Review Paper

Continuing professional development of primary school teachers: Panacea for the emergence of globally competitive Nigerian learners

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While societal development is often linked to the education system, the success or failure of an education system is anchored on the quality of the teachers. This view is expressed in the National Policy on Education thus: “since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers...” (NERDC, 2004:39). It is further held that the success of the entire education edifice is hinged on the performance of the primary sub-sector, hence the statement that “since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system” (NERDC, 2004:14). Balogun (2000) notes that if the primary level is the key to the success and failure of the entire education system, then the custodian of that key is the primary school teacher. This paper therefore is concerned with the issues of the continuous professional development of primary school teacher, for the purpose of sustaining currency in all aspects of their responsibilities in the school system. It is strongly held by this paper that it is only through such efforts that the teachers will fulfill the goal of producing learners with the requisite knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that will enhance the effective participation of Nigerian learners in global competitiveness.

Key words: Development, education, primary, school and system.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-cultural psychologists such as Wenger (1998) have argued that knowledge creation and learning take place in societies of practice through complement process of participation, interaction or shared experiences of members working together towards established objectives. In addition, it has been observed that in knowledge creation, an extended learning cycle is developed when societies and groups interact with varied knowledge, expertise and backgrounds in pursuit of accepted goals (Engestrom, 2001). He posits further that for stated objectives to be achieved, partners must work together by exploring, articulating and modeling possible solutions. These theories are explored in relation to the continuing professional development of teachers at the foundation level of the Nigerian education system. How teachers are developed in Nigeria is highlighted and consequent issues in adopting co-operative learning as a viable strategy for the professional development of teachers.

PARTNERSHIP/IN-SERVICE LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

To the highly experienced and professionally trained teachers in Nigeria, the idea of partnership or in-service learning may not totally be a new concept. However, its use as a learning strategy for the continuing professional development of teachers in the recent past may not have been freely exploited. An attestation to this is the paucity...
of literature on its use in the Nigeria school system. Reports of teacher training in Nigeria in the 1960s by Ukeje (1986) showed the regimental procedures of training pupil teachers. A cursory overview of these programmes contained a high proportion of co-operative learning techniques. Teacher training was then undertaken as a close missionary family venture, and teaching itself was adjudged a helping or service profession. Under this understanding, good and experienced teachers voluntarily mentored the young, inexperienced-new-comers into the profession. These mentors were teachers who could demonstrate remarkable mastery and competence in their subject areas and classroom management.

This collegial relationship became threatened by the various educational reforms between 1970 and date aimed at broadening the scope of education. For instance, within this period, the report of the first National Curriculum Conference of 1969 was implemented with the commencement of Universal Primary Education Scheme. Between 1976 and 2004, the 6-3-3-4 education system (6 years of primary, 3 years each of junior and senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education), the 9-3-4 (9 years of Basic education, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary) system were all adopted within this era (Ekpo, 2005).

The impact of these educational reforms on the teacher education sub-sector is perhaps the most profound as these developments put pressure on the few available trained and professionally trained teachers. To provide more efficient and conscientious classroom teachers for the teeming population of entrants into the primary and junior secondary schools, the three tiers of government (federal, state and local councils) introduced and sponsored teacher bursary and scholarship award schemes to attract more people into the ‘noble chalk’ profession (Ekpo, 1995).

Furthermore, polytechnics and university graduates with single honours in various disciplines who could not be employed in their chosen fields got into teaching as “stop gap”. Hence, teaching became an “all comer” or a “universal accepter” occupation, though the least paid and cherished. Payment of salaries and other allowances of teachers have become political issues in which teachers are sometimes not paid for onward of twelve calendar months at a go. Under these unfavourable conditions of service and economic down turn, teachers got engaged in what Dike, (2002) refers to as “non-academic moonlighting activities”. This situation has changed for the better as schools now engage in various group learning activities such as Science and/or Mathematics quiz, school debates, Junior Engineers and Technologists (JETS) and sports competitions. These bring teachers together to share ideas and experiences (all aspects of co-operative or collaborative earning).

TEACHERS’ DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Nigeria with an estimated population of about one hundred and forty million (140m) people has about forty-five thousand, two hundred and seventy (45,270) primary school spread across the seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local government councils. There are about five hundred thousand, six hundred and twenty-eight (500,628) primary schools teachers out of which 463,944 (four hundred and sixty-three thousand, nine hundred and forty-four) representing 92.7% qualified with the balance of thirty-six thousand, six hundred and eighty-four (36,684) or 7.3% unqualified (TRCN, 2005).

The National Policy on Education provides that the training of all categories of teachers should be undertaken by seven institutes which include: Colleges of Education, Faculties and Institutes of Education in the universities, Schools of Education in the Polytechnics, National Teachers Institute, National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and National Mathematical Centre (NMC). These institutions are expected to produce highly conscientious, motivated and efficient classroom teachers, encourage in them the spirit of enquiry, creativity, nationalism and give them a sense of belonging. The academic content of the training programme is also expected to acquaint the recipients with intellectual and professional orientation, adequate to the ever changing situations in the country as well as making them knowledgeable, progressive and effective teachers capable of inspiring the learners to achieve success (NERDC, 2004). It is obvious from the aforementioned objectives that teacher development requires both a professional education as well as professional development. These components are neatly knit in a holistic package of Initial Teacher Training or Pre-service education, induction, internship and continuing profession development.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The attainment of the goals of any profession is enhanced by the selection or recruitment procedures adopted. This is because it is at this point of recruitment that issues of standard and status are considered. For the teaching profession, recruitment starts with admission procedures into the pre-service programme. In the early days of modern education in Nigeria, it was possible to select candidates with commitment, intelligence, courage, empathy, patience, etc. which are attributes of a good teacher into the profession.

From the inception of the Universal Primary Education Scheme in 1976 to the current Universal Basic Education launched in 1999 different crash teachers training programmes have been introduced. These included the
The absence of other education, especially among those who come from West African male, performance. This policy pronouncement has implication may not refer to be subjected to extra effective work, 2005); as they do, global village, virtual programme on graduation. Section 6B sub-section 78 (c) provides that newly qualified teachers shall serve a period of internship one (1) year for degree holders and two (2) years for NCE holders’ (NERDC, 2004:41). This policy pronouncement has however not been implemented up till date.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER:

The development of primary school teachers in Nigeria beyond the point of initial teacher training takes place randomly, haphazardly and most times accidentally. This is because most of these occur when teachers with either the Teachers’ Grade Two (TC II) or Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) enroll for advanced academic programmes. The contents of these courses are determined by the institutions and most often more theoretical than practical to the needs of the teachers or schools.

This in effect does not address the professional needs of the teachers because additional qualification may not necessarily improve professional performance. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) observed that there is dire need for continuing development of teachers in Nigeria if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Africa are to be achieved by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2004).

This is the same direction taken by the Director and Chief Executive of the National Teachers’ Institute while addressing officials from the consortium on Teachers Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) when he submitted.

There are very few and irregularly organized in-service training workshops or seminars that aimed at enhancing teachers’ knowledge and skills...most teachers do not have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of the subject matter they teach and most importantly to improve their practical skills for the effective implementation of the curriculum (Mamah, 2005). The scenario as painted above is not good enough because young teachers learn about their professional roles and acquire relevant skills by working alongside other teachers in teams (Smethen and Abay, 2005); as they discuss their thoughts, ideas, lesson plans, record-keeping and evaluation of pupils’ work are often done in partnership with others. Current advances in technology and consequent changes in organizational infrastructure have brought about increased pressure on teamwork and learning. Emerging concepts like internet, intranet, network society, World Wide Web, global village, virtual learning, teleconferencing, etc. demand for partnership work force and skills for increased productivity (Gokhale, 1995; Lawrence, 1999).

EMERGENT ISSUES IN CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NIGERIA

There exists a symbiotic relationship between the school where the teacher works and the society where the school
situates. For this association to be meaningful and sustained the teachers must see themselves as lifelong learners working in partnership with the host community for the mutual benefit of the learners and society. Teachers must therefore be aided to remain active and innovative. Innovative teaching does not just emerge from the blues, it is evolved gradually but steadily through interaction between theory and practice. Where these ingredients are in short supply as is the case with Nigeria Primary school teachers, they teach from old, outdated notes and children engage in rote learning. This is because primary education has been politicized such that the knowledge development potentials of teachers are under exploited. The ultimate targets of all teacher development programmes are improvement in pupils' learning, professional improvement of individual teacher and general efficiency in the society. For these to be achieved, provisions must be made for participants' interest, status, level of involvement, monitoring strategies, implementation, documentation and funding.

Primary school teachers in Nigeria are conscious of global trends in education and aware of their training needs and inadequacies. However, they are never consulted when drawing up the content of training programmes. Thus, beside being sporadic all the in-service programmes in Nigeria are top-down organised. This situation was laid bare at a training workshop for head teachers of primary schools when one of them was asked to assess the success of the training session in relation to meeting their needs, he quickly retorted, "nobody asked of my needs before the workshop, how can i know if it has met my needs". It is needless to say that teachers desire to partake in the planning. In addition, participants in in-service programme for primary school teachers in Nigeria are often widely diverse in status, qualification and experience. Diversity in status, qualification and experience is not enough to come to an assertive conclusion that the environment is least conducive for free exchange of ideas. On the other hand, it would be better if the authors discuss the specific disadvantages of this diversity." Thus, teachers' experiences which are the essence for development are totally de-valued in the top-down approach of continuing professional development provided in Nigeria.

Other emergent issues in the continuing professional development of primary school teachers in Nigeria borders on location of training centres which are centralized; issues of implementation and documentation in which no concerted efforts are made for logical implementation and documentation of research results. Perhaps, the most crucial factor in successful implementation of continuing professional development programmes for teachers in Nigeria primary school is adequate funding. The policy document recognizes that education generally is an expensive social service which requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of government for its successful implementation.

Unfortunately, the Director of the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) was said to have observed that: funds are rarely allocated or promptly released for short in-service training programmes (Momah, 205). The education sector is grossly underfunded as the UNSECO minimum recommendation of 26% budgetary allocation to education is yet to be adopted.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In a network society like an educational system, all the relevant components need to work in consonance of each other to achieve a holistic development involving the teachers, students, school system and society. To boost the continuing professional development programmes for primary schools teachers in Nigeria, these recommendations are suggested:

Some of the institutions listed for the training of teachers, such as National Teachers' Institute and National Mathematical Centre should discontinue their involvement in the pre-service teacher education component of their development and concentrate on the in-service education of the teachers. These should pale well with such other professional associations like the Nigeria Association for Educational Media and Technology (NAEMT) to mount workshops for serving teachers.

A collaborative approach to identify developmental needs will enliven the profession. For instance, teachers can be requested to identify their main priorities for the coming year which form the trust of organized workshops. If these are put to place, the teachers become focused and committed to the improvement or innovation. It has been noted that adult learners are more committed to decisions according to the extent of their involvement in the formulation. Non-involvement of teachers at the planning stage will make them feel undervalued and become uncooperative and sometimes confrontational.

Entry point into teaching should be made attractive to lure into it talented youths as lowering the admission requirements will not raise its professional status, rather as Niemi (2005) noted the higher the requirements are, 'the more attractive the profession'. Primary school teachers, teacher educators and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) providers should have a collegial relationship and interact freely on common goals for partnership learning to be meaningful to all.

Activities of the CPD providers such as the National Mathematical Centre and National Teachers' Institute should be decentralized down to the local Education Authority level where school-based teacher development programmes should be adopted.

The service providers should be trained so that they can pay particular attention to the issue of documentation of findings. Adequate funding should be ensured so that
head teachers are empowered financially to undertake sponsorship of participants at various continuing professional development programmes.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria like most developing African countries is faced with double challenges in their development endeavours. The first has to do with the pre-service upgrading or updating of these teacher’s knowledge and skills. Due to competing educational needs, continuing teachers development in Nigeria has been circumvented as teachers have been given the ‘one-shot’ initial training for the current virtual classroom. Teachers are the main determinants of any educational system and should therefore be trained continually for competence. Teachers are able to identify their training needs if allowed to and their experiential knowledge can enhance their performances.

Teachers are key components in any educational system and should be competently trained and valued. Outside being the initiators and facilitators of all learning experiences, they are the producers of knowledge about teaching. Knowledge generated through teachers’ experimental and experiential outputs would naturally enhance and increase the knowledge-base about the teaching profession. Where this academic activity is lacking, professional development is shallow, unfocused and ill-motivated. Partnership learning should not be unstructured, voluntary or sporadic; rather, it should be jointly planned and periodically evaluated collaboratively. Hence, through a systematically planned and executed teacher development programme Nigeria primary school teachers who had their pre-service training prior to the wide use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education could have the chance to interact mutually with their newly qualified counterparts proficient in ICT skills and the educators from the training institutions.

Through this process, problems of teaching and learning are easily identified by the stakeholders and solutions proffered with innovative ideas and knowledge generated for the overall development of teaching profession in Nigeria. It is only through this that the foundation level of education would be capable of laying the solid base for other higher levels to thrive.

REFERENCES


