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THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the growth of teacher education in Nigeria from the colonial era to its current form, examining its historical development and professionalization. At the inception of Western education in Nigeria, missionary schools in southern Nigeria provided the majority of the informal teacher training in Nigeria, which concentrated on religious instruction and basic reading. With the founding of teacher training institutions (TTCs) in the early 20th century, the British colonial government standardized teacher preparation, although access was restricted and the curricula were Eurocentric. With the adoption of the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the creation of oversight organizations such as the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Nigeria started to professionalize and expand teacher education after gaining independence, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. The article emphasizes the need for more funding for teacher education, better hands-on training, ongoing professional development for aspiring educators, and more equitable access to teacher education in both urban and rural locations. Despite these initiatives, the system is still threatened by issues such as inadequate funding, unequal access to education across regions, and a disconnect between classroom realities and theoretical instruction. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can improve the quality of education and ensure that all children have access to trained teachers.

Keywords: Development; Professionalization; Teacher Education

Introduction

Nigerian teacher education has experienced significant transformations over the years, evolving from a rudimentary system during colonial control to a more structured and professionalized framework today. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the knowledge, skills, and values of future generations, making the professionalization and advancement of teacher education critical to raising educational standards in the country. This article explores the policies, challenges, and historical evolution of teacher education in Nigeria, while examining key programs,

organizations, and reforms that have shaped the field, alongside the current issues and potential paths forward.

Teacher education in Nigeria began during the colonial era when the British established missionary schools in the southern regions. These schools, with little to no official teacher training programs, primarily focused on basic literacy, numeracy, and religious education. Only a small percentage of children received formal education during this period, and missionary societies played a significant role in teacher preparation. However, the system was inconsistent and uncontrolled, leading to significant disparities in the quality of education (Fafunwa, 2018). The first formal attempts to organize teacher preparation were through Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), which were established in the early 20th century as part of the British colonial government's efforts to standardize education. However, this system was elitist, and most Nigerians, particularly in the northern regions, had limited access to it (Malisa & Missedja, 2019).

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the need for a more professionalized and comprehensive approach to teacher education became increasingly clear. The Nigerian government recognized that the development of a qualified teaching workforce was essential for the nation's educational and economic advancement. In the 1970s, the government took significant steps to expand teacher education by establishing more teacher training institutions across the country and enacting laws to increase access to teacher education (Usman, 2020). Despite these efforts, challenges such as underfunding, a lack of resources, and an uneven distribution of educational facilities persisted, particularly between urban and rural areas (Awodiji, Ogbudinkpa & Agharanya, 2020).

The 1980s and 1990s marked a period of increased focus on elevating teaching to a respected profession. The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1981 played a pivotal role in professionalizing teacher education by establishing clear requirements for certification and qualifications. The policy also advocated for a more structured approach to teacher education, encouraging the creation of diploma, degree, and postgraduate programs (Omolade, 2022). Furthermore, the NPE emphasized the importance of continuous professional development, ensuring that teachers would receive ongoing support and training throughout their careers. This push for standardization was reinforced by the creation of regulatory bodies such as the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in 1998 and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in 1993, which helped maintain a professional code of conduct and ensure the

quality of teacher preparation programs (Barnes, Boyle, Zuilkowski & Bello, 2019).

Despite these advancements, Nigeria's educational system continues to grapple with several enduring challenges. One of the most pressing issues is inadequate funding, which affects both the quality of teacher preparation programs and the working conditions of educators. Many teacher training institutions are still operating with outdated infrastructure, limited resources, and underpaid staff (Mormah & Bassey, 2021). Additionally, there is a significant gap between the academic knowledge imparted in teacher education programs and the practical skills needed for effective classroom teaching. Many programs place greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical experience, leaving teachers inadequately prepared for the realities of classroom management and student engagement (Ene et al., 2021). To address these issues, a concerted effort will be required to improve curriculum, infrastructure, and funding, as well as to ensure that teacher education programs are more aligned with the evolving demands of the educational system.

Historical Development of Teacher Education in Nigeria

Nigerian teacher education began during the colonial era, when missionary schools served as the main educational institutions, especially in the southern parts of the nation (Fafunwa, 2018). Teachers were primarily trained informally at this time, with little to no standardized programs or defined curricula. Missionary societies usually provided these early educators with on-the-job training, which placed a strong emphasis on teaching fundamental skills in reading, math, and religion (Omolade, 2022). During this time, teachers' main responsibilities were to teach the indigenous populace fundamental administrative skills and to propagate European cultural norms and religious doctrines (Malisa & Missedja, 2019). The quality of instruction and education varied greatly, and the training system was mainly unregulated. Some missionaries were dedicated to offering top-notch instruction, but others lacked the means, know-how, or organized training necessary to adequately train teachers (Omenka, 2023). Because many schools were ill-equipped and lacked adequate resources, the caliber of instructors produced during this time was uneven. Although it brought formal education to Nigerians, this early system was more concerned with upholding colonial norms than it was with addressing the educational needs of the native population. It also did not aim to develop a professional or sustainable teacher staff (Fafunwa, 2018).

In order to standardize teacher training in Nigeria, the British colonial government established Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) in the beginning of the 20th century. With an emphasis on teaching fundamental

knowledge and practical skills, these institutions were first established in the southern parts of Nigeria with the primary goal of preparing teachers for the expanding network of elementary schools (Barnes et al., 2019). These colleges' curricula mostly ignored indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values in favor of disciplines like English language, European history, and religious studies that were in line with colonial aims (Usman, 2020). Because of this, even though the training programs were more structured than the previous unstructured approaches, their reach and scope were still constrained. These programs were created by the colonial authority to generate a select few highly qualified educators who would act as a bridge between the local populace and the colonial government (Omolade, 2022). The great majority of Nigerians lacked any formal teacher education since only a small number of members of the privileged classes could enroll in these teacher training institutes due to limited access (Ene et al., 2021). Furthermore, the curriculum was Eurocentric, which marginalized African cultures, customs, and languages while also promoting colonial ideals (Omenka, 2023). The socio-political and economic disparities of the era were sustained by the hierarchical educational system that was established as a result of this exclusionary attitude. Thus, the TTCs contributed significantly to the further alienation of indigenous educational methods and the consolidation of colonial norms (Samuel & Adekunle, 2019).

After Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the government realized how important teacher preparation would be to the advancement of the country and its educational system (Ukeje & Aisiku, 2022). The Nigerian government gave more attention to formalizing and professionalizing the teaching profession as part of larger initiatives to improve educational quality and promote the development of human capital (Barnes et al., 2019). Significant progress was made in the 1970s when the government started to build additional teacher training facilities nationwide in an effort to provide access to teacher education and develop a more organized system that would meet the expanding educational demands of a recently independent country (Ene et al., 2021). In awareness of the need for qualified teachers at all levels of the educational system, the scope of teacher education programs was also broadened at this time to encompass primary and secondary education (Awodiji et al., 2020). The teacher education system nonetheless faced several obstacles in spite of these encouraging advancements. Inadequate finance was one of the most urgent problems, resulting in many teacher training organizations having antiquated facilities and few resources (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018). Furthermore, the quality of teacher preparation varied greatly due to the lack of

uniformity in curriculum and standards throughout institutions (Mormah & Bassey, 2021). There were differences in the quality of training and preparation provided to teachers in various parts of the nation, and some institutions found it difficult to keep up with changing educational demands. These difficulties limited the efficacy of teacher education reforms in raising the standard of education overall and undercut their potential (Usman, 2020).

The Professionalization of Teacher Education

As the government and important educational stakeholders realized the vital connection between better learning outcomes and high-quality instruction, Nigeria's teacher education system began to become more professionalized in the 1980s and 1990s (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018). Significant improvements were brought about by the recognition that the country's educational progress depended on a professionalized teaching workforce (Barnes et al., 2019). Professionalization, in this sense, is the process of making teaching a formal, acknowledged profession with set norms, moral guidelines, and specialized training for teachers (Otegbeye, 2021). This change represented a significant break from the earlier unstructured and uneven methods of teacher development. The national standardization of teacher education was one of the first steps toward professionalization (Awodiji et al., 2020).

To guarantee that teachers fulfilled the minimal requirements to practice, this entailed establishing more precise and consistent standards for teacher certification and licensure (Samuel & Adekunle, 2019). These criteria were put in place with the intention of creating highly qualified educators who could successfully negotiate the intricacies of the Nigerian educational system (Usman, 2020). To meet the changing demands of education, specialized training programs were also created, combining subject-matter competence, professional ethics, and contemporary educational approaches (Barnes et al., 2019). Encapsulated in important programs like the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1981, these reforms started to create a teaching workforce that was more professional and unified (Ukeje & Aisiku, 2022). A rising understanding that the quality of education in Nigeria was primarily dependent on the quality of its teachers was reflected in the emphasis on professionalizing teaching (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018).

The 1981 National Policy on Education (NPE), which attempted to address the rising need for a more organized and professional teaching workforce, was a seminal policy in the professionalization of teacher education in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 2018). The NPE acknowledged that improving teacher

preparation and educators' ongoing professional development were the only ways to raise the standard of education (Otegbeye, 2021). In order to achieve this, the policy placed a strong emphasis on the necessity of a methodical approach to teacher education, complete with precise standards for the credentials needed by educators at all educational levels (Omenka, 2023). These recommendations aided in defining the responsibilities and standards for educators at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Mormah & Bassey, 2021). In order to guarantee that teacher preparation was thorough and in line with international educational standards, the NPE also advocated for the creation of schools that would offer certificate, degree, and postgraduate programs in education (Barnes et al., 2019). The policy's emphasis on in-service teachers' continual professional development was one of its most important features; it acknowledged that teaching is a dynamic profession that necessitates constant learning and adaptation (Ene et al., 2021). In addition to providing instructors with useful teaching strategies, the goal was to guarantee that they possessed the subject-matter knowledge required to promote high-quality learning results (Awodiji et al., 2020). The NPE was crucial in making teaching in Nigeria a respected and clearly defined profession by developing a structure that included specialization, ongoing professional development, and qualification (Usman, 2020).

A major step toward the professionalization of teacher education in Nigeria was taken in 1993 with the creation of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018). The NCCE was tasked with overseeing teacher education programs at education colleges and making sure that the curricula, caliber of instruction, and results met national requirements (Mormah & Bassey, 2021). By doing this, it sought to raise the uniformity and dependability of teacher preparation nationwide, so fostering the growth of a more skilled and qualified teaching workforce (Ene et al., 2021). To supervise teachers' certification, registration, and professional behavior, the Nigerian Teachers Registration Council (TRCN) was founded in addition to the NCCE (Otegbeye, 2021). The TRCN played a crucial part in establishing a more official and controlled setting for the teaching profession (Samuel & Adekunle, 2019). The TRCN made sure that only capable and qualified people entered the teaching profession by requiring instructors to be registered and to abide by a set code of ethics (Usman, 2020). This approach contributed to the profession's advancement and strengthened the notion that teaching is a specialized and esteemed occupation that demands constant professional growth and adherence to moral principles (Barnes et al., 2019). Together, the NCCE and TRCN's founding was crucial in creating an atmosphere that made teacher preparation more standardized, organized, and in line

with national objectives for educational advancement (Awodiji et al., 2020).

Nigerian teacher education programs have changed over time to accommodate the nation's shifting educational needs. Specialized fields including special education, science and technology, and educational leadership were added to teacher preparation programs as the demands of the economy and society became more complicated (Chinedu et al., 2018). A greater understanding that good instruction encompasses more than just fundamental reading and numeracy abilities is reflected in this diversity (Omolade, 2022). Teachers who receive specialized training in these areas are more prepared to meet the varied needs of their students, including those who have impairments or who need more complex skills in cutting-edge subjects like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) (Ezumah & Ezumah, 2020).

The inclusion of educational leadership programs also shows that the value of developing leaders capable of successfully running schools, promoting educational changes, and putting creative teaching methods into practice has been recognized (Omenka, 2023). Teachers who receive this kind of training are better equipped for duties outside of the classroom, such as managing school resources, creating a pleasant learning environment, and influencing educational policy (Usman, 2020). Nigeria hopes to create a more dynamic and flexible educational system that can meet the constantly changing needs of the domestic and international environment by including these specialized subjects into teacher education (Fafunwa, 2018). This all-encompassing approach to teacher education makes it possible for teachers to deliver high-quality, pertinent instruction, giving pupils the information and abilities they need to succeed in a cutthroat society (Kenneth, 2019).

Current Challenges in Teacher Education

The efficiency of teacher training programs is still hampered by a number of issues, despite notable advancements in the professionalization and development of teacher education in Nigeria (Omolade, 2022). Inadequate funding is one of the most enduring problems, impacting both the standard of teacher education programs and the working circumstances of educators (Usman, 2020). The capacity of many teachers training institutes to deliver high-quality instruction is hampered by their dilapidated facilities, dearth of instructional resources, and underpaid employees (Omenka, 2023). Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms brought on by a lack of funding can make it impossible for trainees to get the individualized attention and assistance they require (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018).

The unequal distribution of resources for teacher education throughout the nation

presents another difficulty. Access to teacher training programs is still restricted in rural and isolated locations, despite notable advancements in the growth of teacher education institutions in urban areas (Fafunwa, 2018). Because rural areas frequently struggle to recruit and retain talented educators, this regional inequality has contributed to an imbalance in the distribution of qualified instructors (Otegbeye, 2021). Problems with teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, exacerbate this discrepancy (Samuel & Adekunle, 2019).

Furthermore, there are still issues with the curriculum's quality and applicability in teacher education programs. There is still a disconnect between the training instructors receive and the realities of the classroom, despite the curriculum having been modified to match contemporary teaching techniques and educational trends (Kenneth, 2019). Many teacher preparation programs place a greater emphasis on theory and pedagogy than they do on real-world, experiential learning (Barnes et al., 2019). Graduates who are well-versed in educational theory but lack the abilities to properly manage classrooms or engage students in meaningful learning experiences are frequently the result of this lack of practical training (Omolade, 2022).

Future Directions for Teacher Education in Nigeria

A number of adjustments are required to overcome the issues with teacher education in Nigeria. First and foremost, funding for teacher education programs, including facilities, instructional materials, and staff professional development, must be significantly increased. Enhancing the caliber of teacher education programs and making sure they are prepared to offer cutting-edge, pertinent instruction that satisfies the demands of current classrooms should be the top priorities of this investment (Usman, 2020).

Second, teacher education programs need to place more emphasis on hands-on training and fieldwork. It will be easier to close the gap between theory and practice if student instructors have more opportunities to obtain practical experience in classrooms. Partnerships with schools and mentoring programs could help improve the growth of teaching abilities and assist new teachers when they enter the field (Kenneth, 2019; Barnes et al., 2019).

Additionally, the ongoing professional development of in-service teachers ought to be a primary priority of teacher education policies. Regular training programs should be available to teachers so they may stay current on curricular changes, educational technology, and innovative teaching strategies. In addition to raising educational

standards, this strategy will guarantee that educators continue to be competent and driven in their positions (Ene et al., 2021; Omolade, 2022).

Lastly, it is crucial to increase teacher education in underprivileged communities, especially in rural and isolated locations. Addressing regional inequities and guaranteeing that all Nigerian students, regardless of location, have access to qualified teachers would be made possible by ensuring equitable access to high-quality teacher education throughout the nation (Fafunwa, 2018; Omenka, 2023)

Conclusion

From its colonial beginnings to its current more structured and regulated system, Nigeria's teacher education has advanced significantly in terms of professionalization and development. Even though there have been notable advancements, issues like a lack of financing, regional differences, and a disconnect between theory and practice continue to prevent teacher education from reaching its full potential. To further raise the standard of education in Nigeria, these problems must be addressed with more funding, revised curricula, and a stronger focus on real-world experience. The professionalization of teacher education will continue to be a crucial component in accomplishing the nation's educational goals of increasing educational standards and expanding access to education, as well as guaranteeing that all children have access to high-quality education.

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