

## **IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY FOR THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The quality of a nation's educational system often mirrors the level at which that nation attains an acceptable level of development. Granted that a robust educational sector is a function of a juxtaposition of several factors, the importance of quality teaching can never be overemphasised. While the authors of this paper acknowledge the hindrances and challenges that have so far belaboured the Nigerian school system in terms of training, recruiting and motivating quality teachers. The major objective of this paper was to discuss the various techniques that could be applied to improve the quality of teachers, and by so doing enhance the quality service delivery in our school system. This, in the view of the writers, is quintessential for the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria.*

### **1. Introduction**

The need for quality education in Nigeria had never been as pronounced as it was within the last decade. This is not unconnected with the upsurge in the demand for information and know-how about meaningful living standards that would not only enhance the citizens' chances of survival but also enable them to contribute their quota to national development. Education is fast becoming the cornerstone of human existence and cannot be neglected in man's quest for sustainable development. This fact was properly articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which include the provision of inclusive and quality education for all. This is because quality education helps to bridge the gap between poverty and sustainable development.

In order to produce high quality human resource persons from our schools, the quality of teachers available to instruct the learners must also be high. In view of this and the increasing global demand for high standard education, there is the need to effect an upward review of our own standards in Nigeria. Considering also what our students are expected to know and understand in terms of skills, aptitudes and attitudes they need to imbibe, very high standards have to be upheld if our students are to be able to confront future challenges in their quest for self-sufficiency, and by extension contribute immensely to sustainable national development.

Since Nigeria aims at attaining sustainable development partly through education, there is the need to operate an educational system that provides very high quality service delivery. This can be achieved if the challenges in the education system are reduced to the barest minimum and the citizens are provided with high quality

education . This paper was, therefore, embarked upon in order to highlight some of the challenges facing teacher quality improvement and to profer strategies that could be applied to improve the quality of teachers as well as that of education in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Sustainable National Development**

Development, with regards to human beings, has been defined in psychology as a progressive series of orderly, coherent changes (Hurlock, 1978). It is regarded as a combination of all the qualitative and quantitative changes that occur in an individual as a result of the effects of growth, maturation and learning. It encompasses different aspects including the physical, the intellectual, the motor, the emotional and the social developments. The development of a nation also implies its progress or perceived success in all its ramifications. Since myriads of facets may be involved, the concept of national development tends to be elusive. Members of each nation are left with the freedom of determining those aspects that constitute their national development.

Basing on the definition of some other authors, Okemakinde, Adewuyi and Alabi (2013) intimated that national development involved the total transformation of society as well as the aspiration to develop man's potentialities in a total sense and it included reduction of poverty, wealth creation, equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring nutrition and health, housing and ancillary services, social security and welfare. They also quoted Egwu (2007) as claiming that national development was the establishment of a viable and bouyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society; the enthronement of equality and social justice and the building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethnic, religious and geo-political identities developed a collective sense of imagination that they were one.

The goal of any nation or society is to attain an acceptable level of sufficiency in various facets of life. There should, therefore, be in place a high literacy level, low infant mortality rate, food security, employment opportunities for the teeming populace, availability of basic amenities and infrastructure, security of life and property, among others. These are the parameters commonly used for measuring the level of development in any modern society. When a nation can boast of a relatively robust state of infrastructural and human resources, such a nation is said to be a developed one.

Onyenemezu (2013) saw national development as national growth in all its ramifications. He opined that national development encompasses all the activities a nation engages in, so as to achieve a good standard of living for her citizens. From the definition above, one can deduce that national development is the goal of any people-oriented government because every responsible national leadership owes the citizens the duty of providing them with the necessary wherewithal, with which they can thrive as a people. Also, these citizens will always expect giant strides from the government in terms of provision of a convenient socio-economic platform on which they can build their own successes.

Sustainable development, on its part, looks at the possibility of a nation's developmental success standing the test of time. Sustainable development as a concept became entrenched as the main yardstick for measuring national development, as a result of the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission, in 1987. The goal of the commission was to tackle the deterioration of the human environment and natural resources (Wikipedia, nd).

The Brundtland Commission (1987) defined sustainable development as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs." The United Nation's definition of sustainable development remains the most complete definition because it allows for the "convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social equity and environmental protection" (Drexhage & Murphy, 2010).

Over the years, sustainable development has evolved into something more than a concept. It is currently viewed as a noble aspiration as well as the ultimate goal by many nations. Several national, regional and international policies have in recent times, been made with the goals of sustainable development as the backbone of such policies. With the current focus on environmental protection, sustainable development aims at protecting the futures of the unborn generations. Boyi (2013) made reference to Munasinghe who had alluded to the importance of the environment when he defined sustainable national development as a way of improving the myriads of opportunities available to mankind to achieve their potentials while maintaining "the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems."

### **The Importance of Education to Sustainable National Development**

Okemakinde, Adewumi and Alabi (2013) referred to education as the gateway to national development. They cited Abdul-Kareem (2001) who had intimated that education was an inevitable tool for sustainable development and a vehicle for advancing the frontier of knowledge. According to them, the global claim that education is a major and potent instrument for the attainment of sustainable development in all human society today cannot be overemphasized. They also stated that education was often seen as a prerequisite for quality manpower development and wealth creation, a sure path to success in life and service to humanity. They went further to conclude that education was a weapon against ignorance, disease and poverty and held the ace to gainful employment, sustainable economic growth and national development.

In a related development, Nnabuo and Asodike (2012) quoted the UK Panel for Education for Sustainable Development (1998) as claiming that education for sustainable development enabled people to develop the requisite knowledge, values, and skills to participate in decisions about the ways things are done, individually and collectively, locally and globally, that would improve the quality of life without damaging the planet in the future. This paper posited that, education provides the needed knowledge, skills, aptitude and attitude for the teachers and all the other

professionals and workers as well as individuals that operate within the society for their personal and national development.

The relevance of education to Nigeria's quest for sustainable national development has been properly captured in the position of the *National Policy on Education* (2013) thus:

*Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument for change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.*

The above statement from the National Policy on Education highlights the importance of education in Nigeria. Annual national planning as embodied by budgetary statements always highlight the importance of education to the country. Government investments through the allocation of significant amounts of money to the education sector are motivated by the belief that education equips both the individual and the society with the requisite technical know-how necessary for shaping the world of tomorrow.

### **The Role of Teachers in Sustainable National Development**

The teachers' role is very significant in the achievement of sustainable national development. According to Okemakinde, Adewuyi and Alabi (2013), teachers have an important role to play in adequately preparing the young for their roles in the society in order to achieve the set national objectives. They further intimated that all professionals and workers within the society had at one time or the other passed through the tutelage of a teacher, and, as such, whatever they became, was a direct outcome of what teachers had passed on to them. According to them, no nation can experience remarkable development without the existence of "quality" teachers within that nation's educational system.

Teachers provide effective skills development for employability through education. Furthermore, skills development is an important ingredient for sustainable national development. In line with these facts, Maclean (2008: 15) argued as follows:

*Effective skills development for employability and sustainable livelihood is essential if sustainable development is to be achieved, and this also provides a foundation for peace building through contributing to poverty alleviation and rising levels of income.*

Egbo (2011) expressed the opinion that none of the programmes for sustainable development in the 21st century would be successful without the availability of qualified teachers at the classroom level. In her opinion, the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) hinged on robust education systems and, implicitly on effective teaching and learning. She further argued that, for all practical purposes, building teacher capacity was, ultimately, engendering development, growth and excellence within the education system.

The fact remains that, teachers are responsible for nurturing the innate talents of individuals from the period of childhood, thereby making it possible for those individuals to attain the optimal levels of their potentialities. When such individuals become self-actualised, and begin to contribute to nation building, the role played by their teachers ought not to be discounted. Some opinions about teachers are, however, in support of this stance. Okoroafor (2014), for instance, succinctly stated that any nation that recognises education as the key to national development must also recognise the fact that teachers are an important ingredient of that very process, and contributing to the possibility of the realisation of that goal. This is very obvious in our contemporary society, considering the numerous disciplines that teachers provide through instructional delivery. Individuals who benefit from these teachers eventually develop into professionals in various facets of life. Archibong (2013) also saw teachers as agents of socialisation, change and development, as well as the bridge and springboard for economic growth, development and stability.

Oftentimes, government parastatals and the organised private sectors take credits for developmental strides made in a nation. Even politicians deliver manifestoes coloured by promises of how to move the country forward and receive plaudits from all and sundry when laid down national goals are achieved. But teachers remain the primary facilitators of any nation's educational system, and they, above all major stakeholders in national development, deserve recognition for the magnificent job they have done and are still doing in nation building.

### **The Challenges Facing Teacher Quality Improvement in Nigeria**

The destinies of various generations depend largely on the quality of knowledge available to the individuals that make up the given communities in the society at any point in time. From the basic education level, through the secondary and up to the tertiary levels of education, it is vital that students benefit from good quality teaching. This would go a long way in ensuring that they fully develop intellectually, and otherwise. It would also increase their chances of attaining self-actualisation, and subsequently contributing their own quota to national development. Unfortunately many factors have so far bedeviled the quality of teachers available to our numerous students in Nigeria. A few of those challenging factors include:

- ❖ *Inadequate Training for Nigerian Teacher:* Of all the factors militating against the quality of teachers available to our students in the country, lack of proper training is one of the most significant challenge. The common saying that "one cannot give what one does not have" best describes this situation. A teacher who lacks knowledge of the subject matter he/she is to impart to students is basically a huge impediment to the ability of a child to learn. Ibidapo-Obe (2007) asserted that, "input determines output." This directly mirrors the widely held notion that an inadequately trained teacher lacks both the knowledge and technical know-how required to impart quality knowledge to their students.

- ❖ *Lack of or Non-professionalisation of Teaching in Nigeria:* Many teachers in Nigeria are far below the generally acceptable standard obtained in developed nations. Information available from Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (2004) categorised teachers into four classes as follows:
  - a. Class A – Holders of Ph. D in Education or Ph. D in any other field (PGDE inclusive).
  - b. Class B – Holders of Masters degree in Education or Masters degree in any other field (PGDE inclusive).
  - c. Class C – Holders of Bachelor's degree in Education or Bachelor's degree in any other field (PGDE inclusive).
  - d. Class D – Holders of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) or its equivalent.

Unfortunately, not all the institutions or organisations that employ the services of teachers have wholeheartedly complied with the directives of the TRCN which had taken effect as far back as 2006. Some schools still employ half-baked and unqualified teachers, thereby undermining the various efforts to professionalised teaching in Nigeria.

- ❖ *Poor Societal Perception of the Teaching Profession:* It is common knowledge that most potential undergraduates are more interested in studying for careers in the assumedly more prestigious professions, like Law, Medicine, and Engineering. Despite the fact that the government, over the past decade, had done her bid by upwardly reviewing the remuneration of teachers across the country, most people still feel that teaching lacks the lustre and glamour that surrounds other occupations like Law, Medicine, and Engineering. This mindset has lured graduates from institutes of education to seek for employment in other sectors of the economy. Durosaro (2006) cited in Akindutire and Ekundayo (2012) also bemoaned this malaise. He pointed out that the low status accorded to teachers in the country had gone a long way in discouraging students from enrolling at institutions of higher learning to be trained as teachers. Some of these students might have the requisite aptitudes to become great teachers.
- ❖ *Lack of Motivation:* No individual can give his or her all, if he or she is not properly motivated. Even when one possesses the inspiration to teach, lack of motivation in the job will always be detrimental to his ability to give his or her best as a teacher. Durosaro (2006) cited in Akindutire and Ekundayo (2012) considered motivation in the teaching profession to include better pay packages, improved conditions of service, as well as provision of bursary and scholarship awards to education students at all levels of education. It is not a secret that teachers in Nigeria earn far less than their peers in the more lucrative sectors of the economy like the oil and gas sector. Furthermore, most

scholarship schemes advertised on various media outlets are for students in the areas of the sciences and technology. The lack of provision of similar incentives to the students of education would exert a negative influence on the motivation of both teachers and teacher trainees.

- ❖ *Poor Policy Implementation:* Most policies are made to provide both short-term and long-term solutions to challenges in our educational sector. These policies remain mere statements if they are not duly implemented. One major challenge facing the availability of quality teachers in Nigeria is the inability of the relevant stakeholders in the educational sector to effectively follow through the implementation of various policies designed to better the lots of teachers. Anyakoha (1994), cited in Ogunyinka, Okeke and Adedoyin (2015), decried the fact that after painstaking efforts by knowledgeable planners to document certain policies based on future projections, there was little effort to translate those theoretical statements into practice. This has always been a problem with many public ventures in the country and it has gone a long way in impeding reasonable growth and development in our educational sector. Ogunyinka et al. (2015) also cited other factors such as underfunding of education by government and injudicious utilisation of available funds by implementation agencies as stumbling blocks hindering the smooth implementation of educational policies which ultimately result in poor quality resource delivery.

### **The Need for Improving Teacher Quality in the Nigerian Educational System**

There is a strong need for the improvement of teacher quality in the Nigerian educational system. In fact, a high premium has been placed on teacher education as evidenced in the documentation in the National Policy on Education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) had in that document stated that no educational system could rise above the quality of her teachers.

Daluba (2015) reasoned that teacher education would continue to be given a major emphasis in the Nigerian educational system in order for it to be meaningful because the educational system of a country could hardly be meaningful if the quality of teachers who operate it were deficient. Olelewe (2014) was also of the opinion that without high quality teachers, the goal of functional education could not be realised. According to him, teacher quality had a significant relationship with educational productivity which depended upon the professional knowledge and pedagogical skills possessed by the teacher. In a related development, Jusuf (2005) argued that high quality education was required to produce high quality human resources. This can, of course, not be achieved without the presence of high quality teachers.

In order to further justify the placement of high premium on teacher education, Arikawei and Benwari (2015: 49) stated:

*Professionalism of teaching and teacher development can be seen as a crucial factor for the attainment of goals, learning achievement, organization of programmes and the overall success of any*

*educational system. The bedrock of a dynamic educational system thus lies on the core of a devoted, knowledgeable, competent and a well-trained teacher in any given society. These qualities are well-appreciated and cherished as important factors that bring about the growth and advancement of societies in the developed countries like Britain, United States of America, France and some developing countries of the world.*

Arikawei & Benwari (2015), concluded that the continuous preparation and upgrading of teachers was a vital aspect in the quest for the nation's economic and technological development. They further quoted a group of authors who had asserted that the recognition of teacher preparation and upgrading was bound to promote the teaching profession to produce teachers who could function effectively as constructive, socioeconomic, moral, and spiritual change agents needed to promote goodwill, peace and progress, not only in Nigeria, but also in the world of the 21st century.

### **Strategies for Improving Teachers' Quality in Nigeria**

Having enumerated the various challenges facing improvement of teachers for qualitative teaching, it is also appropriate to discuss some of the things that could be done to improve the quality of teachers in Nigeria. These include:

1. *Boosting the Morale of Teachers:* Improving the morale of teachers would greatly enhance teachers job performance. According to Perumal (2011), teachers' morale had direct impact on instructional delivery, teacher effectiveness and leadership. This view is hinged on the premise that when teachers' morale is low, they tend to develop apathy and indifference in their attitude towards service delivery. The reverse is mostly the case when teachers' morale soars. To enhance the morale of teachers, it is important that the government and school proprietors, in the case of private schools, reviewed teachers' salaries upward to reflect prevailing socio-economic realities. Alams and Farid (2011) were of the opinion that such a move would reinforce the teachers' positive attitude to their work. In addition to improved remuneration, incentives, financial and otherwise, are also suggested as good strategies for improving teachers' morale.

Award of prizes and bonuses to hardworking teachers would also trigger a positive attitude to work amongst others. Allford (2008) found that teachers' morale could also be improved through providing good leadership in the school, empowering the teachers, and providing facilities and resources for teachers' professional development. Lester (2010) added that teachers morale can be enhanced through teachers' involvement in school decision making. She opined that encouraging and rewarding teachers who have spent a long time in the service would motivate them.

2. *Strict adherence to profesional standards:* The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) had stated in the *National Policy on Education* that the goals of

teacher education in the country included, among others, producing highly motivated, conscientious and efficient teachers, providing them with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment, and enhancing their commitment to the teaching profession. For the quality of Nigerian teachers to improve, our teachers must be exposed to global perspective instructional system, be well prepared and provided with ongoing professional development and appropriate support. All teachers should meet the standards of professional teaching.

3. *Applying the Hawthorne Effect*: The Hawthorne Effect has been described as the tendency for some people to work harder and perform better when they are being observed (Wikipedia, nd). It was named after a series of social experiments on the influence of physical conditions on productivity at Western Electric's Factory at Hawthorne, Chicago in the 1920's and 1930's (Cook, 1967). While it is not often ideal to perpetually hover around an employee, in this case a teacher, the Hawthorne Effect entails consistent observation of the teacher to enhance his productivity. Observing teachers, giving regular feedbacks, and letting them know that their actions and inactions are under scrutiny, according to the Hawthorne principle, helps eliminate lethargy and keeps the teachers on their toes as they strive to impress their superiors. It is important to note that for observation of teachers to lead to the desired improvement in the quality of service, there is the need for the teachers to be given feedback on a regular basis.
4. *Enhancing Public Perception of the Status of Teachers*: There is the need to reorientate the general public on the professional status of teachers and the associated prestige of the teaching profession. This could be done by assisting practicing teachers through seminars, workshops, in-service training programmes, counselling talks, and other appropriate means, to maintain an upright professional disposition at all times in order to restore dignity to their work. They should be groomed to behave with utter decorum and to desist from acts like succumbing to sorting from students as well as obtaining financial inducements from parents in order to perpetuate examination fraud, that would undermine their professional worth and cause the public to look down on teaching. Engaging in such obnoxious acts would portray the teaching profession in bad light and present it as beggarly to the watching public. They would create the impression that teachers were beggars, possessing low morality and lacking professional integrity. Hence, it is the opinion of the authors of this paper that if teachers were assisted to do some essential house-cleaning in this respect, they would significantly contribute to a more positive public attitude towards the teaching profession.

Furthermore, it is pertinent that the general public is made aware of the fact that the teaching profession is not exclusively reserved for paupers and individuals who have failed to gain employment into assumed more prestigious careers. This would in no small measure encourage young and bright minds to aspire to be teachers.S

5. *Providing Improved School/Classroom Climate*: Groups which achieve their goals efficiently, exhibit a high degree of cohesiveness, think well of their superiors, agree on set objectives, command some respect from their subordinates, among other benefits. The teaching profession would not be different in this regard. Teachers' quality can be boosted by creating a positive climate in their workplace. Rapti (2012) agreed with the notion that an improved school climate correlates positively with improved teacher output. She opined that teachers tend to push themselves hard to meet desired goals when the school environment is cordial and warm. Hoy and Miskel (2001) also asserted that a positive school environment affected the effectiveness of the teacher. In this regard, Rapti (2012) was of the opinion that school administrators and pioneers must ensure, among others, that i) adequate structures are put in place to reduce the incidence of overcrowded classes; ii) students' discipline must be a focal point of school policy; iii) adequate teaching aids must be provided to ensure that the teacher is fully equipped to carry out his/her duties.

### **Conclusions**

The educational sector is the most important among the various sectors in any nation. Hence, ensuring that teachers who constitute the primary agents of success in the sector put in their very best in the performance is not negotiable. Since an individual cannot offer what he does not have, it is the duty of the government and other employers of teachers to ensure that teachers are not only adequately qualified but also fully motivated to give in their best.

If the teachers are substandard, lazy, uninspired, and unmotivated, the educational sector in particular, and the entire nation in general, are doomed. However, there is the need for the standard and quality of education available to her students to be improved upon to meet up with those set by the more advanced nations if Nigeria must, alongside those other nations, attain sustainable development. This can only be achieved through making conscious efforts to entrench professionalism and produce a crop of teachers who are highly motivated in our educational system. These would, in no small measure, improve teacher quality, and consequently the quality of education available to students in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government and relevant stakeholders should ensure that recruitment of teachers is based purely on merit. Teaching should be exclusively reserved for people who are adequately trained and motivated to impart knowledge to others.
2. Adequate supervision of teachers should be put in place. Truancy and apathy among teachers should be frowned at. Teachers should be closely and adequately monitored to ensure that they desist from practices that could jeopardise their jobs.
3. The remuneration of teachers should be reviewed upward.

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