Problems of Teacher Education for Primary Schools in Nigeria: Beyond Curriculum Design and Implementation

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Abstract

Primary education is the core of development and progress in modern societies. However the quality of teachers who are to ensure the realization of the aspirations we hold for our children may depend greatly on the quality of their entry qualification. This study therefore investigated the entry qualifications, the mode of entry into and the reasons why students enroll in Colleges of Education. A questionnaire developed and validated by the investigator was used along with oral interview to collect data. In all 1,200 student teachers cutting across all the schools and levels in the selected colleges were involved in the study. The findings showed that majority of the student teachers do not possess five O/L credits or equivalents which is the minimum entry requirement for university education and that only a few of them really have the genuine desire to become teachers. Recommendations are made on how to improve on the quality of entrants into the Colleges of Education and the teaching profession generally in Nigeria.

Introduction

Education has become one of the most powerful weapons known for reducing poverty and inequality in modern societies. It is also used for laying the foundation for a sustainable growth and development of any nation. Primary education in particular is the level of education that develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. In other words, it helps to eradicate illiteracy, which is one of the strongest predictors of poverty (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotamalala 2003).

Thus, Primary education is the only level of education that is available everywhere in both the developed and the developing countries as well as in urban and rural areas (Akinbote, Oduolowu & Lawal 2001). This explains why primary education is the largest sub-sector of any education system and offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of the young ones (UNESCO 2001).

In realization of the fact that unequal access to educational opportunity is one of the strongest correlates of social inequality, the Federal Government of Nigeria has embarked on a massive expansion of access to primary education. The 1976 UPE and the current UBE programmes were aimed at making basic education accessible to all children of school age irrespective of their social, economic, cultural or geographical backgrounds. As one should
expect, there was a massive expansion of primary education in Nigeria. For example, there was an increase in the number of primary schools from 14,902 in 1970 to 30,726 in 1976 with enrolment figures of 4.8 million and 11.6 million respectively. In the 2001/2002 session, the number of primary schools rose to 45,270 with an enrolment of 19.3 million (TRCN2005, FME 1996).

However, the quality of primary education has not kept abreast of the expansion in enrolment. Although, this according to UNESCO (2001) continues to be a global concern, yet it is the general belief that the competence of teachers is central to the education of children. In a way, what constitutes competence in teaching is intimately connected with the type of teacher education programmes available for preparing school teachers. Therefore one of the problems of teacher education for primary schools in Nigeria is the poor quality of teachers produced from the Teachers’ Colleges (Taiwo 1982).

Akinbote (2000) has attributed the poor quality of products of the Teachers Colleges among other things to the quality of students admitted into the colleges. However, the lowering of the admission requirements into the colleges for whatever reasons, has not only affected the quality of the products of the colleges but also the image and prestige of the teaching profession (Akinbote, 1999). This observation agrees with the assertion of Liberman cited in Akinbote (1999) that the quality of the entry qualifications of recruits into a profession is bound to affect not only their efficiency and effectiveness but also the prestige of the profession.

In an attempt to raise the quality of primary school teachers, the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) has now become the minimum teaching qualification in the country. This implies that no primary school teacher in Nigeria is expected to possess a teaching qualification lower than the NCE. This could be regarded as a bold attempt at improving the quality of teachers who will be able to help us achieve the aspirations we hold for our children. In order to achieve this, the number of Colleges of Education has risen from only six in 1976 to about 72 presently (Akinbote, 1999). This has led to a mass production of NCE teachers for both the primary and the junior secondary levels of education. The numbers of primary school teachers has risen from 406,693 in 1988 to 734,142 in 2002 with NCE teachers numbering 14,671 and 20,642 respectively.

There is probably no other profession that has been scorned more than teaching in Nigeria. Adeleke, (1999) reported in her study of student teachers attitude to teaching that 87% of undergraduate student teachers in the Faculty of Education in one of the first generation Universities would not like to teach at the primary school level. Similarly, she found out that among those who would like to teach at all, 88% would not like to remain in teaching for a long time. If this happens among Education students, one can imagine what will happen among students in other Faculties.

Since one of the identified causes of the poor quality of products of the Colleges of Education is the low entry qualification (Akinbote, 2000), it has become necessary to further investigate it. Specifically, this study investigated the entry qualifications, the mode of entry and reasons why some Nigerian students enroll in Colleges of Education. The following questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the entry qualifications of Nigerian College of Education Students?
2. What is the mode of entry into the Colleges of Education in Nigeria?
3. Why do students enroll in Colleges of Education in Nigeria?

Methodology
This is a sample survey study in which the questionnaire and oral interview were the major means of data collection.

Population/Sample

The population for the study consisted of student teachers in Colleges of Education in the Six South Western States of Nigeria. Seven out of the thirteen (13) Colleges of Education in the zone were purposefully selected (3 Federal, 3 states and 1 privately owned) Colleges of Education were involved in the study. All the colleges selected have Departments of Primary Education Studies (PES) and have been producing teachers for at least five years. In all, 1200 students that cut across all levels and various departments were involved in the study.

Instruments

The instrument used in the study, College of Education students Questionnaire, was developed and validated by the investigator. The questionnaire consisted of two sections Personal information such as name of institution, department, gender, entry qualification, mode of entry/admission into the college. Section B – consisted of reasons why they have chosen the College of Education.

The draft questionnaire was given to the experienced teacher educators in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan and three Senior Lectures in the Department of Primary Education studies from three Colleges of Education, which were not involved in the study. They were asked to critically examine the instrument with particular reference to its relevance and adequacy for collecting the necessary information from the respondents. Their suggestions led to some modifications before draft copies were produced for the pilot study.

Procedure

The pilot study was done for the trial testing of the instrument. This was personally done by the investigator in one of the Colleges, which was not used for the main study. One hundred and twenty students cutting across all the levels – 100 to 300 levels were used. Only those who were met in their lecture halls at the time of the visit were given the instrument to complete on the spot. This was with the cooperation of the lecturers. The investigator also had the opportunity of having an oral interview with some of the respondents on their perception of teaching and why they came to the colleges. The necessary adjustments were made before the final copies used for the main study were produced.

The main study was carried out with three-research assistants who were all higher degree students in the investigators department. They were given the necessary instructions on how to administer the instruments to the respondents. They were then assigned to the colleges – two colleges to each of them while the investigator handled one college.

With the permission of the Deputy Provosts of the colleges and the cooperation of Deans of Education, Heads of Departments and lecturers, there was no problem in administering the instruments to the subjects. All the levels (100, 200 and 300) students were involved in the exercise, which cut across disciplines. The General Education lecture periods where students from various Departments were present were used. In some cases, the first 100, or less students met in the lecture halls were given the questionnaires to
complete on the spot. In all 1,200 questionnaires were properly completed and found useful. The data collection lasted two weeks.

Data Analysis

The investigator using frequency counts and percentage did the data analysis. The results are presented in Tables 1-3.

A Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade II</th>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>SSCE/GCE/OL</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of subjects</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>86.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1200 100

B No of Credits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Credits</th>
<th>3-4 Credits</th>
<th>5 and above</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>44.60</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1200 100.00

C Mode of Entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAMB</th>
<th>Pre-NCE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>65.75</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1200 100.00

Table 1: Distribution of subjects by Qualification, and mode of Entry N = 120

Table I shows that the Senior Secondary School Certificate/GCE O/L candidates constituted the highest number of students, 1035 (86.25%) in the Colleges of Education sampled. Similarly majority of the students in the colleges, 535 (44.60%) have between 3-4 SSCE/GCE O/L papers or equivalents, Next to this category are those with between one and three papers 372 (31.00%) while those with 5 credits and above are the lowest (24%).

Table 2: Reasons for Enrolling in College of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for enrolling in a college of Education</th>
<th>No of students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Personal desire to become a teacher</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Just to use the college as a stepping stone</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Because there is no other institution that could offer me admission</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>43.75</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 To satisfy the wish of my parents</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 As a result of Encouragement from friends</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 2, it could be seen that majority of the student teachers 525 (43.75%) in Colleges of Education are there because of the simple fact that no other institutions offered them admission. The second most important reason is that they want to use the colleges as a stepping-stone to other institutions 372 (31.0%). On the other hand only 150 (12.5%) are in the Colleges of Education as a result of their personal desire to become teachers. Other reasons are as a result of encouragement from friends 108 (9.41%) and to satisfy the parents 45 (3.75%).

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Question 1
What are the entry qualifications of College of Education students?

As revealed in Table I, SSCE? GCE/ O/L candidates totaling 1,035 (86.25%) were the highest followed by Grade II, 117 (9.75%) and Technical, 48 (4%) respectively. Similarly, only 293 (24.0%) of the respondents had five credits and above at the GCE O/L and equivalents. This means that the majority 907 (762) of them are not qualified for university admission. The original plan of the Colleges of Education at inception was to draw their clientele from among the ‘good products’ of secondary schools and Grade II Teachers Colleges (Adesina cited in Akinbote 1999)

By good products here, we would take it to mean those with five credits and above at a sitting including English Language. Therefore, it could be inferred from the above figures that majority of the entrants into the Teacher Education Programme for primary education are not good enough for university admission.

Question 2
What is the mode of entry into the colleges?

As revealed in Table 1, majority of the students came in through JAMB, 789 (65.75%) while the remaining 34.25% came in through the pre-N.C.E programme. That majority came in through JAMB however does not imply they are all good materials. This is because some of the colleges in an attempt to increase their enrolment figures sometimes admit candidates who score as low as 100 marks or even lower in some special subject areas such as the sciences and vocational/Technical Education at the JAMB Examination (Akinbote 2001). This is in addition to the fact that majority of them had less than five credits at the GCE O/L.

Question 3
Why do student teachers enroll in Colleges of Education?

Table 2 has revealed that 525 (43.75%) of the student teachers found their ways into the Colleges of Education because there were no other institutions that could offer them admission. On the other hand only 150 (12.50%) came in as a result of their personal desire to become teachers. In other words as many as 87.5% of the student teachers in the colleges sampled are reluctant or not good enough for other institutions.

Implications of Findings
The implications of the findings for teaching and learning at the primary schools are many. The finding that only 24% of the student teachers had five credits and above implies that the original plan to have only the good products of our secondary schools admitted into the colleges has not been met. We must not forget that unless many of the best brains can be attracted into teaching to help in the education process, the future will promise nothing but retrogression and disaster (Lewis cited in Akinbote 1999).

The disaster is almost here now as majority of the products of our primary schools are found to be neither sufficiently literate nor numerate to be useful to themselves and the society (Yoloye 1998). A Provost of one of the Colleges of Education was reported recently to have openly decried at a graduation ceremony the poor quality of students in his college who could neither read nor write well.

Thus, since those that are admitted are of low academic quality, it means they may invariably turn out to become low quality teachers who may not be able to provide the necessary academic leadership to their pupils. No system of education can use rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004). Similarly, the finding that only 150 (12.5%) of the student teachers were in the Colleges of Education as a result of their personal desire to become teachers means a lot. In the first place, it means that the majority of students in the Colleges of Education are the left over, the reluctant and the good for nothing-young men and women who are only out to earn a living out of teaching. Even the good ones, who are probably the 31% who want to use the colleges as a stepping-stone may not remain long in teaching as reported by Adeleke (1999).

There is a popular saying that, as is the school so is the society, and as is the teacher so is the school (Ukeje 1996) and no system of education can rise above the quality of its teachers. This implies that the teacher is the most important manpower needed to develop other manpower in any society. The poor quality of teachers in our schools and invariably the poor quality of products of our schools in recent years could be traced to the quality of entrants into the teacher education programmes. There has thus been some agitations on the need to raise the entry requirements into the Colleges of Education so as to improve not only the quality and output of the products of the colleges but also the image of the teaching profession. According to Liberman, cited in Akinbote (1999) the quality of the entry qualifications of recruits into a profession often affects not only their efficiency and effectiveness but also the prestige of the profession.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary school years are very important years in a child’s intellectual and all around development. Therefore all primary school teachers should be intellectually good enough to teach the school children with diverse interests, and capabilities. The intellectual capability of the entrants into the teachers colleges could thus became a major factor in their ability to profit from whatever training programme they may be exposed to in the colleges. It is one thing to have good programmes for teacher education; it is another thing to have the right caliber of people who can profit from such programmes admitted.

One important step in having high quality teachers is the recruitment of good secondary school products into our teacher education programmes particularly at the Colleges of Education. Akinbote (1999) has suggested the upward review of admission requirements into the Colleges of Education. This is to ensure that only the good ones come into the teaching profession. In order to encourage the good ones to go in for the teacher education programme for primary schools, the following recommendations are made:
• That in addition to raising the admission requirements to five credits at SSCE/O/Level, or equivalents, there should be oral and written interview for the prospective candidates into the Colleges of Education to ensure that only those who are both mentally and emotionally suitable for teaching are admitted.

• Special scholarship/Bursary awards should be made available for such good candidates who wish to specialize in primary education. This should cover tuition, books and accommodation for the duration of the programme in order to encourage the good candidates to come in.

• Appointment to teach at the primary school level should be preceded by both oral and written interview to really ensure that only the good and willing teachers are recruited to teach the young ones. In addition to this, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria must license the individual before being offered a teaching appointment.

Nigeria needs to ensure not only 100% enrolment, retention and completion rate by 2015 at the primary school level. We should also ensure that the pupils are sufficiently literate and numerate to be useful to themselves and the society. This can only be possible when we have competent and confident teachers with a clear sense of mission and the capacity to learn. It is not possible to reform or introduce any education programme without taking teachers into greater consideration.

Therefore our teacher education programmes for primary education must be repositioned to admit only people who can help the young learners take greater ownership of their own learning. A reluctant, left over, not good for anything or half baked teachers will not take us to the promised land. The great aspirations we hold for our children and the future of the country will only be made possible with competent, effective and dedicated teachers. The present NCE teacher education programme for primary education is good enough if only the right calibers of people are brought in. In other words, the problem of teacher education for primary schools in Nigeria is not that of curriculum design and implementation but that of recruitment into the programme.

This study was limited to the use of oral interviews and questionnaire; there may be need therefore for a richer and fuller qualitative study over a longer period of time. This will allow for a link of how entry qualifications affect participant’s success in training and effectiveness in teaching after their course.

References


