

TEACHER QUALITY: ANTECEDENT TO QUALITY EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Teacher quality is central to quality education and national development of any nation. Without competent, qualified and professional teachers, there will be no quality education and national development. This paper highlights teacher quality and Quality education and national development. The paper recommended that only qualified competent teachers should be employed for all levels of our educational system through competency tests and interviews from time to time. Also, in every area of the educational sector be it in the Sciences, Social and Management Sciences, Humanities, the Arts or the teacher education sector, the best brains should be employed to handle them.

Introduction

The position occupied by teachers in the educational development of any nation is second to none. Government can build classrooms, provide teaching materials and equipment but without competent teachers to handle them to the advantage of the students, they remain worthless. Teaching materials cannot teach by themselves. The true position is that quality teaching can only take place when we have quality teachers. Quality teaching and learning can take place with competent teachers even in the absence of much needed teaching materials and infrastructure.

Quality education which is the backbone to the development of any nation cannot be possible without quality teachers. It is these teachers that are responsible for producing the medical doctors, engineers, architects, teachers, politician's e.t.c that can launch a country into its scientific, technological, education and political development. (Ngada, 2005). Education, according to Ukeje (1991) is the most critical instrument for change in any society. As a result of this, education is the single largest industry that is expected to attract the lion share of a nation's budget if meaningful development is to take place as it affects all spheres of life in the society. However, no matter how much a nation invests in education, it is more of a share waste of resources if there are no competent and committed teachers to implement the curriculum of its educational system at all levels. Teacher quality is the single determinant factor in the education and national development of any nation. The development of any nation and its education lies squarely on the availability and adequacy of quality teachers in its educational system at all levels. (Ngada, 2008).

Teacher Quality

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stated that no education of a nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. Ali (1992) stated that an

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educational system is only as good as the teachers who operate it. This shows the crucial position occupied by teachers in the implementation of the curriculum in the schools. The availability of competent qualified professional teachers is the major determinant factor in the quality of education of any nation. The quality of such teachers will determine the quality of medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, architectures, politicians, and teacher's e.t.c of that nation. Good teachers will definitely produce trustworthy civil servants and professionals in every sector of a nation's civil service.

Major characteristics/qualities expected from such teachers are many and varied. Ali (1992) stated that for the teacher to be effective, he must have a basic command of his subject; he must keep abreast of his field and be able to communicate his knowledge effectively to others at their levels of comprehension. He must have a thorough acquaintance with psychological principles and be able to make practical use of them in teaching. Thus for a teacher to be effective and competent, he needs to be professionally trained, knowledgeable in the subject- matter, be able communicate very well with his students and know his students very well to be able to meet their individual needs. This shows that without competent professional teachers in our schools, quality education cannot be sustained.

According to Ukeje (1991), a qualitative teacher should be a person who is dependable, adaptable, cooperative, considerate, enthusiastic, forceful, honest, neat, industrious, open-minded and refined. While in the classroom, he should be able to transmit knowledge and skills effectively and efficiently and inspire learners to greater heights. He should in addition, have broad educational background, sound professional knowledge and experience.

Fafunwa (1969) stated that the teacher is the key in the entire education programme, for a teacher can make or mar the best educational programme in the world. To support Fafunwa, Oladebo (1987) in Ruwa (2003) observed that the federal Government can buy millions of naira worth of equipment and provide necessary facilities, but without high level man power of teachers to manipulate these facilities and equipment to the best advantages of the students, the whole exercise may still be a waste. In her observation Nkwodimmah (2003) stated that the future of a nation rests in the hands of its teachers, for the qualities they process to day will inevitably be reflected in the citizens of tomorrow. This is clearly seen in the complaints we have today in Nigeria in every sector of life and the economy over the low quality of our graduates. Many left school and are almost unable to construct good sentences or even write application letters. We hear of doctors operating patients and many forgetting scissors in the patients or administering wrong drugs to patients. We have many mechanical/electrical engineers who cannot operate simple machines. There are many teachers who cannot teach.

To further support the important position occupied by the teacher in the educational system, Ukeje (1991) pointed out that if the child is the centre of the education system, the teacher is the pivot of the education process. In every

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educative process, there always stands the teacher in front or at the back, at the centre or at the side. What he knows and does makes a great difference and what he does not know, cannot do, or fails to do can be an irreparable loss to the child. The teacher in the final analysis translates policies into practice and programmes into action. Thus, we can manage possibly without adequate classrooms and other facilities, we can educate without books and teaching aids but we cannot do without the teacher. In a similar vein, Anikweze (1995) argued that although learning can take place independently of a teacher, yet is inconceivable for there to be a school without a teacher. He pointed out that it is the competence of the teacher that gives life and substance to education. The competence and professional qualification of the teacher more than anything else, plays the greater role in sustaining the quality of education.

In this paper, teacher quality is concerned with professionally trained teachers, competent teachers, teachers who can deliver the goods. Teachers who can make the learners learn even in the absence of essential or scarce teaching materials. It is the teacher who can make the students to persevere and learn even in the midst of obstacles and problems surrounding them. These are teachers who are not actually motivated by material benefits but are more interested in seeing their students learn. These are teachers who place their learners above personal gain. They are teachers who are more of directors and disciplined assistants (Lubasa, 2008), who are always available to assist the students to discover things for themselves. These are teachers who apply different methods of teaching to make the learner learn at all cost.

Quality Education and National Development

The importance of quality education to national development cannot be over emphasized. Infact, the Federal Government of Nigeria regards education as “an instrument par excellence for effecting national development” (FRN, 2004). Education, therefore, is an instrument which a nation uses in bringing up its members in order to be useful to themselves and also contribute to the general well being of the society. The development of any nation rests squarely on the availability, nature, adequacy and quality of its educational system (Ngada, 2003). This is perhaps why Aboribo (1999) stated that there is no doubt that the socio-economic and political development of a given society depends on the awareness of its citizens, which again is determined by their level of education.

One of the objectives of the Nigerian government is to set the economy of this country on a firm, self-reliant and integrated foundation with self-sufficiency towards a level of industrialization, which will free the country from under-development and economic dependence (Adegbemiro, 2003). This calls for a total mobilization of our human and natural resources and an intensification of the application of education to the process of growth and development. Development and rural growth depend not only on our human resources, but also upon the levels of skills, and knowledge, which we can develop. More importantly, they depend on the attitudes, motivation and dedication of the output

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from our system of education. Thus, quality education should equip the citizens with the required knowledge which will make them productive, self-reliant and progressive. It is the type of education that will enable the individual to contribute his quota to the development of his society. It should be the type of education that will enable the individual use his knowledge for self employment rather than relying on the government for a living as a civil servant or a worker. Quality education should provide functional education for the citizens' i.e education for self-reliance.

National development has several meanings, subject to individuals' perception of the concept. Thus national development is capable of having several interpretations like those given by the six blind men of Hindustan who had physical contact with an elephant. To the one that feels against its broad and sturdy side, the elephant was a "wall", while it was a "spear" to the one at the tusk. Similarly, it was a "snake" to the one grabbing its squirming trunk; a "tree" to the one at the knee; a "fan" to the one hanging on the ear, and a "rope" to the sixth, seizing the swinging tail (Grieves, 1983).

Like these blind men we are free and bound to differ in our perception and definition of national development, because it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Economists, for instance, ascribe national development to a country's economic growth, a rise in its real output per head and the attendant shifts in technological, economic and demographic characteristics (Rich, 1974). Sociologists and social anthropologists on the other hand, see national development primarily in terms of the process of differentiation that characterizes modern societies; whereas political scientists focus attention on political stability, national consciousness and political participation as the main indicators of national development (Adams, 1970).

The different approaches to the definitions of national development were summed up by UNESCO (1963), when it used the term broadly to refer to "growth plus change, which involves materialism, mental, psychological, physical, instructional and organizational innovations". Thus, national development may be seen as a process of change at level of economic, political and socio-cultural spheres, etc, that encompasses material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress, and socio-cultural transformation that results in general improvement in the welfare of the people of a given nation.

Adesina and Adetoro (2000) viewed the concept national development to entail political, social, economic, cultural, scientific and technological dimensions. Theoretically, it is a function of the transformation of a traditional society to modern society with changes in all aspects of life such as government, the family, education, religion, and social organization; a shift from rural to urban living and changes in knowledge, beliefs, values, self conceptions and ways of life.

There is great relationship between quality education and national development. This was championed by great philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates

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and John Dewey who acknowledged formal education as a pre-requisite for peace and national development.

The importance of education in national development has also been recognized, stressed and eulogized in many official policy statements in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stated that the federal government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. Accordingly, it stated that education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is the most important instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. Thus according to Agocha and Okobia (1988), as societies and national development plans change, so should the education system if it is to remain relevant, useful and functional.

From the above analysis, there seem to be a symbiotic relationship between teacher quality, quality education and national development. We cannot have one without the other. If we consider this as a self-evident truth, then the place of high quality teachers is logically central in the educational and national development process.

Conclusion

The crucial role of the teacher in educational and national development of Nigeria is central. If our education is to achieve the national objectives, then well trained, well qualified, efficient, motivated and dedicated teachers are absolutely essential. The quality of the teaching staff is probably the most important determinant of education standards at all levels. This is summed up in the opinion of Castetter (1971) where he stated that while the provision of school facilities are vital and organizational purpose and leadership essential, availability of money and the provision of a well designed instructional programmes are vital and *sine qua non*, the most crucial single element in the educative process is the teacher. The teacher occupies a position second to none in the educative process.

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised in this paper on the crucial position occupied by the teacher towards quality education and national development, the following are recommended:

- (1) Competency tests should be given to teachers before employment and from time to time on their job to keep them abreast and fit for the job.
- (2) Only tested teachers found to be competent should be employed into the teaching profession.
- (3) Those in the employment of the teaching sector should be tested and those found not qualified should be relieved of their job.
- (4) The best brains should be employed to handle every sector of our educational institutions.

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