

THE CHALLENGES OF IMPROVING
THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION
OF TEACHERS

J.C.B.Bigala

Introduction

One of the greatest and most difficult questions to which we can devote ourselves according to (Kant, 1975) is the problem of education. For three decades African governments, researchers and non-government organizations (NGOs) have strived to improve the quality of teacher education and teachers, (Heyneman and Loxley, 1983). This is in view of what Senteza Kajubi says " No education system can be better than the quality of teachers" (E.C.Report, 1989). The task of improving teachers, therefore is not only a difficult one, but also a seeming insoluble problem which requires one to write down all one knows and then make connections.

Teachers remain the most important part of the process of improving the quality of education. Their role in influencing the pupil's learning is very great especially in African countries (Akinpelu, 1975). They are expected to improve the quality of education. Studies have been although the budgets for

education may be enormous, some researchers question whether the existing quality of teaching matches with such expenditure (Perry, et. al., 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to review the salient features of teachers' education with particular reference to Africa and to suggest some ways in which its content, materials and methods can be improved. The main theme

of the paper is that more drastic steps must be taken in all African countries to adapt education system more closely to the real problems and pre-occupations of local and national communities.

How can the educators of different countries, possibly working together, improve the effectiveness of teachers already in the educational institutions and attract people, prepare them with higher qualifications, allocate them to the educational institutions where they are most needed, and hold them in the profession with the high morale and steadily improving competence?. And how can all this be done at a cost we can afford?" In other words, how can we revolutionize teaching so that some of the best minds and talents are available at times and places where learners, young and adult most needed them? (Marope and Chapman).

The implications of education to teacher's education are enormous in terms of numbers, the quality and quantity of skills required, and the new roles that teachers need to play in and outside the formal classrooms. The greatest pervading problem affecting the quality of education everywhere is the low status accorded to teacher education. In most African countries, teacher education is not given the attention that its importance deserves. It is a platitude, but worth repeating again and again that the status and reward system always encourage the better students to choose other careers than teaching, often leaving only the weakest and unwilling candidates to take up education to become the future teachers. The following are major features of teacher education in most African countries:

- Teachers' college, compared to secondary schools from which the student teachers are recruited are inadequately provided for in terms of buildings, libraries, textbooks, laboratories (if any), equipment, staffing and very often even in terms of diet.
- An unhealthy proliferation of small-size and poor quality teachers' colleges does exist in a number of African countries.

- Teachers' salaries are lower than those of any other workers with comparable education and professional qualification. Low salaries and poor conditions of services result into attrition of trained teachers to greener pastures and more verdant valleys leading to critical shortages of teachers particularly in science, mathematics and technical subjects, and to low morale and low productivity of the teaching force as a whole (Mautle and Weeks, 1993).
- Persistent dissatisfaction with the performance of teachers has, in Africa, usually led to recommendations involving (i) recruitment of students for pre-service training from a higher academic level, although not necessarily a better achievement level, e.g. recruitment from 'O' level instead of the previous junior secondary school certificate level or (ii) having teachers trained in higher educational institutions, e.g., the university, instead of the regular Teacher Training Colleges where they are awarded higher certificates or diplomas, or (iii) giving them in-service courses to upgrade them in the institution of Education attached to universities, or (iv) prolonging such courses without necessarily making them more rigorous and practical, or (v) mere restructuring of the curriculum without due regard to its relevance and practical usefulness to these would-be teachers.

All measures, however, are like tickling the elephant's tail without touching the main body of the enormous beast. They have done little or nothing to increase the attractiveness and effectiveness of the teaching profession.

The challenge to teacher education in the coming decade will be in each nation's ability to do the right thing at the right time and place so that basic education can genuinely expand and improve. Such a challenge, however, implies that before embarking on new models for the recruitment, training

and retention of teachers, there is need to understand not just the chronic problems are so enduring both in industrial and developing countries.

First, few academically able students will be attracted to the teaching profession in a labour market that offers them more attractive alternatives. Whether in Africa or in the industrial countries, the result of the low status accorded to teachers of any status or grade seems to be the same. Smart students with good secondary school records avoid teacher training. Consequently, most education majors in the United States of America, for example, come from low-income backgrounds and often families in which they are the first generation to attend university entrance qualifications of schools of education are also comparatively low (Lyons:30). While most people expect every doctor, lawyer or engineer to be smart, this is not so with members of the teaching profession.

As long as most teachers and their teacher educators come from low status and social background where academic pursuits as well as access to other opportunities are limited, and recruits do not come from high achievement background especially whenever there are 'crash' programmes to train more teachers, such teachers will always fall into a social class of their own. Although the social class systems in developing countries may differ from those of industrialized countries, there are social class and academic factors whose influence on people's mobility and access to the education system and its reward and incentives parallel those of class. Ultimately, teachers form a special class of people who are poorly rewarded, marginalized in many ways by decision makers and often suffering multiple socially handicapping factors, including lack of self-respect and confidence in themselves. This implies that unless there are fundamental changes within society itself, simply manipulating the training of teachers will not achieve all the desired results.

The second problem which is linked to the teachers being socially handicapped is that, almost all changes to every aspect of education system do come about through the instigation of so-called professional educators

and through legislation rather than by the consensus of classroom practitioners themselves. In most if not all African countries, education policy review commissions and national parliaments determine the structure of education, and national curriculum development centres prescribe what will be taught, usually with very little input by the teachers themselves (National Commission on Education Report, 1993). Far-way national examination boards, councils and syndicates are responsible for the examination and certificates of pupils with no reference to the continuous assessment and evaluation of the classroom practitioners. Things are not decided by teachers but by those who are usually further away from the harsh realities of the classroom situation. Even professors of education usually have little if any real contact with schools.

The third problem is that the teaching occupation serves two groups traditionally weak in institutional influence i.e., women and children, on the one hand. In many countries, the majority of primary school teachers are women who already suffer from oppression and discrimination; on the other hand, teachers as a whole serve minors rather than adults and therefore do not have opportunities to establish prestigious relationships with other adults during their daily work as other professionals do. In other words the teachers' clients are children who have no power to accord them even normative rewards.

If nations are serious about improving the quality of education, they will have to make more than marginal and piecemeal changes in the attractiveness of teaching profession. The professionalisation and empowerment of teaching would mean not only the establishment of:

- More rigorous entry requirements;
- supervised internship;
- teachers having more autonomy in professional matters;
- peer-defined standards of practice;
- increased responsibility with increased competence; and

- Professionally competitive salaries but also paying more attention to the social attitudes discussed above which give rise to the low regard for teachers.

Need for a New Type of Teacher

There is a need for a new type of teacher sensitive to development issues, i.e., one who would be an effective agent of change in society. Improving teacher education to bring about such teachers should concentrate among other things on programmes which develop closer relationships between teacher education and the teaching profession, the classroom, the school setting and the community of parents who send their children to school. Basic education must involve building partnership between schools, the community and various governmental and non-governmental agencies so as to increase the effectiveness of education. As the three problem areas discussed above have indicated, the solution is not simply one of recruiting trainees who would make a real difference within an equitable social and economic reward milieu.

Goodlad (1990: 185) suggests four factors on which the professional education of teachers should rest and which are of particular relevance to the new type of teachers needed to promote education in Africa.

First, such teachers must understand the importance and responsibilities of citizenship as 'the primary political office under a constitutional government', and they must, therefore, possess a foundation of knowledge about the nation's government and its expectations of citizens.

Second, they must have up-to-date knowledge and "the intellectual tools to participate broadly in the human conversation and to introduce young people to it".

Third, teachers must possess the pedagogical knowledge and skills necessary to arrange optimal conditions for helping learners to learn most effectively and to relate their knowledge to the needs and priorities of development.

Fourth, teachers must have a thorough understanding

exclusive parts, from which teachers and professional educators are suffering, there is a great need to link teacher education to research.

If the educational research is concerned among other things, with learners, with the practical aim of improving the effectiveness of the learning process, then it must be an activity in which teachers and all those concerned with the education should engage. If education in Africa is not going to become static and sterile, there is need to pay greater attention to research in the education of teachers. Teachers, inspectors and administrators we engage in our schools, training colleges and adult education programmes should be able to evaluate their own techniques to question the validity and appropriateness of curricula and other time-honoured practices and to suggest improvement. Teacher involvement in such activities is essential if innovations in education are to be effectively implemented. (Prophet and Rowell, 1990). In other words, the teaching profession as a whole needs to develop a research oriented attitude which would not only respond to research but also demand it. A research educational approach to teacher education would provide a sound scientific basis for adaptation to new situation and keep alive the teacher intellectual creativity rather than mere routine skills based on the experience of school practice. Improvement in the teaching competence of the teacher would contribute not only to his job satisfaction, but also to the enhancement.

Who should Teach?

The challenge of education is enormous, in terms of the numbers, the quality and the quantity of skills required and the new roles that teachers need to play both in and outside the formal school system. Improving teacher education, and ultimately pupil learning, requires that society makes a decision on whether they want 'real' professional teachers at all levels of the education system, an ideal which few countries can afford, or they want professional teachers at only certain levels of education while the rest of the education system is manned by people moving towards a variety of carriers including professional teaching. In view of the large number of teachers

required in order to implement education, it would be more pragmatic for developing countries to choose the second alternative.

One should think of a job which is a profession or simply a 'stage' on the way to other professions including teaching. Since professional teacher training is unlikely to be achieved within the short term, which is what basic education for all is about, we need to go for teaching as a 'stage' on a rail-road leading to many different destinations. This would work very well for recruiting teachers for primary school, for out-of-school youth, and for adults in areas such as literacy, primary health care, and other basic skills. Teaching at these levels should be, as it were, a sort of paid 'national services', where the skills required can be quickly learned in induction courses.

.... "Teachers still show significant deficiencies in areas central to effective teaching. These areas include provision of lessons transition, communication lesson objectives, between lesson integration, effective use of format evaluation, effective use of corrective follow-up and most significantly, a definite more towards learner-centred instructions". (Marope and Chapman, 1997).

Since literacy and simple numeracy are basic skills, concentration should be on training to impart these skills and working with learners to practice and consolidate these skills in a wide variety of environmental situations.

At levels higher than the primary school and imparting basic education skill, 'real' professional teachers can be insisted upon, but even here, in many developing countries these are many areas where non-professional teachers could be utilized with profit provided that there are sufficient teaching materials.

Materials for Education

As stated at the beginning of this paper, if children and adults are to remain literate, they will need to keep practicing and engaging those skills such as

reading,

schools and communities. The idea of MINDSACROSS is to have those who need most to be their main authors.

Schools happen to have the largest concentration of new literates in the country. No other groups are in better position, have a better opportunity, and a more compelling reason to write, and read, discuss and communicate in writing than school children. MINDSACROSS has found out that primary school children can write superb stories, plays, poems and other reading materials for their peers and those in other schools to read. Adult illiterates can recount stories and histories which can be taped and transcribed. The aim is to encourage school children and adults to feel that they have something worthwhile to say, and to create a network and a community of authors, communications, readers and discussants addressing community problems. Although, MINDSACROSS is still in its infant stages, one may suggest that approaches of this kind which engage learners in experiences that link school to community will be of vital significance in promoting education.

Conclusion

The challenges posed to the teacher education are enormous in terms of the number of teachers, the type of skills required and the new roles that teachers need to play. If one is serious about making education a reality, fundamental changes will be made to attract teaching. One should not only introduce new models and patterns of teacher education, but also one will have to address those problems which make teaching marginalized and "forgotten enterprise". The reward and incentives systems as they affect teachers will have to be addressed. Lastly, the improvement of teacher education and learning quality requires that society makes up its mind as to whether to rely in "real" professional teachers at all levels of education while at the same time, the rest of the education system is manned by people moving toward a variety of careers including professional teaching.

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