PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN AFRICA:  
A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

There is now a serious public outcry concerning the crisis in Nigerian education. National Conferences, Seminars and Workshops have bemoaned the multifaceted cause of this “falling standards” of education. There has been frantic search for solutions to the poor standard of teaching schools in the country. Some stakeholders have continued to blame teachers for the appalling performance of students in examinations. Across some states of the federation, where education summits were organized, experts strongly recommended re-training programs for both public and private school teachers. It is in recognition of this, that the Federal Government has directed the National Teachers Institute (NTI) to re-train teachers in Nigeria. In this era of globalization, it is imperative that teachers are adequately prepared to function effectively in a challenging global environment. The challenges of globalization demands teachers who are competent, effective, and dynamic in their orientation. This paper examined the concepts of teachers’ education; establishment of Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN); models of continuing professional development; The National Teachers Institute (NTI) and retraining of teachers under the Millennium Development Goals Projects (MDGs). The study concluded that continuous professional development of teachers would definitely bring a positive change into Nigerian educational system that would produce good, well seasoned and great leaders of tomorrow.

Keywords: Professional development of teachers, Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN); Millennium Development Goals Project (MDGs) initial training; Nigerian educational system.

Introduction

A teacher is one certified to engage in interactions with learners for the purpose of effecting a change in their behaviours. On the other hand, a teacher assumes different capacities such as educator, instructor, tutor, lecturer and professor. Teachers’ at all levels of the educational system are very important in the overall development of any nation. According to Anho (2011), teachers’ education is the process which nurtures prospective teachers and updates qualified teachers’ knowledge and skills in the form of continuous professional development. Teachers’ education revolves around the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behavior and skills required in the performance of effective duties in the classrooms, and in other social gatherings including churches. Teachers’ education is often divided into three stages namely:

(a) Initial teacher training;
(b) The induction process involving the training and supports of the trainees during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school; and
(c) Teacher development or continuing performing development and intensive process for practicing teachers.

According to Anho (2011), the above processes and stages of professional development of teachers constitute the concept of “teacher education”. The Nigerian educational system is in a state of confusion and disarray as a result of inconsistencies, non-implementation of education policies, corruption perpetrated by the stakeholders. There is now a serious outcry by all and sundry to re-examine and appraise the Nigerian educational system in line with current trend. The Federal Ministry of Education is currently at the forefront of efforts at reforming the education system.

The Concept of Professional Development for Teachers’

Professional development in a broad sense refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. More specifically, “teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching
systematically’ (Glatthom, 1995). Professional development includes formal experience (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc.) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to academic discipline, etc.) (Ganser, 2000).

A teacher is conceived of as a reflective practitioner, someone who enters the profession with a certain knowledge base, and who will acquire new knowledge and experience based on the prior knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). In so doing, the role of professional development is to aid teachers in building new pedagogical theories and practices and to help them develop their expertise in the field (Dodds, 2001).

Teachers’ professional development has two main phases: initial preparation and continuing professional development. Initial teacher training most often takes the form of full-time residential pre-service programmes in teachers’ colleges or universities. Initially training may also be available to serving unqualified teachers through distance education, ‘out-of-school’ programmes during vacations or on release from schools for extended periods of time. The professional components of initial teacher training programmes can be either consecutive or concurrent with academic subject.

Continuing professional development of teachers comes from various sources and agencies, and in various forms: orientating teachers to curriculum or examination changes, upgrading qualification levels, donor-funded projects, professional teachers’ associations in developing subject teaching (e.g. Science Teachers’ Association of Nigeria ‘STAN’), or sometimes teachers’ unions, school based improvement initiatives, or individual teachers working to improve their qualifications, career prospects or teaching skills. Continuing professional development may be regarded as all forms of ‘in service’, ‘continuing education’, ‘on- the –job-training’, ‘workshop’, ‘post-qualification courses’ etc. whether formal or informal, structured or unstructured, teacher-initiated or system-initiated, accredited or not (Mohammed, 2006).

Establishment of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN)

The establishment of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in 1993 was a big boost to the status of societies which expect a great deal from their educational systems. New goals are being continuously set e.g. gender party by 2005, universal basic education by 2015; life long learning; life skills education; HIV/AIDS education; competency in the use of ICT. As key agents in these changes, teachers face high expectations, new roles and demands. They need new skills. knowledge and new roles which they can get through Continuous Professional Development Programmes (CPDP).

One of the key elements of teacher quality is the provision of adequate opportunities for personal growth and professional development. Indeed, the continuing professional development of teachers ought to be an issue of central concern to all those who care about the quality of tuition in schools. Research on teacher education has consistently stressed the need to regularly provide opportunities for teachers to improve their knowledge of the subject matter they teach and the teaching skills they learned in the pre-service courses they attended. This is based on the recognition of the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world, such that whatever knowledge and skills teachers acquired in their pre-service training becomes stale very fast as new challenges and realities emerge in the socio-economic and political environments (Mohammed, 2006).

Research has indicated some identifiable stages in the process of becoming a teacher. For example, there is the five stage model of a novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer, and expert teacher. It is obvious that the journey from being a novice teacher to becoming an expert will be facilitated, quickened and made less stressful by planned continuing professional development programs (Robinson and Latchem, 2003). There is shifting global paradigm in the concept of teaching. The emphasis is on students-as-learners in the classroom as learning places, where learning requires the active participation of the learners, taps into individual and social processes, assume students to be constructors (as well as recipients) of knowledge, and ultimately views teachers as curriculum-makers (Grimmet and Neufeld, 1994).

These pedagogical changes, demand new roles for the teachers on the field. It is continuing professional development programmes that can take the new skills to the teacher. Opportunities for continuing professional development must be created to re-skill the potential teacher, re-motivate the
interested teacher, retrain the dedicated teacher and retain the practicing teachers teaching in the country (Jegede, 2004). According to Akuezuilo and Akudolu (2006), teaching in the country was the fulfillment of an important criteria required for teaching to get the status of a profession. The TRCN since its establishment has been working relentlessly to uphold the teaching profession in the country. Some prominent actions of the TRCN are:

(a) Launching of campaign for the registration of teachers;
(b) Initiating awareness and organizing continuous training and professional development programmes for teachers;
(c) Holding regular and consultations with stakeholder and programmed partner.

Teachers are responding favorably to the activities of the TRCN. For instance, as at early 2005, more than five hundred thousand teachers have been registered. The council has organized many continuous training and development activities to enhance the instructional skills of teachers. As noted by the TRCN (2006:2), the themes for this past Continuous Professional Development Programs (CPDP) are:

- Mathematics and Sciences.
- Technology and Creative Arts
- Teaching in English Language
- Learner-Friendly Strategies
- The Management of Large Classes
- Gender and Child Rights Protection
- Eradication of Examination Malpractices
- HIV/AIDS Prevention and Management
- Drug Abuse and Cultism
- Professionalization of Teaching

The aim of these CPDP is to enhance teachers’ professional competencies. Akuezuilo and Akudolu (2006) findings also revealed that the TRCN has made the Mandatory Continuous Professional Education (MCPE) part of the requirements for the renewal of teachers’ practicing licenses. The aim of the TRCN is to avail every teacher the opportunity for continuous development so as to remain relevant as a professional in the present information age. One mark of the information age is that developments in information technology occur at breath taking speed which results in the inundation of knowledge. The consequence is that new knowledge is continuously making existing knowledge obsolete. The implication is that the knowledge acquired in schools is no longer enough for any professional who wants to be useful and effective in his or her profession. This underscores the need for the MCPE to make all teachers still relevant to the profession.

Models of Continuing Professional Development

Various models for teachers’ professional development have emerged. According to Mohammed (2006), research has indicated two most commonly used models in Nigeria: the workshop model and the school-based teacher professional support model. The workshop model entails drawing participants out of their schools to a venue where they are exposed by experts to a core of information and skills. The workshop may be short or long-term. The nature of skills and processes to be acquired also vary. This is the most common form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model in Nigeria. The school-based teacher professional support and mentoring model is an alternative strategy for in-service training of teachers. Here, pupils, teachers, supervisors and facilitators are involved collaboratively in carrying out a series of classroom/school-based activities that will help the teacher to improve. The teacher gets professional support from facilitators and supervisors who serve as mentors. Activities may include direct classroom support by the facilitators and supervisors; staff meetings within the school and involving head-teachers and the participating teachers; demonstration lessons by teacher-educators or mentors; visits to the school by mentors (if external).

Erant (1994) suggests that any framework for promoting and facilitating professional learning should take into account the following:

- an appropriate combination of learning settings (on-the-job, near the job, home, library, course etc.);
The National Teachers’ Institute

The National Teachers’ Institute was mandated by Act No 7 of 1978 to organize programs for upgrading and updating practicing teachers at all levels, a task, which it has been engaged in since its establishment.

In Nigeria, unlike other countries, the re-training of teachers has not received the desired attention from Local, State and Federal Government. There has not been any systematic attempt to update regularly the knowledge and skills of teachers in the light of the changes in curriculum and the wider society. This neglect has in turn affected the quality of teaching in schools. It is in recognition of this that the Federal Government has under the Millennium Development Goals Project, directed the institute to retrain teachers in Nigeria.

The National Teachers’ Institute is fully committed to capacity building for primary and secondary school teachers as demonstrated by the range of retraining programs. Apart from the upgrading courses that the institute has been implementing for many years (TCII, NCE and PTTP), the institute introduced proficiency Diploma Courses in Early Childhood Education, Guidance and Counseling, School Supervision and Inspection, and the Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Indeed, the institute believes that an effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education Curriculum must begin with strengthening the capacity of existing teaching force through in-service training and re-training that will:

- disseminate innovative practical skills that will enhance the teachers’ effectiveness and thereby enhance the quality of learning;
- update the teachers’ knowledge of subject matter;
- contribute to the development of positive attitudes and self-concept by the teachers; and
- enable teachers to make pupils perceive learning as an interesting pleasant activity that promotes self-understanding, inquiry and critical thinking.

In 2002, the institute drew a five-year master plan on the professional development of teachers (2002-2006). The components of the plan are:

- training workshops on teaching the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Primary Science and Social Studies;
- training workshops on improvisation and utilization of instructional materials;
- training workshops on school based assessment;
- training workshops on improvisation and utilization of instructional materials; and
- distribution of multimedia learning packages (audio, video, print) on innovative teaching methods that provide on-the-job professional support for teachers, disseminate information on preventive education especially malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS (Mohammed, 2006).

Retraining of Teachers under the Millennium Development Goals Project (MDGs)

One continuing professional development project that has posed the greatest challenge to the institute is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) project. In terms of scope, funding, impact and logistics, it surpasses all previous CPD interventions by the Institute. It provided the institute an opportunity to use the accumulated expertise on a bigger national scale. The MDGs are a set of eight time-bound goals agreed to in 2000 at the General Assembly of United Nations in New York, where Nigeria was one of those countries that signed the declaration that set the target date of 2015. The goals range from poverty reduction, primary education, gender issues, child and maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria, environmental water and sanitation, debt, trade and aids. All the eight MDGs are interrelated and education is a cross-cutting issue without which the goals would not be attained (Mohammed, 2006).
To this end, the President of Nigeria directed that all gains from the Debt Relief grant from the Paris Club should be invested in MDGs related projects. The NTI was then mandated to implement a capacity of building programme for primary school teachers under the MDGs project for 2006. Almost all the primary school teachers had been trained through the MDGs between 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced 9-year Basic Educational Curricula for Primaries 1-6 and Junior Secondary School (JSS 1-3).

The National Teachers’ Institute in collaboration with the Teacher Education in Sub-Sahara Africa (TESSA) programme, at the Open University, U.K. have provided support for the institute by integrating some sessions of the TESSA modules into the manuals for the retraining of primary and secondary school teachers in Nigeria. The objectives of the programme are to:

- disseminate practical skills that will enhance the teacher effectiveness and promote greater mastery of the subject matter by pupils;
- update the teachers knowledge of subject matter;
- contribute to the development of positive self-concept and attribute towards the teaching profession; and
- enable teachers to make pupils to perceive learning as an interesting and pleasant activity that promotes the development of self-understanding, inquiry and critical thinking skills.

The training focused on the innovative techniques of teaching the four core subjects of English Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies including School-Based Assessment and Improvisation of Instructional Materials. The training programmes have been well monitored by various agencies such as National University Commission (NUC), Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), National Assembly, Federal Inspectorate and Non-Government Organizations, the press and the public. Evaluation checklists and daily exit cards were administered on the participants to elicit feedback (Mohammed, 2006).

Challenges of Professional Development for Teachers in Nigeria

- Attitudinal problems: Despite the activities embarked upon by the Local, State and Federal Government of Nigeria to expose teachers to frequent training and re-training, there are sizeable number of teachers who are resistant to change due to their negative attitudes to introduce new innovations and techniques to teach their students, which could lead to students failure.
- The weak correlation between school enrolments and the number of teachers employed in each school is the most obvious indicator of poor deployment. Variations in pupil – teacher ratio between schools are typically very large in Nigeria, they range from 50 to 70 pupils to one teacher (Fakoya, 2009).
- Teachers’ inability to teach with Information and Communications Technology (ICT): Nigerian teachers are yet to be developed professionally of ICT skills, competencies and capabilities which are required for the effective implementation of ICT education. With this problem, Nigeria as a country cannot join the global competition of the information super highway.
- Teachers rarely enjoy the same work environment as other professions. The government schools are with poor furniture for students and teachers, dilapidated staff rooms and classrooms; and these could inhibit teaching-learning process.
- Nigerian teachers do not receive good salaries as other professionals do. As a result, commitment to the growth of the profession is affected.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Continuous professional development of teachers would definitely bring a positive change into Nigerian educational system, that would produce good, well seasoned and great leaders of tomorrow.

- Teacher training institutions should be strengthened to adequately respond to teachers’ needs and demands.
- Opportunities for continuing professional development of teachers should be created and exploited to the maximum.
More effort to be geared towards developing a positive professional attitude among teachers. Such attitude includes having high regards for the profession, upholding the teachers' code of conduct, desisting from any action that can tarnish the image of the profession.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) should be effectively utilized by teachers to facilitate learning and teaching. The development of ICT literacy is so important that the European Commission (2003:19) affirmed that “it was the first step in professional development”. Teachers should be well grounded in the use of ICT so that they would be able to effectively, confidently and competently use ICT to achieve instructional goals.

The state and federal government should give upward review of teachers' remuneration package that would motivate them to give their best to students. Adequate incentives and promotions should be given to teachers when due.

Work environment should be suitable and convenient for teachers and this could be done by providing beautiful offices, good and comfortable chairs and tables, and also equip with adequate facilities by the agencies of education, stakeholders of education and the school authority.

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