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QUALITY TEACHER EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION IN NIGERIA

R. T. LAWAL

Department of Educational Foundations, Kwara State College of Education, Oro.
Tel.: 08056682459,

A. J. OLANIYI

Department of Arts Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
Email: jubab83@gmail.com Tel.: 08038590342

&

S. B. ABOLADE

Department of Arts Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
Email: Abolade2010@yahoo.com Tel.: 08031812100

Abstract

The Nigerian society and her educational system seem to be witnessing various kinds of decay. Hence there is the need to arrest this ugly situation through education and is why the Federal Government has thus adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting economic, political, social, cultural and technological advancement in any society. To attain this, the roles of the teacher can never be underestimated; this is because the quality of education depends greatly on the professional quality of the teacher. It is in this connection that, the researchers believe that social reconstruction which means the creation of a new social order can be used to improve the quality of teacher education programme in Nigeria. Therefore, the critical questions addressed by these researchers are: Why quality teacher education for social reconstruction? Whose responsibility is it to bring about social reconstruction and quality teacher education? The focus of this paper is to examine how quality teacher education programme could assist in attaining viable social reconstruction in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommended that teachers should, through the teaching of cultural activities, imbibe the indigenous practices for healing and acknowledging wrong doing.

Keywords: Education, quality education, teacher education, and social reconstruction

Introduction

Education is a tool for national transformation and social reconstruction. This is why the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Policy on Education (2013) adopted education as an instrument par excellence for social development and national integration. Education is a pivot on which other development indices such as: social, economic, political and religion revolve. The effectiveness and efficiency of any educational system does not depend entirely on adequate funding but on a host of other factors such as the quality of teachers, curriculum, the philosophy, the policy and environment of the learners. The quality of teachers therefore can never be underestimated as it goes a long way to affect human resources development and other sectors of the economy. Consequently, the thrust of this paper is to examine the concept of education, quality education, teacher education and social reconstruction, and how quality teacher education could be used for social reconstruction in Nigeria. Conclusion and recommendations are also presented.

Concept of Education

The concept of education is a nebulous term as it has a variety of definitions. Okafor (1988) viewed education as the process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities, and his maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve these by his perfect self-fulfillment inclinations. Okafor stressed further that education involves a processes of acculturation which gives respect to the individual worth of the learner. It demonstrates clearly that the learner, as an individual, has inputs in what he or she learns. Hence, Okafor's definition recognized an individual as one who is born with certain potentials and that the task of education is to develop such inborn capabilities. Durkheim (1964) described education as the influence exercised by adult generation on those that are not yet, ready for social life. Its subject is to arouse and develop in the child a number of physical, intellectual and moral qualities which are demanded of him by the special milieu for which he is specifically-destined. It is the systematic socialization of the young to be useful to themselves and the entire spectrum of the society.

From the above definitions, education could be described as a process of transmitting what the society considers to be valuable to the individual and the society as a whole. It could further be explained as a process of fostering the development of individuals and the improvement of their innate capabilities and potentials. It should be noted however, that the mode of transmission of knowledge should adhere strictly to the cultural practice of the society, if it will be

wholeheartedly embraced. All these are ingredients for societal reconstruction and development.

Concept of Quality Education

The quality of education of any nation determines to a great extent, the quality of her citizens. Thus, quality education is viewed as the cornerstone on which effective nation building rests. Quality education discovers the human potentials needed for the building of a virile and resourceful nation. It equally places citizens of a nation appropriately based on their intellectual abilities. Nwude (2003) explained quality education in relation to its value in a society thus:

Quality education is very vital in every human existence and societal development. It facilitates the rate of development and increases the standard of living paving way for national ability. An educated society is wealthy because when a man acquires quality education, he becomes a freethinker and creator of wealth who understands the society he lives in better and becomes more useful in it.

To some educationists, quality connotes excellence or attainment of standard (Ekhuagere, 2005, Aworeh, 2005). The Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP, 2002) described quality as a 'function of how much value has been added to the abilities of learner irrespective of their background and characteristics' Other scholars in education believe that quality education should be comprehensive, touching on all relevant aspects of education, and holistically-related. Obanya (2002, 2007), argued that quality in education should pervade all the dimensions of a system be it input, process or output. He contended that the quality of the output should be taken seriously because the amount of the input and process factors impact directly on it.

Quality in education covers every area of education, hence it should not be limited to output alone but the degree of excellence should be assessed. Input, in education includes what students bring into the learning context in terms of their family background, socio-economic characteristics and the provision of materials and human resources. Quality education therefore should embrace the way the policy framework and curriculum are drawn up and readily made available to schools. Having discussed the concept of quality education, what then is teacher education?

Teacher Education

The need for well qualified teachers in Nigeria has gained pre-eminence because the teacher is considered as a means of providing learners with necessary

skills and knowledge needed to adequately carry out their teaching activities as well as for professional growth. Teacher education enhances the skill of the teacher in his classroom teaching and learning situation. The National Policy on Education (2013) stated that teacher education is designed to produce highly-motivated, sensitive, conscientious and successful classroom teachers who will teach students effectively and professionally towards a better educational achievement. Teacher education and the teacher are the critical factors in the education sector of national planning. The quality of a teacher determines, to a great extent, the quality of the output and the level of national development.

The National Policy on Education (2013) stated further that teacher education programme in Nigeria will continue to be given a major emphasis in all aspects of our national educational planning, because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Therefore, teacher education demands skills and methodologies, which can be utilized in dealing with pedagogical problems encountered in teaching and learning situations.

Bamisaye (2007) described teacher education as an academic programme for preparing teachers for professional competencies both within and outside the classroom. In discussing the mission for the preparation of future teachers for Nigeria educational system, Okebukola (1992) suggested that:

Training activities geared specially to preparing teachers need to contemplate not only instruction on the curriculum and specific teaching procedures, but more importantly on the development of the ability to reason "pedagogically" on the part of students in order to convert substantive knowledge into teachable knowledge and experiment in the classroom.

Unfortunately in Nigeria there are worrisome evidences of corruption in the larger society that constitute the real learning environment wherein the curriculum content of teacher education takes place (Awokoya 1980, Clinton 2009, Gowon 2011 a, Gowon 2011 b). It follows that the learning environment depletes the quality of good, balanced and specialized education that teachers in training at various levels and in various areas of specialization receive. Thus for good quality teacher education in Nigeria the societal environment within which the education takes place needs to be drastically improved upon.

While focusing on ensuring quality in teacher production in Nigeria Lassa (1998) submitted that, by international convention, the major factors that determine standards in teacher education are the selection of entrants into the teaching profession, the programme of study and factors related to teacher-preparation and

development.

Similarly, Ruwa (2013) suggested that a high standard of teacher education should start with placing a high value on the criteria guiding the selection of those most likely to be excellent teachers. It is therefore clear that no adequate training can take place without competent teachers to handle the training programme. The teacher, more than any other professional group, influences the lives of the populace in the nation and their future endeavours.

In the same vein, Ukeje (1995) submitted that teaching is the most vital and strategic profession for national development. Without teachers there can be no good doctors, nurses, pharmacists, engineers, lawyers, accountants. Compared to other professions, the mistake of teachers has more devastating effects on the learners and the nation than the mistakes of other professionals.

Features of Quality Teacher Education

Education is regarded as the key to the development of both human and natural resources of any nation and for education to be meaningful and achieve its aims of social reconstruction and change; it must be quantitative and qualitative in all its ramifications. Awokoya (1981) opined that quality education is that education which is relevant and adapted to the vast changing needs of the community. Quality education requires all the ingredients of technological take-off that are identified, integrated and stimulated in the education process. For the realization of quality teacher education, the following must be present: highly-motivated and efficient classroom teachers who will demonstrate sound knowledge of the principles and practice of education as well as sufficient information, communication, and technological skills.

Furthermore, such teachers must possess innovative abilities and demonstrate knowledge of relevant instructional materials, self-discipline, transparency and exemplary attributes to be able to reconstruct the social ills ravaging our society. What then is social reconstruction?

Concept of Social Reconstruction

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1991) described reconstruction as situations of reconstruction after conflict or natural disaster. There is an opportunity to rebuild the education system to avoid the weaknesses and faults of the past and to promote social harmony, individual fulfillment and sustainable national development.

It further stated that sustainable national development provide the opportunity to reconceptualize curriculum and methodology over the longer term, through

curriculum development and work drawn on national professionals and through strengthening of systems in the training of in-service and pre-service teachers. The period of reconstruction should also permit re-orientation of textbooks to remove misconceptions that could lead to ethnic or religious division, hatred and intolerance, and to provide positive models of peaceful conflict resolution which are necessary ingredients for peaceful co-existence.

In line with the above, Ebuta (2012) defined social reconstruction as a radical change in the social structures of a given society and within the framework of such structural changes, one identifies changes in institutions, value, attitudes and changes in personnel. Moreover, social reconstruction brings about changes that touch virtually every aspect of the society; the social institutions which are agencies of social changes, cultural and behavioural patterns including values, skills, knowledge and attitudes in such a way that they introduce modifications for improved social living.

Shaaba (2012) supported the above assertion when he opined that, to socially reconstruct is to redevelop a thing or a belief on the basis of social selves, needs, values or interests. The implication of 'social' according to him is that individual needs, values or interest cannot be accepted if they are strictly based on personal desire. A critical examination of the above assumption shows that social acceptability is very essential before personal wishes and values can be part of social reconstruction.

Consequently, social reconstruction could also mean re-orientation of the society towards the national value system. This may be in the form of focusing on the societal needs and aspirations on a new improved ideals and ideas.

Why is Social Reconstruction Necessary?

Social reconstruction is necessary because according to Cohen (1999) is a condition in which the population achieves a level of tolerance and peaceful coexistence; gains social cohesion through acceptance of a national identity that transcends individual, sectarian and communal differences; has the mechanisms and will to resolve disputes non-violently; has community institutions that bind society across divisions; and addresses the legacy of the past abuses. For the social well-being of the society, social reconstruction includes twin approaches; directly addressing the legacy of violent conflict through inter and intra group reconciliation and indirectly building societal links by promoting reconciliation through community-based development and cooperative actions.

The prevailing overwhelming and unprecedented nation-wide upheavals, chaos, confusions and insecurity underscore the necessity for social reconstruction

in Nigeria through quality teacher education. Considering the situation, this concept will be addressed on the basis of the sources and reasons presented for the upsurge and resurgence of chaos, tribal and ethnic parochialism, religious fanaticism and oppressive tendencies of the government.

The militant and restless youth in South-South Nigeria, Boko Haram in the North-East and the ethnic, religious and tribal crises in Jos are examples of the situations seeking urgent social reconstruction. Many lives have been claimed as a result of these upheavals in different parts of the country. Sectionalism has eroded trust and peaceful existence among citizens. Communal clashes have pervaded the country in its entirety. These have in turn, debilitated and impeded government structures and policies respectively and undermined political ideals and values.

The Nexus between Teacher Education and Social Reconstruction

Education is an instrument for social development and integration. To achieve social development and integration, certain machineries have to be put in place. This could be done through the nation's educational system. The process of education cannot be completed without teachers: hence teachers' factor is important in ensuring positive change or orientation in the society. No matter the level of technological development of that society, teacher's input in the inculcation of the right societal values cannot be underestimated.

Based on the above assertions, the National Policy on Education (2013) recognized the importance of teacher education as the base of all other types of education. The quality of the teacher determines what is turned out of any educational institution because the teacher is a source of knowledge and facilitator of learning. A society is as great as its educational system. Therefore, any society that relegates the teacher as a major component of education is far from the path of greatness. The mistakes of the teacher result in a defective teacher education programme which has devastating consequences on the nation more than any other professional group.

Social reconstruction, as explained earlier in this write-up is a condition in which the population achieves a level of tolerance and peaceful coexistence especially after conflicts or disputes. This may be inter-group or intra group conflict. To achieve lasting reconciliation among different groups involved the role of education, especially formal education. The school, being a social organization is one of the places where children from various backgrounds and lineage assemble in the classroom so that the teacher can inculcate into them the right type of skills, knowledge and attitudes. Teacher education programme focuses on the production of teachers for all levels of the nation's education system. Hence, the trainees could

assist in promoting love and mutual understanding among the aggrieved communities through the training they have acquired.

Teacher education programme is vital because it could assist in mending and binding communities together through the curriculum content that could strengthen communal relationship and promote patriotism among the social groups. This will further lead to positive reconstruction and restructuring of the prevailing structure. Therefore, the curriculum, methodologies and other instructional strategies should focus on inter and intra-group interactions either through community development programmes, inter-tribal marriages and business transactions, for whatever reconstruction or reconciliation, be it in the health, political, economic or religious sectors.

Conclusion

Having examined the various concepts in the paper, it is obvious that quality teacher education is the only potent tool for achieving social reconstruction and reconciliation. Ukeje (1996) averred that education unlocks the door to modernization. He added that the teacher who holds the key to that door can not be underestimated and concluded that to attain modernization in any nation, the quality of the education system and more importantly the teacher education programme is a *sine qua non*.

Recommendations

Having analysed the role of education through teacher education in national reconciliation and social reconstruction, it is imperative and desirable to offer suggestions on how lasting social reconstruction could be achieved:

- a. The curriculum content for all levels of the education system should be devoid of ethnic sentiment and parochialism in order to enhance meaningful social reconstruction in Nigeria.
- b. Teachers should study to understand the cultural context to shape strategies for promoting reconciliation and peaceful co-existent in the country.
- c. Courses that promote ethnic interaction and patriotism should be made compulsory especially at the primary and secondary levels of our educational system, for example, Social Studies, Civic Education and Moral Education.
- d. Teachers should, through the teaching of cultural activities, emphasize the potency of indigenous practices for healing and acknowledging wrong doing.
- e. Student-teachers should be posted to areas different from their tribal or ethnic enclave during teaching practice exercises and National Youth Service Corps

(NYSC) scheme. This would afford them the opportunity to learn and appreciate the diversities in our culture.

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