

## TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NIGERIA: The journey, the potholes and the patches

DR EJIMA, OKUTACHI SUNDAY  
BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT, KOGI STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
P.M.B. 1033, ANKPA, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA  
E-mail: Sunday\_ejima@yahoo.co.uk

### **Abstract**

*National development all over the world has continued to be intricately tied to educational development in which the teacher is the critical element. Many countries of the world have realized this central role of the teacher in the education process, and both developed and developing countries including Nigeria, have made some efforts in this area. The situation in Nigeria, however, has not shown a linear upward progression both in national and education development. Evidence abounds as to the existence of reform agenda, improved monetary wages, and establishment of teachers training institutions and specialized bodies, recruitment of more teachers and well-advertised capacity building workshops. The evidence of the positive impact of all these efforts, though not yet empirically researched into, does not seem to be significant. The state of the education sector in Nigeria may attest to this guess. Experts have traced this problem to poor teacher professional development among others. This paper thus reviewed past and present efforts of government and other stakeholders aimed at Teacher Professional Development in Nigeria, identified potholes in the course of this journey and suggested the patches for smooth drive. Initial teacher education, induction and Continued Professional Development (CPD) were considered. The journey started with the activities of the church missions and reached the establishment of Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). The potholes noticed include unrestricted entry into the profession, proliferation of teacher education institutions, among others. The need to streamline the various efforts was advocated among others.*

### **Introduction**

National development all over the world has continued to be intricately tied to educational development in which the teacher is the critical element. It is most likely that it is for this reason that Jekayinfa (2005) posited that the training and production of the manpower needed for the attainment of national objectives should be framed on the quality and quantity of teachers. It is against this backdrop that the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN, 2004) made specific policy provision for teacher education.

The quality of a teacher is dependent on his or her preparation for professional role as a distinct practitioner. This is his or her professional development as against the training which is a preparation of an individual to undertake relatively routine task. The task in this paper therefore is centred on teacher education which translates into teacher professional development.

Teacher education according to Afe (1993) refers to the policies and practices designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider society. It is the review of these policies and procedures from the point of introduction to the present day Nigeria that is termed the journey in this paper. In the course of the review, what is obtained and what ought to be were considered and the gaps identified. It is the gaps and the probable courses of the gaps that is considered as the potholes. The patches represent suggestions, proposals, or recommendations to be adopted to put Nigeria on the proper and correct tract of teacher professional development.

### **The journey**

The history of teacher education in Nigeria is as old as western education in the country. This is traceable to the activities of the various church missions in Nigeria. Prominent among these church missions according to Jekayinfa (2005) were Wesley Methodist, The Church Missionary Society, Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic who operated between 1842 and 1860. The various church missions established training institutions devoted mainly to the training of elementary teachers.

The teacher training programmes of the church missions were considered to be unsatisfactory. What they provided was training which equips their products for relatively routine tasks instead of professional role as distinct practitioners. This led to the setting up of Phelps-stroke Commission in 1925 and Ashby Commission in 1959 (Fafunwa, 1974)

Phelps-stroke report gave rise to two forms of teacher education of two years duration each. These were the Elementary Training Colleges for training Grade III teachers for the junior primary school and the Higher Elementary Training Colleges for training Grade II teachers for the senior primary school. These Colleges just like the training institutions of the church missions train and so do not prepare the products for professional role as teachers. The Ashby Commission report led to the establishment of more Universities and the introduction of Bachelor's degree in education either as B.A. (Ed.), B.Sc. (Ed.) or B.ED. Hitherto, graduates engaged in teaching hold either Bachelor's of Arts or Science degree with few holding Post Graduate Degree in Education in addition to their Bachelor's degrees.

The modification of this Commission report for production of Grade I teachers' occasioned the establishment of Advanced Teachers Colleges which in later years metamorphosed to what is now known as Colleges of Education. These Colleges were designated for the production of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) holders, a kind of middle level manpower (teachers) for the junior secondary school.

Fafunwa (1974) reported too that the University of Ibadan floated a one year Diploma in Education programme for non-education graduates involved in teaching and Associate Certificate in Education for grade II teachers as part of the efforts in teacher professional development in Nigeria.

According to FRN (2004), noted that teacher education programme in Nigeria is offered in Colleges of Education, the National Teachers Institutes (NTI), Faculties of Education in Nigeria Universities, National Mathematical Centre and the Nigeria Language centre. Ejima (2010) also pointed out that Schools of Education in many polytechnics also offer teacher education programmes.

In the course of the journey in teacher professional development, FRN (2004) provided for professional status of teaching in Nigeria. In furtherance of this provision, the Federal Government of Nigeria in May, 1993 via Act 31 established the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) as an agency of the Federal Ministry of Education. The mandate of this body, among others, is to register and license qualified teachers to practise. Both the FRN (2004) and TRCN (2007) pegged the minimum bench mark qualification to be registered at NCE.

Considering the journey, one can safely say that Nigeria has made some efforts in teacher professional development. To determine the worth of these efforts made, there is the need to take a look at the standards vis-a-vis the Nigeria practice in teacher professional development

### **The Issues and Potholes**

Wikipedia (2010), identified three stages of teacher education. These are initial teacher education, induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The initial teacher education is the pre-service course given to a teacher trainee before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher. This stage of teacher education is provided by accredited teacher education institutions or units. In Nigeria, the institutions and bodies are so many that one cannot vouch for uniformity and standards. The initial teacher education is being carried out employing both the consecutive and the concurrent models. The issue, however, is that the two semesters for the PGDE in the consecutive model is probably inadequate to provide enough knowledge, attitudes and skills required of a professional teacher.

Induction is the education and support given to newly qualified teachers in the first few years of teaching to help him or her develop a professional identity and to further develop the basic competences not acquired during the initial teacher education in school. In most cases, this is done by mentoring, peer network and input from educational experts. In Nigeria, this is rarely done. What is done in some schools is induction into the school where newly qualified teachers are posted to.

Continuing Profession Development (CPD) has to do with in-service education for practicing teachers. This could be in form of conferences, seminars and workshops. This is often practised for serving teachers but is not uncommon to find director and other senior officers of the ministry and relevant departments enrolling for the conference at the expense of the practicing teachers. Enrolments of Artisans, Motor cycle riders and traders for such programmes are also common scenes in Nigeria. Of course, reasons for this may not be farfetched. These are most likely for financial gains and not for professional development.

A critical issue in teacher professional development is the curriculum for initial teacher education. There is no controversy over the enormous task entrusted in the hands of the teacher. He or she is to transmit to the learners the beliefs, attitudes and ideals of the society. Bearing in mind that the teacher may serve in a variety of culture probably different from his or her own area or outside the location of the institution where he or she is professionally prepared, raises the issue of what constitutes the right knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills the teachers should possess. The situation becomes more precarious in Nigeria where the responsibility of teacher education is vested in multiplicity of institutions. These institutions are supervised by different quality control bodies and so the problem of uniformity of curriculum and emphasis becomes evident. For instance the Colleges of Education are supervised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education, the institute and faculties of Education of Universities are supervised by the National Universities Commission and Polytechnics by National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

In many countries of the world especially in developed countries, there are quality assurance mechanisms in which case the serving teachers strive to meet the standards and so the professional development is enhanced. For instance, in some of these countries like Amarica and the United Kingdom, assessment of teacher performance is done with a view to identify teachers' needs for additional development or identify teachers that may have to leave the profession. There are no such mechanisms in Nigeria and so Continuing Profession Development (CPD) programmes are not directed at appropriate audience and as such teachers do not strive to keep afloat in the profession.

A very major issue in teacher professional development in Nigeria is the lack of commitment by the government. It is true that the government has policy provision for making teaching a profession (FRN, 2004). As a follow up, the federal government via Act 31 on May 4, 1993 established the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN, 2007). It is worthy of note however that the Registrar to this body was never appointed till 1999, six years after the pronouncement of the establishment of the body, pointing out a lack of commitment.

As earlier noted, the minimum entry qualification into the teaching profession in Nigeria is the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). It is common knowledge that no known profession in the country has the entry point lower

than Bachelor's degree or equivalent except nursing. It is to be noted too that at the time nursing attained the status of a profession in Nigeria, qualifications higher than what the School of Nursing offered were not in common place. In contrast to this, at the time teaching was said to have been granted the status of a profession, higher qualifications in education were all over the place.

Closely linked with the entry point of NCE is the status of the certificate. As stated by FRN (2004), NCE holders are prepared and made to teach in the primary and junior secondary levels of education in Nigeria. A critical review of the National commission for Colleges of Education Minimum Standards for NCE shows that many Colleges of Education offer many courses that are not relevant to the levels of education their products are prepared for. For instance, combinations involving Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Economics, Political Science and Geography just to mention a few are common in many Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2008). By implication, the holders of such certificates are not professionally and adequately prepared to enter the profession.

The inability of TRCN to regulate entrance into the profession is today a major short-coming in the teacher professional development in Nigeria. For instance, anyone can seek to be employed as teachers in today Nigeria even after 16 years of the establishment of TRCN. In Nigeria, both the government and the private school proprietors employ anyone who has qualifications beyond the ordinary level or school certificate no matter the discipline. The matter is as worse in the private schools where proprietors employ even secondary school dropouts and failures. This discourages people willing to enter the profession and so the profession becomes open to frustrated individuals who are not able to enter other professions or people who use teaching as stepping stone to other vocations.

The current practice of TRCN seems to be that of simply giving people the right to teach when they meet the basic requirements. The major focus on high standards that support and extend teacher professional development is lacking. The linkage between TRCN and the teacher education institutions or bodies is not strong enough to ensure quality

The issue of discrepancies in teacher professional development in Nigeria is a glaring one. For instance, NCCE provides for a three year of six semesters on full time programme teacher education in Colleges of Education for the award of NCE, the minimum requirement for registration as a professional teacher. In the same country, Nigeria, TRCN, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and Nigeria Teachers Institute (NTI) initiated a programme, Special Teachers Upgrading Programme (STUP) for the award of NCE. This is a two year weekend programme holding on Fridays from 4.00 p.m. and Saturdays. The products of these two programmes are adjudged to be holding the same qualification. One may not need to do an empirical study to know that the quality of the two products is not the same.

The foregoing has impacted the education sector and ultimately, national development negatively over the years and the unpleasant impact has continued in unprecedented ways. Recently, the Federal Government decried the massive failure rate of Nigerian candidates in the Senior School Certificate Examinations. The issue then is; if the teaching had been effective, why the massive failure? Still using the attitude assessment approach, the lingering and indeed intensifying phenomenon of examination malpractice speaks volumes of the quality of teaching, irrespective of the multifunctional explanation of its occurrence. It is opined that, with effective service delivery from the teacher, temptation to cheat would be very minimal.

Similarly, judging from the opinion of employers and research findings, the quality of teachers could still be questioned. Advertisement for teaching in Lagos State, for example, carries a tag that indicates dissatisfaction with the bulk of the existing stock of the teaching force. In advertisement for employment, employers seek for teachers who are competent (Gbogbojobs, 2010). This implies that there are teachers that are not competent. This is a sad commentary on the quality of the country's teaching force.

It is true that Nigeria's journey on the path of teacher professional development to the present day 21<sup>st</sup> century has been through many potholes, yet all hope is however, not lost as the road can still be patched.

### **Patching the Potholes**

For reasons of quality, standards and effective monitoring of teacher professional development in Nigeria, the need to streamline the initial teacher education programme becomes pertinent. In this regard, the current practice of multiplicity of teacher education institutions should be discarded. The responsibility should be given to a particular body, say a teacher institute. There could be multiplicity of this body but the quality control will then be in one hand. In the alternative, if it becomes difficult to streamline, all pre-service teachers should be brought together under a single body, call it Teacher Institute at the end of their initial teacher education for at least a period of one calendar year and fine tuned before being licensed to practise as is done in the law profession.

As earlier mentioned as potholes, the one year PGDE programme in the consecutive model of initial teacher education is grossly inadequate. This short period of training is not found in any of the esteemed professions. For instance, it is unthinkable of any university graduate in whatever discipline, no matter how related to medicine, to take a one year post graduate diploma in medicine and be allowed to practise as a medical practitioner. Not even in the law profession is such a thing done. For proper initial teacher education therefore, those who choose to return to the teaching profession should take up a full Bachelor's degree programme in education by going through the direct entry arrangement of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

The absence of induction in the teacher education in Nigeria can be made up for by instituting an internship programme before entering the practice. This is done in some other professions, for instance in pharmacy, there is an internship period of one year, in medicine, there is also a one year houseman-ship programme before entering the profession. During the internship period, newly qualified teachers should be placed under the supervision of an experienced teacher for the purpose of mentoring. The internship programme does not take the place of the teaching practice which is part of the initial teacher education programme.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is very much in practice in Nigeria. The major problem as earlier mentioned is the issue of persons that are not practising teachers or persons not even in the education sector like Artisans and Motor cycle riders usurping the positions of the teacher most likely for reason of the stipends paid at the end of the programme. Effective monitoring and supervision of such programmes could be a step in the right direction. Wikipedia (2010) also reported that a growing research base suggests that to be most effective, CPD activities should, among other things, be spread overtime, be collaborative, use active learning, be delivered to group of teachers, and should include period of practice, coaching and follow-up.

Introduction of quality assurance programme into the teaching profession will also induce practising teachers to pursue higher professional development so as to either earn their promotions or stay on the job. This will also improve their output as the quality of the work undertaken by a teacher has significant effects on the pupils or students.

The current practice of NCCE floating programmes like Economics/Political Science and Biology/Chemistry not relevant to the level their products are expected to teach should give way to the relevant programmes. This is, by implication, suggesting that teacher education programmes at NCE level should be directed to meet the curricular content at the primary and junior secondary school levels..

Although, the FRN (2004) gave recognition to teaching as a profession and pegging the minimum qualification to NCE, what obtains in practice especially in private schools is at variance with this provision. There is, therefore, the need for TRCN to seek legislation at the National Assembly that should regulate the practice of teaching.



## Conclusion

It is clear from the review in this paper that Nigeria as a nation recognises the position of teacher in the overall development of the country and so made significant efforts in teacher professional development but the result is not significant enough and unless this shortfall is made up for, national development premised on educational development would be compromised. Consequent upon this, it was recommended among others that, the education of Nigerian teachers must top the list of priorities of government. Streamlining teacher education programmes and institutions, collaboration between the NUT, TRCN and teacher education institutions were also recommended. The need for monitoring as part of teacher professional development was in addition advocated

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