



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS: THE
NATIONAL TEACHERS' INSTITUTE
EXPERIENCE

BY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, there is now a serious public outcry concerning the crisis in education nationwide. National Conferences, Seminars and Workshops have bemoaned and catalogued the multifaceted cause of this “falling standards” of education.

It is gratifying to note that the Federal Ministry of Education is currently at the forefront of efforts at reforming the educational system. The teacher is seen as the critical element in actualizing this new vision. This is quite understandable given the extensive literature on the critical role of the teacher in the educative process. Unfortunately, various inadequacies have been identified in current teacher education programmes.

This paper examines the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teacher in Nigeria. It discusses the concept of CPD, the rationale for CPD and the efforts of the NTI in providing opportunities for Continuing Professional Development for teacher in Nigeria.

2.0 THE CONCEPT OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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. Initial training may also be available to serving unqualified teachers through distance education or

‘out-of-school’ programmes during vacations or on release from schools for extended periods of time. The pedagogical or professional components of initial teacher training programmes can be either consecutive or concurrent with academic subject.

Initial teacher training has been criticized for its inadequacy in preparing students for teaching. Whereas the form of preparation maybe a major cause, it is necessary to emphasize that it may be unrealistic to expect initial training to produce a fully fledged teacher. Learning to teach is a process that requires continuing support and resources. Continuing Professional Development of teacher comes from various sources and agencies and in various forms: orienting teachers to curriculum or examination changes, upgrading qualification levels, donor-funded projects, professional teachers’ associations in developing subject teaching (e.g. STAN), or sometimes teachers’ unions, school based improvement initiatives, or individual teachers working to improve their qualifications, career prospects or teaching skills.

The distinction between initial training and continuing professional development of teachers may not be clear cut. In our national situation where both qualified and unqualified teachers are employed in schools, pre-service and in-service education may go on simultaneously. It is therefore necessary to employ structured as well as unstructured approaches in the professional development of teachers.

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.

3.0 RATIONALE FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

The teacher is increasingly becoming an important factor in the educative process. According to Sprinthall, Reiman and Sprint (1996:666), “there is no such thing as a teacher-proof curriculum”. They point to the massive failures of national curriculum projects of the 1960s with the attendant *“failed ideas, unused curriculum guides, and tarnished hopes ... By implication then, teacher characteristics, attitudes, conceptions of self, and intellectual and interpersonal dispositions in large measure determine both the explicit and the so-called hidden agenda of the classroom. The formal curriculum is represented by the materials, lesson plan, and objectives, but the informal agenda is the atmosphere, or climate, in the classroom, as indicated by important teacher characteristics.”*

Societies expect a great deal from their educational systems. New goals are being continuously set e.g. gender parity 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 CPD.

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 our 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. Indeed in countries such as Singapore, every teacher is required to submit himself/herself to 100 hours of retraining every year.

Various inadequacies have been highlighted in the past and present teacher education programmes. A recent research by Tee Kay Educational Consultancy Services done on behalf of the UBEC, NCCE, NTI, TRC and World Bank revealed that there exist major gaps in the present NCE and degree curricula in the following areas: computer education; small scale research techniques; handling of large classes; special courses on learning

disabilities, health and environmental studies; mother-tongue education courses; improvisation skills in respect of instructional materials, resource management (instructional materials, funds, etc), skill for teaching multi-grade classes, especially in rural areas; critical analysis of the major primary textbooks, the national curriculum modules and sexuality education. These gaps have urgent implication for pre-service training. For those already trained using these curricular, they need to be followed up with in-service continuing professional development programmes to correct these deficiencies.

The great diversity in the entrants into the teaching profession has great implication for mounting continuing professional development programmes. As noted by Robinson and Latchem (2003:5) teachers vary in: number of years of education received and the levels attained; the nature and amount of training completed; average age, social status, location (urban or rural) and income levels; their skills as adult and independent learners; their beliefs and models of ideal teacher; their levels of motivation; their access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and learning resources (teachers' journals, books on teaching professional associations, newsletters); their opportunities for professional development and support; etc. These diversities require that custom-built CPD courses be organized.

According to Robinson and Latchem (2003), research has indicated some identifiable stages in the process of becoming a teacher. For example, there is the five stage model of 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 teacher will be facilitated, quickened and made less stressful by well planned continuing professional development programmes. There is shifting global paradigm in the concept of teaching. The emphasis is on students-as-learners in classroom as learning places, where learning requires the active participation of the learner, 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 1994). These pedagogical changes demand new roles for the teacher on the field. It is CPD programmes that can take the new skills to the teacher.

In other words according to Jegede (2004), opportunities for continuing professional development must be created to re-skill the potential teacher, re-motivate the interested teacher, retrain the dedicated teacher and retrain the practicing teachers.

4.0 MODELS OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Various models for teacher professional development have emerged. Two most commonly used models in Nigeria are 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 CPD 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 teachers get 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); etc.

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

1. an appropriate combination of learning settings (on-the-job, near the job, home, library, course, etc.)
2. time for study, consultation and reflection,
3. the availability of suitable learning resources,

4. people who are prepared (i.e., both willing and able) to give appropriate support and
5. the learner's own capacity to learn and to take advantage of the opportunities available.

5.0 CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Whereas it appears obvious that teachers need CPD and substantial research seem to have confirmed this, not much importance seem to be attached to continuing professional development of teachers in Nigeria. For most teachers, training ends as soon as they graduated and no opportunities exist for updating their knowledge and skills by attending seminars, conferences and workshops that will enhance their knowledge and skills and ultimately their classroom practice.

Budgets for continuing professional development are often small. Indeed funds are rarely allocated and where available, funds are inadequate and often misused. In-service training workshops and seminars are very few and irregularly organized. There is even the poor understanding of the importance of continuous re-training of teachers on the part of Federal, State and Local Government Areas.

6.0 THE NATIONAL TEACHERS' INSTITUTE EXPERIENCE

The National Teachers' Institute is fully committed to capacity building for primary and secondary school teachers as demonstrated by the range of retraining programmes it has organized so far. Apart from the upgrading

courses that the Institute has been implementing for many years (TC II, NCE and PTTP), the Institute introduced proficiency Diploma courses in Early Childhood Education, Guidance and Counselling, 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; and
- distribution of multimedia learning packages (audio, video, print) on innovative teaching methods that will provide on-the-job professional support for teachers, disseminate information on preventive education especially malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Apart from teachers, the NTI retraining programmes also focus on teacher trainers in tertiary institutions. The Institute is collaborating with the British Council for a Certificate course in professional development for trainers of English teachers for Nigeria. The delivery modes for the certificate course are: course materials delivered on CD-ROM (which can also be printed and distributed), with regular tutorial inputs; support and mentoring through e-mail feedback with “supervisory course tutors” with participants joining an e-mail discussion forum where they can exchange notes, questions, advice etc. with other participants; and occasional face-to-face contact sessions. The British Council centres located in Kano, Abuja and Lagos will be used for the pilot phase before spreading to other states.

7.0 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, environment water and sanitation, and debt, trade and aids. All the 8 MDGs are interrelated and education is a cross-cutting issue without which the goals would not be attained.

To this end, the President of the Federal Republic 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-building programme for primary school teachers under the MDGs project for 2006. A total of 145,000 primary school teachers were trained nationwide with each state including FCT (Abuja) nominating between 2500 and 4000 teachers for the training.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- disseminate innovative 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 within a period of six days.

The training workshop was conducted in 147 centres made up of one centre in each senatorial district and the capitals of the 36 states of the Federation and FCT (Abuja). The resource persons were carefully selected from the Universities and Colleges of Education nationwide. Each of the 145,000 participants were provided with self-instructional training manuals which is expected to serve as resource materials for the participants and their colleagues in schools after the workshops. In addition, the participants were supplied with stationery and paid some allowances.

Each of the 147 training centres were equipped with various training equipment such as computers and accessories, television sets, video cassettes records/players, radio/CD/audio cassette recorders/players, portable generators and instructional materials such as recorded audio and video cassettes, CDs, and flash cards in the 4 core subjects and an HIV/AIDS' teaching kit. These equipment and materials procured and produced for the training programme were left behind after the training with NTI field centres so that they can be used by the NTI, State Ministries of Education, and SUBEBs in subsequent training programmes.

The training programme was well monitored by various agencies such as the NUC, FME, NUT, MOE, National Assembly, Federal Inspectorate and Non-Governmental Organisations, the press and even the public. Evaluation checklists and daily exit cards were administered on the participants to elicit feedback.

A number of lessons were learned from the workshop. The registration of participants must be done well in advance. The duration of the workshop may need to be extended. Separate workshop may need to be planned for the administrators such as head-teacher, inspectors or supervisors. More centres may have to be used.

The Institute intends to carryout a well designed follow-up programme to ensure that the participants make good use of the skills learnt. An action

research approach will be adopted. This will involve the following activities:

- classroom support for participants by carefully selected facilitators and supervisors who will serve as mentors;
- inter-school cluster meetings/workshops organized by the facilitators to provide grounds for general and specific discussions on classroom practices and experiences;
- demonstration lessons by teacher-educators (mentors);
- weekly/fortnightly visits to schools by mentors;
- observations and journal entries; and
- exhibitions of Improvised Instructional Materials.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The teacher is seen as a critical element in the educative process. Good teachers are known to produce good pupils. The quality of teachers and teaching is affected broadly by two related aspects: the conditions of teachers in a changing environment and their training and professional development (Robinson & Latchem: 2003). This paper was concerned with the training and professional development of teachers.

In spite of the well known benefits of continuing professional development of teachers, most teachers never have the opportunity to improve their

knowledge of subject matter and the practical skills for the effective implementation of the curriculum.

The National Teachers' Institute has carried out various CPD projects. The most recent and unarguably the most ambitious was the MDGs retraining programme for teachers. The yearning for many more of such project was open and strident.

It will be necessary for more advocacies by teachers' unions and teacher education agencies. Teacher training institutions should be strengthened to adequately respond to teachers' needs and demands. It may be necessary to make it mandatory for all levels of government to set aside at least 5% of their budgets for teacher professional development. The establishment of school and cluster-based teacher networks for improving classroom practice should be encouraged. Finally, opportunities for continuing professional development of teachers should be created and exploited to the maximum.

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