Abdulsalam (1997) observed that "the Nigerian experience of the teacher is very awful in the sense that some of teachers are either auxiliary, temporary, awaiting result, gate - crasher or making time". Madueke (1996) also rightly opined that: "If we are to achieve quality in teacher education, it is desirable that those who

train as teachers should the bulk of teachers for primary and secondary schools. But the present admission requirements into these colleges tend to create the impression that only the rejectees of other tertiary institutions could easily be admitted into the NCE programme".

Stressing the need for quality in teacher preparation, Ukeje (1997) "frowned at the involvement of non-professionals and inexperienced teachers in the supervision of students on teaching practice". The remarks made by Maduabum (1991) is another testimony to existence of obstacles to effective teacher production in Nigeria when he stated that "it is unfortunate to note that it is only in teaching that "failures" are given official candidacy among those who are to be prepared for teacher training programme.

From the foregoing observations made by scholars and experienced educationists, it can be inferred that teacher training in Nigeria are faced with a lot-of problems that need urgent attention to address them if education is to respond positively to societal needs and aspirations.

The concept of Teacher Education

According to UNESCO (1992) "Teacher Education is the training of those persons who are directly responsible for the education of pupils or students". They further explained that the term is used to describe the process of professional preparation of those persons who are by the nature of their functions designed as teachers. From this definition, it can be inferred that a teacher is a person who has undergone a professional training on who need special attention to respond to their various needs such as educational, vocational e.t.c. Teacher education on the other hand is the process of training and graduation from the teacher training institutions that will be saddled with the responsibility of training the young in all tiers of our education system. According to Kolo, (1991) "Teacher Education is a continuous process of pre-service teacher training undertaken by institutions of higher learning with departments in charge of education in Nigerian universities or as a continuous and deliberate effort intended to improve the efficiency of those to be charged with the responsibility of training children in schools".

The Objectives of Teacher Education in Nigeria

According to the National Policy on Education revised (2004) "all teachers in our educational institutions from pre-primary up to the university will be professionally trained". The policy also outlined the following objectives of teacher education in Nigeria.

"To produce highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of education system to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers; to help teacher fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives; to produce ground adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country but also in the wider world; to enhance the teachers' commitment to the teaching profession."

The policy further asserted that teacher education will continue to be given a major emphasis in our educational planning. It was also proposed that teacher education would" be free for intending teachers. It was further explained that the Nigeria minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession would be the Nigeria Certificate in Education popularly known as the NCE. The foregoing discussion is a testimony that teacher education in Nigeria is highly regarded at least at the policy making level which is aimed at improving the quality control in teacher education and the educational standard of the country since teachers are determinant of educational quality. But the realization of these objectives still remains a dream going by the introductory discussions in this paper where challenges to educational quality standards were intensively discussed that need urgent attention to salvage the teacher training and vocation from collapse.

Challenges in Teacher Education Standards in the 21st century

The quality of teacher education standards in any school system, have failed to operate effectively in terms of the demands of these already established educational standards. A number of our foremost and seasoned educationists (Fafunwa, 1999; Ukeje 2000; Azeke, 2000; Ivowi, 2000; Baike, 2002; and Obanya, 2004) have continued to point to the general decay and near collapse of teacher education in Nigeria. What then are the challenges for teacher education in a democratizing Nigerian society particularly in improved educational standards for attaining quality assurance in Nigeria?

- **Challenges Of Socio-Cultural Patterns And Perspectives Of The Nigerian Society**

Ukeje (2000) recounts that the Nigerian society is yet to recover fully from the ruinous level of decay in her educational system which was largely brought about by decades of regimes of military dictatorship and neglect. These regimes, according to Ukeje (2000), mercilessly raped, bastardized and almost completely destroyed the Nigerian educational system. We need to remind ourselves that this Nigerian decay is particularly grave, debilitating, degenerating, deteriorating and dehumanizing in regard to education.

The social ills plaguing the Nigerian society have drastically and damagingly eroded the schools. The entire facilities have suffered unbelievable decay. The teaching – learning process and environment have lost their aura. The education system has become a haven for criminals, cultists, drug addicts, etc Teachers have become a cheaters, examination malpractices have assumed widespread and alarming proportions, particularly at secondary and tertiary educational levels; secret cults have practically taken over the administration of most of the higher education institutions; some of which have turned into battle grounds for rival cult groups.

Ukeje (2002) expatiates further that the Nigerian Ivory Towers of academic excellence, have become anthills of degradation. He discloses that the schools leaving certificate, the degrees and diplomas have virtually lost their credibility both within and outside Nigeria. These scenarios cast ominous clouds on the future of the Nigerian nation « and urgent action is needed now before it is too late.

- **The Challenges of Teacher Education quality and Education programmes**

Ukeje (2000) discloses that teaching is service profession. He endorses further that everywhere and at all levels it has its requirements, techniques, its rewards and at times its frustrations. The success registered during the duration of a given classroom pedagogy largely depends of the quality of teacher education programmes. Some people hold that teachers are born. However, this may be partially true, but it is upheld in this exposition that teaches are both born and made. This is so because teaching is both an art of a science; some aspects of the art of teaching may be innate, but the science of teaching has to be learnt and cultivated, this exposition holds very fervently that if any curriculum programmes is to be explored for the purpose of contributing its quota in generating positive attitude and orientation amongst students in the task of achieving and the enhanced human development and improvement in a democratic society, it must capitalize on the "teacher factor" in bringing about this.

Ukeje (2000) reflects further that a good teacher must be adaptable flexible, dependable, cooperative, considerate, enthusiastic, forceful, honest, industrious, open-minded, refined and resourceful. He must have a breadth of knowledge, good health, leadership qualities and scholarship. In the classroom, a good teacher should not only be able to transmit knowledge and skills effectively, and efficiently, he should also be able to inspire his pupils or students to greater heights of achievement. As a member of a group or community, he must meet the needs of the individuals and the background; he must possess adequate and sound professional knowledge and skills effectively, and efficiently, he should also be inspire his or students to greater heights of achievement. As a member of a group or community, he must meet the needs of the individuals and the community of which he is a part. Indeed he must have a broad educational background; he must possess adequate and sound professional knowledge; and be a sound scholar in this teaching field of specialization. He should, therefore, be prepared to meet the challenges of improving the human condition in a given democratic society such as Nigeria. Most importantly, he should also display adroitness in acknowledge of the skills and strategies required in coping with the demands of these challenges.

- **Challenges In The Training Programmes And Improved Educational Standards at the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Levels**

In respect of social esteem, academic professional rating, the current status of teacher education and consequently teachers in Nigeria is very low (Ukeje, 2000); Obanya, 2002 and 2004). Obanya (2004) concedes that this development is attributable to a number of factors including the apparent confusion in the implementation in some recent innovations in teacher education in the country.

At the primary education level, the defects of the Nigerian Certificate of Education programmes have become an obvious issue (Ukeje, 2000) Obanya, 2002; and 2004). The products of this scheme are expected to teach all the school subjects in their various primary, school classes. Thus, the teacher at this level of education must, therefore, have a sound knowledge of these subjects in order to display effective performance and quality educational standards. Besides, it is worth underscoring that these NCE teachers are majorly prepared to teach at the upper grades of the primary school and the lower grades of the secondary school. However, in practices, most of the products of our NCE programmes are still teaching at all the grades of our secondary schools (particularly in the north) and only very few are found in the primary schools. This development should not be the case because it smacks-off all efforts and attempts at boosting the improvement of educational standards at the level of primary education.

In the same vein, the curriculum offerings in the NCE programmes does not effectively cover the depth of knowledge required in the senior secondary school level; the current NCE programmes in the Colleges of Education are, at best, suitable for the production of junior secondary school teachers only. Thus Ukeje (2000) makes the following reservations about our NCE Programmes in our current tasks at improving and sustaining quality educational standards for attaining quality assurance, thus:

"Clearly, therefore, the current N.C.E products with at most two teaching subjects and 12 credits of general studies are not adequately prepared for primary school teaching of all the subjects on the basis of their

secondary school knowledge. This is clearly unsatisfactory. What is more, some of them did not even study some of the subjects at the secondary school level. This is simply an act of cheating rather than teaching. In this regard, the grade II teachers are even better prepared to teach in the primary school than the current N.C.E teachers. This is because the grade II teacher's curriculum covered all the primary school subjects. Thus the current status of the N.C.E teacher's education programmes in the Colleges of Education is that they are grossly unsuitable or appropriate for the 21st century challenges."

In our secondary schools, one of the current problems of teacher education bear on dichotomy prevailing in the pre-service education of graduate teachers operating at this level. This problem derives from two broad trajectories -teachers who trained through the four year concurrent degree programmes variously designated as B.Sc Ed; B.A.ED and B.Ed on the one hand and teacher who trained through the consecutive degree programmes of a total five years post school certificate duration. The misgivings entertained about these pre-service teacher-training programmes is that the later, according to Ukeje (2000), is acclaimed to have superiority over the former in terms of academic content, but it has also been adjudged to produce less professionally motivated, and oriented teachers and largely breeds birds of passages in the teaching profession (Ukeje, 2000).

On the other hand, Obanya (2002) regretted that the existence of a variety of four year concurrent first degree programmes respectively designated as B.Sc. Ed. B.A Ed., and B.Ed have ushered in inconsistent and uncoordinated degree programmes in this country; this development, according to him has created untold confusion and degeneration of the teacher education degree programmes currently organized in Nigerian universities. He expatiated further that this confusion has been compounded by the fact that some universities designated their education degrees as B.Ed., whereas others make a distinction between degree programmes with academic teaching subjects and those on purely professional education disciplines. This development prompted Ukeje's (2001) condemnation of the introduction of professional four year degree programmes in education by our universities in such fields as guidance and counseling, Curriculum development, educational Psychology, Educational administration and also designated these as B.Ed Degrees. Ukeje (2000) lamented that this development marked the origin of the confusion and the crisis in teacher education quality and standard. He disclosed his dismay about the concurrent degree programmes in our universities, particularly in the context of confronting the tasks involved in overcoming the challenges militating against an embrace and achievement of quality and improved educational standards in Nigeria, thus:

"To add to the confusion, some universities are designating all their education degrees as B.Ed regardless of whether they are the purely professional degrees or the ones with a teaching subject. Thus the B.Ed becomes almost a notorious monster to many well meaning Nigerians".

At the tertiary level, it is entertained in a number of quarters (Jatto, 1994; Ukeje, 2000; Obanya, 2002, 2004; Azeke, 2000; Ikeotuanya, 2000; and Akinmade, 2000) that the current NCE programme is falling in the demands made of it in the 21st century democratic -Nigeria. These educationists -academics generally endorse that if the NCE holder is to be effective in the 21st century Nigeria, he/she must have a sound knowledge of all the primary school subjects. The academics endorsed the urgent need for improving and strengthening educational standards at the NCE level through the infusion of a number of basic components including;

- i. A general academic component;
- ii. A specialized academic component;
- iii. A professional academic component.

At the university level, some of our foremost academic educationists, already mentioned earlier, generally endorse the reservation that if we are craving for improvement in educational standards in Nigeria then the current four year period is too short for effectiveness in the attainment of professional qualification in Education. These scholars generally maintain that no professional course in Nigerian universities lasts for less than five years. Thus medicine lasts for some seven years; law lasts for five years altogether and some universities have increased the duration to five years plus one year in the law school; engineering lasts for five years; architecture lasts for five years, etc. Thus Ukeje (2000) equivocates that the major weakness of the concurrent first degree system is the duration. He endorses that the dichotomy between the concurrent and the consecutive degree programmes could be eased-off; he considers that this issues hinges on duration. This problem could be addressed and resolved through a determination of the relative professional potency between the concurrent and the consecutive systems for the purpose of establishing and making the necessary rectifications and updating so that all academic anomalies are investigated and settled.

Challenges of Funding Teacher Education

Ajagbonwu (2000) reflects that since the mid 1980's education, particularly teacher education ceased to be effectively funded in this country he regrets that our policy makers have failed to recognize that education is an expensive social service and requires adequate financial provisions from all tiers of government, non-governmental organizations, companies and the general public for a successful implementation of educational

programmes, especially financing as it affects Teacher Education in Nigeria. It is pertinent to endorse that teacher education is very vital for the success of the entire education system in Nigeria; in this circumstance, the issue of success implies the sustenance and improving educational standards in the country. Thus, if it is the teacher, according to Ukeje (1995) who translates educational policies into practice and the programmes into action, then adequate provision must be made by government, companies, and well meaning individuals in the area of funding teacher education programmes in the country, particularly if our present crave for sustaining and improving educational standards in Nigeria is to be a reality. Without adequate provisions, according to Ajagbonwu (2000), the possibility of producing highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system will not be achieved.

Ukeje (2000) reminds us that the realization of the potentials of organized education as a veritable instrument for social change and national reconstruction depends largely on the teachers. He reflects this notion succinctly thus:

"Excellent educational policies are meaningless unless there are equally excellent teachers to see to their realization. Various governments may- vote sufficient funds as enabling resources for education, adequate material resources may be procured, but unless the teachers are properly prepared and positively motivated, little productivity will happen. The enabling resource will be wasted, the materials resources will gather dust and decay and little productive education will take place. We have always maintained that for a developing nation like Nigeria, teachers are the most crucial, critical, vital and strategic professional group for national development and construction."

Thus, for the purpose of meeting the 21st century challenges in a democratic Nigeria, we need teachers who are adequately prepared to face the issues and task of this age. These teachers are expected to possess a variety of virtues and qualities of competence and effectiveness which must be rooted in an excellent display of the following

- a. The teacher's knowledge;
- b. The teacher's expertise in the display of the professional skills and model techniques of the curriculum which are rooted in his subject area; and
- c. The teacher's commitment to the socio-civic function of education in a democratic society such as Nigeria.

Teacher Education: Improving the Quality of University Graduate for Achieving Quality Assurance in Nigeria.

In this perspective it is being suggested and recommends that teacher education becomes a highly professionalized industry. Thus university degree programmes in education be streamlined to tally with the duration for the attainment of first degree as in the other professions such as law, medicine, architecture and engineering. Through the extension of the duration of the period for acquiring degrees in education in our universities, the dichotomy prevailing in the concurrent and consecutive degree programmes could be booked into critically and remedied within the framework of the tasks designed for improving and enhancing the quality of educational standards in the context of teacher education in Nigeria.

• Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in the Task of Strengthening Quality Assurance in Teacher Education in Nigeria

The issue of recruitment and retention of component teachers into the teaching profession is a serious problem because of the very poor condition of service and the low status of teachers in the country. Obanya (2004) considers that teaching in Nigeria is fast becoming the last hope of the hopeless. He observes that student choose teacher education courses as a last resort and after graduation they feel reluctant to practice the profession for which they have been prepared. He laments that even when they enter the profession, they jump out at the slightest opportunity. This exposition, therefore seriously endorses that all governments in Nigeria should realize and recognize this predicament and accord teaching its deserved status. This recognition and realization must necessarily bear the teacher -status what is required so as to make it attractive and retain some of our best minds and brains. It is considered that this thinking - pattern constitutes one of the best ways of capitalizing on teacher education in Nigeria for confronting and overcoming her 21st century challenges, in a bid at improving and strengthening the quality of teachers education in Nigeria.

This exposition endorses that if quality educational standards are to be attained, sustained and improved in teacher educational in overcoming the 21st challenges of the Nigerian society, then teacher education programmes should be competency-based. A-number of top Nigerian academic - educationists (Adamu Baikie, 2002 Ukeje, 2000 Obanya, 2002, 2004 Ivowi, 2000; and Azeke, 2000) consider that the present teacher education programmes could be described and experience based. These scholars generally endorse that in this development, we usually assume and concede tactly that once a" student has experienced specified number of courses in specific areas, even under our minimum standard requirements, and had undergone some

form of teaching practice experience, and then he is ready to teach. These scholars maintain that this development could be deceptive as the student's experience might be superficial, trivial and transitory; these scholars maintain that this experience could be geared essentially only on the need to acquire and obtain a certificate, while this experience could all be forgotten as soon as the certificate is obtained. This development contrasts sharply with what we have in competency - based teacher education programmes. Ukeje (2000) explains the essence of competence-based teacher education programmes thus:

"In contrast, competence -based teacher Education programmes, performance goal are clearly specified ahead of the time. The Student Teacher must either be able to consistently demonstrate his ability to promote desirable learning or exhibit continuous behaviours known to promote it. He is held accountable not just for passing a set of prescribed examination but for attaining a given level of competency in performing consistently the essential task of teaching. And this is the crux of the matter".*

The scholar-academics mentioned in this exposition generally concede that three criteria have to be met in our attempts at determining appreciable educational standards of competency-based teacher education programme for Nigeria. These criteria include the following:

- a. The knowledge component which is designed at determining or assessing the cognitive understanding of the student teacher in this subject specialty;
- b. The performance component which is tailored as evaluating the teaching behaviour of student teachers; and
- c. The product component which is meant to evaluate the student teacher's ability to teach through an examination of the achievement of the pupils or student taught by the product (the student teacher).

Strategies for Improving Educational Standards for Achieving Quality Assurance in Nigeria.

Teachers are expected to display knowledge, professional skills and commitment to the socio-civic function of education in a democratic society such as Nigeria. The teacher of 21st century Nigerian society must have a good knowledge of his subject and the world around him. He must understand and appreciate the vision of the Nigerian nation for the next millennium and he must maintain parity in knowledge and esteem with the members of the other profession.

The teacher has to devise ways to enable learners to make their own contributions in terms of bringing about positive changes in the Nigerian society. The teachers have to provide the learners with the skills to think for themselves and become practically oriented so that they can also take decisions. The teacher has to display a commitment to the socio-civic function of education in a democratic society with a view to improving a lot human condition.

• Improving Teacher Education Standards at both Primary and Secondary Schools Level for Achieving Quality Assurance.

It is considered that these should possess the following operational tools in order to enhance their quality assurance in the task of effective classroom delivery, namely:

- An appreciable level of knowledge and understanding of all the primary school subjects;
- A higher level of knowledge, understanding and mastery in an academic discipline;
- A sound knowledge of child growth and development;
- A sound knowledge of the following: measurement and evaluation devices and techniques ; teaching strategies and devices;
- An acquisition of a knowledge of computer literacy for effective functioning in this information technology age;
- Knowledge of broad perspectives of the interactions between man and the world with emphasis on the social, economic and political developments deriving from these interactions.

Within the framework of the foregoing demands, it is still considered adequate that the primary school teacher for the 21st century Nigeria should be an NCE holder. However, in order to be effective, he must have a sound basic knowledge of all the primary school subjects.

II. CONCLUSION

This exposition endorses that the status of teacher present educational standards at all levels in this country is most unsatisfactory particularly if it is to be capitalized upon in meeting the 21st century challenges confronting our society. We need to device requisite strategies for the production of effective and quality teachers at all levels of education. The critical importance and vitality of teachers and teacher educators cannot be gain said in. the context of the overall development of this country. It has become a household knowledge that "no nation can rise above its educational system and that no educational system can rise above its teachers. We, therefore, need capable, dedicated, competent, effective and efficient teachers at all levels in this country;

these cadres of teachers are highly- indispensable if we are to attain, and improve teacher education quality and standards at all level of education in this country.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are apt for this paper;

1. Teacher education should be given priority attention by the Nigerian government.
2. More funding is needed to improve the quality of teachers in Nigeria.
3. Teacher training institutions should be well equipped to meet up with 21st century challenges of teachers.
4. Sufficient resources should be made available for would-be teachers for effective teacher training.
5. There should be adequate and competent teachers at the lower, middle and upper levels in our classrooms.
6. The so-called NCE programme/curriculum should effectively cut across subjects taught at primary level so that teachers at this level would have a sound knowledge and mastery of all primary schools subjects.
7. University degree programmes in education should be streamlined to tally with the duration for the attainment of first degree as in the other professions such as law, medicine, architecture, and engineering.
8. Government should give priority to teaching profession as what is obtainable in other professions like medicine, law, forces. Para-military e.t.c to attract the professionals from living the industry.

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