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The Status of Teacher Education in Nigeria: A Challenge for Improvement

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The Nature and Purpose of Teacher Education in Nigeria

There is no subject that can be defined in terms of what it does alone or how it does what it is meant to do or why it does what it is meant to do in the way it is done, but a complete definition of teacher education will include jointly the what, how, and why levels of existence. With this epistemological principle, a complete definition of teacher education is found in the works of R.S. Peters, (1974) a distinguished philosopher of education, who said: "Teacher education is the process of initiating others into socially and psychologically determined and justified worthwhile experiences through socially and psychologically determined and justified means which are meant to secure the objective of an 'educated teacher.'" The definition when interpreted means that teacher education is a process by which teachers are equipped with valuable needs of the society which they can impart to their students for the benefit of the individual and the society.

The fundamental purpose of teacher education is not only to give teachers a few skills which will improve their results, but also to deal with the inculcation of the right kind of attitudes relevant to the ever expanding horizon of knowledge, personal attitudes such as self-discipline, understanding, sympathy, and a pride in the profession. It is also believed that a well planned and executed teacher preparation program will result in greater grasp of teaching techniques, more self-assurance, and improved quality of work by the teachers.

Trends in Teacher Education in Nigeria Since Independence (1960)

Teacher education in Nigeria has enjoyed some changes for many years, but these changes have not yet established many significant differences in the art of teaching and learning from what it was a decade ago. The most significant changes made are in the following directions.

- (1) Admission requirements upgraded in many states to West African School Certificate or its equivalent.
- (2) Length of time to stay in the program to vary with the quality of entry qualification.
- (3) The scrap of "Grade Three" teacher training programs for the preparation of elementary school teachers in States where they existed.

These changes were made with a view of improving the competence of the prospective teacher. Unfortunately, the present changes may not bring a lasting solution to poor performance of teachers in the secondary school because the problem of teacher education in the country is neither in the admission requirements nor in the number of years the program should last; the problem is that of the professional and technical competencies and individual teacher should possess and be able to perform while on the job. Identical to the problem of competencies is the lack of clear understanding of the societal needs in the field of teacher education. The educational needs of the society have been misinterpreted by many educators to mean the ability to read, speak and write fluently, and probably the acquisition of conceptual technical knowledge of subject matter; e.g., biology, agriculture, history, home economics, etc. Though I do share the view that education should aim at permanent literacy, I hope education would move a little further because the needs of the society extend beyond reading, writing, and cognitive capabilities.

Societal Needs and Students' Perceptions of "Self" and the Teacher

Need has been explained (Leagans, 1964) to represent an imbalance, lack of adjustment, or gap between the present situation or status quo, and a new or changed set of conditions assumed to be more desirable. Needs may be viewed as the difference what is and what ought to be.

The societal need can be classified into:

- (1) Physical Needs--food, clothing, housing, jobs, etc.
- (2) Social Needs--group status, affection, recognition, protection, etc.
- (3) Integrated Needs: The need to relate oneself to something larger and beyond oneself; a philosophy of life.

The society depends on the school's change agents, that is, the teachers, for satisfying most of these needs through the products of learning, that is, the students; but due to lack of constant evaluation of teacher education programs, educators have not been able to realize how ill-equipped are the change agents in coping with the societal problems through the students. Supporting this claim is the large number of students failing the West African School Certificate Examinations annually, and also the high rate of dropouts from the secondary schools, reflected by records from the schools. In many schools, less than 80% of the students admitted in their first year stayed to complete the five-year secondary school program.

The Learners' Perception of "Self" and the "Teacher"

The learner and his parents accept the teacher as a transformer. The learner depends upon the teacher for most of the skills and competencies that will make life dependable for him; hence, he accepts

learning in the way the teacher presents it to him. ("Students" is synonymous to "learners" or "the child" in this paper.) If the child is to acquire saleable skills while in the school, the director of the child's learning processes must possess adequate performance of such competencies relevant to the needs of the child for survival in a competitive world of work.

Most of the students entering high schools perceive themselves as performing certain roles or they have acquired a certain awareness of their roles and strongly look to the teacher to help consolidate their role identifications. Some of these roles can be termed "awareness." They include career awareness, self-awareness, decision-making skills, employability skills, economic awareness, etc.

The individual student possesses some knowledge, attitude toward, and interest in some careers. He knows that the type of job or career he has in mind to pursue for successful living requires some education and associated skills. He depends on the teacher for assistance in learning what is involved in the development, behavior, training and success in his desired occupation.

The Effects of the Existing Teacher Preparation Programs in Nigerian Schools

Many teachers, thinking that they are doing their best to make students learn, tend to over manage the learning situation, defining their roles too narrowly, and tend to make too many decisions in their learners' behalf. Motivational problems have been produced because of the way traditional learning is organized and presented to the students.

A student's behavior within a teaching/learning situation always appears sensible to him and teachers either in ignorance or due to inefficiency do not look at the teaching/learning environment in the same way the students do. Corrective measures need to be

provided to make teachers understand the behaviors of their learners and to gear learning to their needs.

What a student freely chooses to learn is that which he believes is of value to him and relevant to his life. If a student fails to see the personal relevance of particular activities, learning may still take place but out of fear of academic failure, punishment by the teacher, or rejection by parents. However, since the effect of fear is avoidance behavior, the knowledge and skills mastered under adverse conditions are never retained by students for any significant period of time. Since a student believes that what he learns in the classroom cannot be related to his own needs in life, temporarily acquired performance capabilities are discarded at the student's earliest convenience.

There are many policies which policy makers establish and which teachers, principals, and inspectors of education collectively promote which have corrosive influence on students' efforts to learn and achieve. These policies may be termed institutional processes which characterize the school philosophy, program planning, instructional planning and execution, school discipline, school financing, admission processes, evaluation of student learning, etc. In obedience to these policies, teachers tend to lay emphasis on students' memorization of irrelevant materials to survive in secondary schools. When irrelevance characterizes the schooling process, the individual students' needs and unique talents are placed outside the context of education.

Forgetting, as indicated in literature, is not the only consequence of irrelevant education; rote learning and cheating have been used by secondary school students as a way of survival. Many secondary school students, when faced with learning not geared to their needs and level of thinking, take to cheating, and at extremes concern themselves with incredible strategies and tactics for meeting examination requirements and getting a teacher's favour for promotion to the next class. These mechanisms,

many students believe, are the only alternatives to them for coping with academic failure.

A more obvious consequence of teacher failure in the school, and one of the more tragic, is the increasing number of secondary school dropouts. When a student experiences so much failure, he applies the mechanism of withdrawal or avoidance behaviors to overcome the frustration. Realistically, how many of the secondary school students presented for the West African School Certificate Examination annually do pass to the satisfaction of the school and parents? The percentage passing is very low. Hoping to avoid future unsuccessful experiences, several hundred secondary school students who fail certificate examinations refuse to return to school, while many who anticipate failure leave the classroom before they complete their five years of secondary education. The common causes of this are: (1) Poor performance in school subjects, (2) Lack of interest in school subjects due to the way the teacher handles instruction, and (3) Unsatisfying student-teacher relationships. All these are brought about by the teacher's lack of competencies that make for successful learning.

The purpose of education is not to frustrate or fail students. Education believes in making the student learn those skills and knowledges he can apply to make life satisfying for himself and can further develop to improve his standards.

Scapegoating for the School Failures

It has been the practice of teachers and parents in this country to scapegoat the student for his failure in the school.

In many cases, the principal will blame the failure of the school on poor funding, lack of competent teaching staff, and uncooperative attitudes of the local community. However, the student need not share in this blame since he is not involved in the establishment of practices which prevent constructive

learning and teaching from taking place. When principals and government policies permit incompetent teachers to direct students' learning, the content and process of school become totally incompatible with students' needs in relevant occupations. In the school, the student is left to gamble for success and when he fails to succeed, he faces blame from both teachers and parents. This has an adverse effect on the student. He immediately begins to believe that he is not valued as an individual with unique talent and needs. The student's failure is probably not due to his inability to learn. One of the concerns is lack of professional competencies on the part of the teachers to present needed skills and knowledge to the student in a way that will benefit him most.

When students fail, many schools maintain that failure occurs because students do not measure up to necessary standards. It is hard to convince the school and the change agents that they contribute more to the students' failures.

It is disappointing, indeed, in many cases, that principals and teachers believe that the school be applauded when students are successful, but that students are to blame when they are unsuccessful.

Teachers, as those who know better, admitted qualified students during selection exercises, taught them to perform in certain ways, rarely giving them a chance to do otherwise, and thereafter do not want to be held accountable for students' failures. I strongly believe that it is the learning process and not the product which must be held accountable for the school failures.

Teachers have been blamed by the parents, the supervisors, the government, and the learners for being responsible for most of the school practices which contribute to the failure of the learners.

Teachers have been criticized for being incompetent in the profession for which they are paid.

Teachers have been seriously criticized for holding the product of learning (the students) responsible for failure in the school.

Teachers, like their students, once were learners in colleges. They accepted learning in the ways it was presented to them by the educators, and they impart knowledge and skills (though inadequate) to their learners. Since teachers presently have no choice other than what they are taught to do, I hope they would not be scapegoats of the failures of the school. It has to be realized that there is little a teacher can do without the adequate and appropriate tools for guiding learners towards their career goals.

Teachers are professionals and must be taught to teach in the right way. For this, they need education in the disciplines that undergird the profession, plus professional education in classroom management, instructional strategies, curriculum development, instructional evaluation, etc. Since the college career of most of the current teachers in many Nigerian secondary schools is devoted to the development of cognitive capabilities in subject matter areas other than professional training per se, it is necessary to plan adequate professional experiences for prospective teachers before they are allowed into the school system.

Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

The failures of the school emanating from adequate teacher preparation programs are not typical of Nigeria alone. School failures have been experienced in many countries of the world. In most of the developed countries, the problems of the school failure have triggered the need and concern for well prepared teacher educators, professionally competent teachers, suitable curricula, and more effective administration of education processes.

In the United States, for example, research and development efforts have brought about positive changes in teacher education for the improvement of

learning and teaching in American schools. Researchers have used many approaches and procedures to devise strategies for meeting society's educational demands. Areas to which efforts were directed include curriculum planning, instruction (methods and materials), and evaluation of teacher education programs. The researchers have combined certain concepts such as clusters, functions, tasks, competencies, skills, and knowledges, etc., into a number of approaches as strategies for meeting the occupational and professional needs of teachers and the learners.

Some of the researchers whose works are indicative of such combinations are Berkey (1967), Drake and Berkey (1972), Ely and Drake (1973), Cotrell, et. al. (1972), Clack and Meaders (1968), Gleason (1967), Legacy and Berkey (1975), Bail and Cardozier (1967), etc. The major goals of these researchers are: (1) developing a preservice and/or inservice program for teacher educators, (2) developing a secondary and/or post-secondary curriculum for individuals seeking employment in various occupations. The unification of these research efforts using many approaches and procedures led to the Performance/Competency-Based Teacher Education (P/CBTE) which seeks to solve the problems of inadequate competencies of teachers responsible for preparing youths for their respective callings in some states in the United States of America.

A Suggested Paradigm

In Nigeria, one of the major problems resulting in the lack of competent teachers is the absence of adequate development of professional skills in the trainers of youths for relevant occupations. From the curriculum point of view, theorists in philosophy and psychology of education have identified, unquestionably, that the society has some needs which can be called "goals". These goals, they say, can be screened through philosophy of education and psychology of learning to form program objectives or intended learning outcomes (ILO). It has not been all that

easy for educators and program planners in functional education to meet the needs of the society through the conceptual frameworks of the educational psychologists and philosophers.

A new and applicable approach where objectives are identified and expressed behaviorally has to be found to meet the societal goals in education for the world of work. Through the available research work and combination of various research approaches and procedures, a paradigm has been developed as a strategy for meeting the performance needs of teachers in Nigeria.

The paradigm is characterized by identification of tasks which lead to the development of performance units designed to teach identified tasks or clusters which will result in students' mastery of performances. Other characteristics of this paradigm are: the competencies to be acquired are explicitly known to both the learner and instructor and are defined in terms of a teacher's professional role.

The emphasis is away from the more traditional cognitive objectives (knowledge, intellectual abilities, and skills) which are to be demonstrated by the learner, and toward performance objectives (whereby the learner demonstrates professional role behaviors) and eventually consequent objectives (i.e., demonstrated ability to bring about change in others).

The paradigm identifies categories, sub-categories, (clusters), and competencies within a cluster which a teacher should be capable of doing to be successful in his job. There is a sort of overlap or relationship among the clusters and competencies.

The paradigm lends itself to continuous assessment of the students as it performs one competency after the other in relevant programmes. Continuous assessment has been highly recommended for evaluating students' progress in future education in Nigeria.

Implications of the Paradigm to Teacher Education

If the suggested paradigm is carefully implemented in Nigeria, it is most likely to accomplish the following:

- (1) Improved quality of instruction in secondary schools as a result of high quality (competent) teachers.
- (2) Improve the currently inadequate state of knowledge concerning relationships between teacher education curriculum and success of students in secondary schools.
- (3) Reveal the capabilities of training institutions in improving the standard of education through the preparation of knowledgeable and competent teachers to handle school instruction.
- (4) The success of the program will expose the weaknesses of the existing teacher preparation programs in the country and will trigger commitment to tool up necessary development and research efforts to improve the quality of teacher education uniformly throughout the country.

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