

MINIMUM STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper discussed issues of minimum standards and accountability in colleges of education system in Nigeria. Minimum standards in education system have been a critical issue since 1970 after the government take-over of schools from voluntary agencies. The issue needs to be addressed include: proliferation of educational institutions, varied mode of instructional delivery, non-observation of admission policy, increased examination malpractices, frequent strike actions and other disruptions that water down standards in education. These necessitated the researchers to examine the existing Minimum Standard in colleges of Education in Nigeria for the purpose of instilling uniformity in the system. The study x-rayed accountability and the degree of excellence towards the achievement of the goals of the National Commission for Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The paper highlighted problems and prospects of the commission and how to improve standards through the Governing Council and Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria.*

KEYWORD: Accountability, Minimum Standards, Policy, Quality Control, Standards in Education

INTRODUCTION

The question of minimum standards in the Nigerian educational system has been a critical national issue since early 70s when, after the Nigerian civil war, government took-over schools from Voluntary Agencies. The society began to express general dissatisfaction with the existing education system and the concept of falling standards in our educational system crept in. The Nigerian Federal Government (FRN) in recognition of this observation articulated its stand on the issue in the National Policy on Education document. Federal Government of Nigeria Stated that any existing contradictions, ambiguities and lack of uniformity in the educational practices in different parts of the country should be removed to facilitate an even orderly development (FRN, 1998). FRN (2009 and 2012) has it that:

1. Transformation agenda of the present administration and the wide spread criticism that the existing Teacher Education Programme (NCE Programme) is tunnel visioned, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has revised and updated the existing NCE Minimum Standards in Colleges of Education in Nigeria (FRN, 2012).
2. Pre-Service Teacher Education (PSTE) curriculum content in Colleges of education and the University undergraduate programmes tend to be inadequate for the demands of a knowledge economy. The mastery of content knowledge in teaching subjects especially in science, Mathematics and Technology is poor and emphasis is on content memorization and use of lecture method (FRN 2009).

3. Teaching and learning materials are still inadequate and there is little or no skill development in the application of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) and modern media in teaching (FRN 2009).
4. Proliferation of higher institutions in Nigeria today as a result of increasing number of school going age who are already in school or are aspiring to be in school.
5. There are variety of delivery modes in Higher Institutions such as Sandwich Programme, distance learning systems, Work and Study Programme (WASP) etc, each of these claiming to be delivering the same goods to the Nigerians who are thirsty and willing to acquire education anywhere and in any form.
6. Frequent occurrences of students' riots, closure of schools; frequent strike actions by lecturers in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities leading to disruption of academic programmes; and a host of other disruptions in the academic calendar water down education standard quality.
7. Examination malpractice occurs in a variety of forms and adulterates the quality of education.
8. Quest for greener pasture leading to brain drain in such a way that more and more Nigerian scholars and professionals are migrating to other countries: Europe, USA Pakistan and our neighboring West African countries especially Ghana.
9. Many higher institutions operate mostly with dilapidated infrastructure; overcrowded lecture halls and insufficient equipment and materials e.g. library books and computers.

All these constitute aberration that impact adversely on the educational system and have become part and parcel of the system. The quality of education is further affected by variety of other forces such as: poor quality teachers, inadequate facilities, admission racketeering, poor personnel students' services, poor human resources knowledge of curriculum content and methods of delivery, poor supervision and evaluation, poor management etc. In view of the above, it is necessary to examine Minimum Standards in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, examine the mechanism for monitoring the actualization of the minimum standard and suggest mechanism for maintaining and sustaining minimum standards in colleges of education in Nigeria.

Minimum Standard in Education

Standard implies the level of quality, skill, ability or acceptable format which something or performance is judged and measured. Standards in education, therefore, may be referred to as the levels or degrees of excellence to be achieved at the various stages of a nation's formal educational system (Alumode, 2007). Standard or quality of education is a relative concept not absolute and education is used to achieve national goals and objectives. In corroboration, the Federal Government stated that a nation's policy on education is government's way of realizing that part of the National goal which can be achieved using education (FRN, 2004). Thus as a pre-requisite for the quality control of education, minimum standards must be prescribed based on set educational objectives. Therefore assessment of standards of education in terms of graduate skills and abilities in various subject areas amounts to assessment of the extent to which the educational system has achieved the national goals.

Beeby in Iwuji (1993) suggests that standard or quality of education could be thought of at three levels:

The first level is the classroom concept of quality or the school inspectors' conception of quality in terms of pupils' acquired skills and abilities in various subjects as well as their affective behaviours such as attitude to work and respect for authorities. The second level, standard is thought of in terms of educational productivity, the outcomes or outputs in terms of graduates. The third level, standard is thought of in terms of how far the system has achieved the nation's educational goals. At this level various stakeholders judge achievement of goals from their different perspectives.

Minimum Standards refer to pre-determined standards which set the yardstick for each organization. It marks only the lower limits below which no organization under review can operate. It as well provides a yardstick with which to measure how far the minimum has grown in some other establishments. The concept is tied to quality as it ensures maintenance of a particular level of quality (Alumode 2007). Minimum standards encourage competitions among operating establishments as regards how far from the minimum they have gone. Minimum standards in education are attributes of educational system which are adjudged by clue authority as adequate or acceptable or desirable for running the school system (Nwana, 2003: xxi).

Why Minimum Standards in Education?

One may wonder why much emphasis is laid on minimum standard of education. There is ever growing concern for quality education in Nigeria because the nation needs high quality education for its citizens. The reason is that the society is changing and so are needs, and high quality education is a guarantee for high quality manpower that leads to the derivation of high economic benefit for a better society. It is therefore necessary that minimum standards are realized, maintained, sustained and improved upon. A lot of benefits are derived from investing time, fund and efforts in the development, maintenance/sustenance and improvement on minimum standards in education. Minimum standards as posited by Emenali (1993):

1. Provide point of reference for reviewing a programme in order to ensure its continued relevance and viability;
2. Act as benchmark for measuring programme effectiveness for preparing students adequately in their chosen are of specialization;
3. Provide general guide for programme implementation, that is, standards clarify for teachers and administrators what they should do so that quality education is given to those who need and its profit;
4. Bring about the understanding of resource inputs required for effective operation of educational programmes;
5. Enhance comparability in relation to quantity and quality of programmes offered by institutions; and
6. Act as means of providing feedback regarding the performance of a programme so as to improve the quality of the programme.

Minimum Standards for National Certificate in Education (NCE) Programme

The Federal Ministry of Education (MOE) in collaboration with relevant bodies such as National University Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are responsible for quality control in tertiary education in Nigeria. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is entrusted with the responsibility of supervision of colleges of Education (COE) in Nigeria. The establishment of educational standards in the country since the introduction of the National Policy on Education in 1977 has been effected through enactments and policy declarations. Hence Decree number 3 of 1989 authorized NCCE to produce minimum standards for all programmes of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval of the Minister. The decree however limits NCCE to teacher education undertaken outside the universities. The first minimum standards document was produced by NCCE in 1990. The document has to be reviewed after every five years and the most current was published in 2012.

The 2012 Minimum Standard documents were based on the new mandate of the teacher training programme at the NCE level which is the recognized minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria. The new mandate was to produce quality teachers for the Basic Education sub-sector which encompasses the following categories of education:

1. Early Childhood Care Development and Education,
2. Kindergarten Education
3. Primary education
4. Junior Secondary Education
5. Adult and non-formal Education
6. Special Needs Education.

Based on the above categories the Federal Government (FRN, 2012) equivocally stated that:

Each of these categories of education has an approved national curriculum which is distinctive and extensive in addition to those of the Senior Secondary Education (which remain content specific). Thus if NCE is to remain relevant to the sub-sector it is intended to serve, it must do more than it is presently doing (p. vi)

It is, therefore mandatory for Colleges of Education to prepare teachers with knowledge and skills required to teach effectively at the different levels and areas of the Basic Education programme without being oblivious of the need for higher education of the beneficiaries.

The minimum, standards for teacher education educators define the minimum that the educators should know and be able to do as well as their expected minimum dispositions towards their work, if they are to remain and progress in their career. The new minimum standard documents consist of nine volumes:

1. General Education
2. Arts and Social Sciences
3. Adult/ Non-Formal and Special Education
4. Early-Child Care/Primary
5. Languages

6. Sciences
7. Vocational and Technical Education
8. Pre-NCE and
9. Curriculum Implementation Framework for NCE (FRN, 2012).

The necessity for the curriculum implementation framework was predicated on the revision of the existing NCE Teacher Education Programme and the need to provide effective teachers for the areas represented in Basic Education. The implementation framework is a guide to NCE-awarding institutions on mounting effectively the new Teacher Education Programmes in their institutions. This is an innovation in Education Minimum Standard. The implementation framework covers ten (10) sections,

1. General Approach
2. Teacher Standards
3. Learning opportunities
4. Assessment
5. Teaching Practice
6. Quality Assurance
7. General Requirements
8. Course Credit System
9. Guidelines for Examination at NCE Institutions and
10. The New institutional Structure

Mechanism for Monitoring the Actualization of Minimum Standard

When minimum educational standards are articulated and prescribed, there must be a mechanism put in place to monitor the actualization and if need be, impose sanctions for non-compliance. If that is not done the entire exercise of minimum standards would be futile. This explains the import of accountability. In the education circle in Nigeria accountability was used first observed at the end of 1960s to convey the basic idea that school systems should be held responsible for educational outcomes. In the United States the demand for accountability was attributed to such factors as the:

1. Rising cost of education and the increased tax burden;
2. Public general loss of confidence in the schools;
3. Increasing demand by parents of disadvantaged students that greater attention be given to the achievement of their children, and
4. Recognition that management techniques used in accountability programmes in government and industry were adaptable to education (Gronlund in Urevbu 2003).

Writing on school accountability laws in promoting quality education in the United States, Stake (1973) defined accountability in terms of good records and actions open-to-view. He described an accountable school as one that discloses its activities; makes good on staff promises; assigns staff responsibilities for each area of public concern; monitors its teaching and learning; gathers evidence of making good on public expectations; discovers through research the school strengths and weakness and provides cost-effective information and alternative programmes. Shedrake and Linke (1979) described accountability as the ability of an

institution to demonstrate that it has effectively achieved ends and has employed the most efficient means to achieve those ends. Thus accountability has to do with effectiveness and efficiency.

Accountability in Colleges of Education in Nigeria

The Longe Commission Report of 1992 re-examined the developmental role of Colleges of Education in Nigeria and described the goals of Colleges of Education as:

1. Teaching, encouragement of the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers; and
2. Production of highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for Primary and Junior Secondary levels of the educational system (FRN 1992:5).

Accountability to government in Colleges of Education are derived from accountability to government in Colleges of Education through the Governing Council and government Supervisory Agencies, NCCE and Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN).

The Governing Council.

The Governing Council as the supreme policy making body in Colleges of Education charged with policy making for the smooth running of the institutions including:

1. The formulation and control of institutions policy,
2. The control of the institutions finances, ensuring that proper accounts are kept and reported annually after being audited by an independent firm; and
3. The control and superintendence over the institutions property, thus ensuring that all aspects of the property are duly accounted for and regularly reported upon.

The Teachers Registration Council.

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria was established by decree 31 of 1993 and the Council was charged with the responsibility of:

1. Determining who teachers are,
2. Determining what standards of knowledge and skills teachers are to possess;
3. Raising standards of teaching from time to time;
4. Establishing and maintaining a register of teachers.
5. Regulating and controlling the teaching profession/including disciplining of teachers;
6. Classifying teachers according to their qualification. TRCN in addition states the persons who will be registerable as teachers, if they: pass qualifying examinations and undertake teaching practice; are of good character; are 21 years and above; and are not convicted of fraud and dishonesty.

National Commission for Colleges of Education and Accountability

National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) lays down the minimum standards for all teachers' education programmes as well accredits their certificates and other academic awards.

Accreditation is the process by which the quality and standards of educational institutions are assessed. Afe (2003) described accreditation as the recognition granted by a national agency to an institution that has met the minimum national standards set down for that level of institution or programme. Accreditation, therefore, is a process by which an institution periodically evaluates its educational activities, in whole or in part and seeks an independent judgement to confirm that it is sustainably achieving its philosophy and objectives.

Areas in NCCE Accreditation

Emphasis during NCCE Accreditation is in three broad areas in colleges of Nigeria:

The Quality of Academic matters: This consists of the programmes, philosophy, aims and objectives and the curriculum which prepares the students to be competent in an area of specialization. This section inquires about the extent to which the institutional vision, mission and strategic goals of a given College of Education are sensitive and responsive to the production of well motivated teachers with high personal and professional discipline, integrity, and competence for all the levels of Basic Education. This became more important with the signing into law of the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 and also the publication of the new minimum standard which stresses the production of specialist teachers for all levels of Basic Education. This section also inquires about the quality of the various curricula of colleges of Education programme. It includes the general and specific admission requirement into Colleges of Education and graduation requirements.

Governance and Administration: The second section is concerned with the quality of governance and administration provided by the colleges, the competences and number of teaching and non-teaching staff including the headship of departments, deanship of schools and staff development. This section also inquires about the quality and competence of the Principal Officers, Academic Board, School Boards, Departmental Boards and Units, quality of the teaching staff, teacher-students ratio, carrying capacity, examination and result; the processing system, question papers, External Examiners report, marking scheme etc.

Facilities: The third section inquires about buildings and equipment. It inquires about the quality and adequacy of facilities, space and classroom, Laboratory and its equipment, staff offices and their equipment. It is concerned with lecture theatres and lecture halls, class rooms, staff offices and facilities, basic office furnishing and equipment including computers for Heads of Departments and Deans of schools. It looks into the equipment of Centre for Educational Technology (GET), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), School Library, Departmental Library and College Library; vehicle for teaching practice; counselling centre and computers and Demonstration Schools.

In this section the college level of quality of transparency and accountability in funds management, external auditors' report and funds general capability are considered. After the exercise the accreditation status is determined and the institutions get full or interim accreditation or denied accreditation.

Sustenance of Minimum Standard: There is evidence that the standard of teacher education in Nigeria is low but standards in education have connotations for quality, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and pragmatism for educational practice. For Afe (2003:162) to maintain and sustain standards in Colleges of Education as stipulated by NCCE the following suggestions were proffered.

- i. Accreditation Exercise and, Sanctions: The accreditation should be a regular exercise and implementation of sanction should also be observed. There are some legal provisions for sanctions against institutions that fail to comply with the laid down conditions. The NCCE decree 3 of 1993 empowers the commission through subsection (ii) of section 5 to de-recognize any College of Education previously up-graded to degree awarding status if the institution no longer meets the standards for degree programme.
- ii. Teaching Practice Supervision: Students do not take teaching practice serious and Supervisors are not serious either. Gratification in cash and kind takes precedence over academic excellence. The imperative of the role of NCCE and institutions is in the attainment of relevance and pragmatism in teacher education. We should note the importance of the caution that "we must avoid the total mistake of the proverbial dinosaur which lived in its past glory, refused to learn new methods, failed to adopt to the changing times and which intimately had to face extinction" (Etuk, 1992:xii). Therefore any student on teaching practice exercise who indulges in truancy and absenteeism during teaching practices exercise should not be assessed.
- iii. Staff Development: It is said that no matter how good the teachers' pre-service preparation may be, there is always readjustment in educational goals and procedures what is of utmost importance to any education system, it is what learners are able to learn; and not just what teachers are required to teach. This situation imposes new demands on educational craftsmanship in turning things around for better (FRN 1998). The new Teacher Education Programmes with emphasis on Basic Education teachers should be provided with opportunities to acquire relevant skills and attitudes of an effective teacher. Both pre-service and in-serve training for teachers should focus on creating teachers for specific areas in Basic Education, that is, Early Child Care and Education (ECCE), Primary Education Studies (PES), Junior Secondary School (JSS), Adult and non-formal Education and special Education.
- iv. Resources: The issue of deficiencies in physical and instructional facilities in colleges of Education is pathetic as facilities crucial for sustainability; of education minimum standard in colleges of Education. Adequate lecture theatres and lecture halls are very essential because of the large number of students admitted in the colleges. Adequate number of classrooms for seminars, group discussions etc should be provided. Staff officer facilities are basic in sustaining minimum standard as basic office furnishing and equipment including computers for Deans and Head of Departments are very crucial in efficient performance of duties. Spacious and well equipped libraries are needed for research.

There should be enough books to cover all the areas of the subject in the ratio of one student to ten books. There should also be supplied well equip centre for ICT and GET. Qualified and adequate number of teaching staff as well as non-teaching staff should be appointed. A minimum of master's degree in education with teaching are required for appointment as lecturers in Colleges of Education.

The recommended staff/student ratio of 1:25 in essence adequate number of qualified staff is necessary for the maintenance and sustenance of education minimum standard.

The quality of teachers in the educational setting is directly related to the quality and adequacy of instructional input and consequently the products from teacher training institutions. In order

to achieve the production of good quality teaching force, institutional trainers should be professionally of high quality educators. In that way education minimum standard will be sustained in colleges of Education in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Teacher should be provided with basic skills of teacher's education programme and opportunities to acquire relevant skills and attitude.
2. There should be enough books in the school library to cover all the areas of the subjects offered in the schools at the ratio of one student to three different books. There should also be supplied well equip centre for ICT and GET.
3. The recommended staff/student ratio of 1:25 should be strictly observed; in essence adequate number of qualified staff is necessary for the maintenance and sustenance of education minimum standard.

CONCLUSION

This paper X-rayed minimum standards and accountability in Colleges of Education. The needs to discuss minimum standards at this time under some prevailing circumstances were highlighted. The concepts of minimum standards and accountability were given indepth discussion. It was explained that a lot of benefits are embedded in investing time money and efforts in the development, maintenance and improvement upon Minimum Standards in Education. Minimum Standards in Colleges of Education and the new minimum standards document published in 2012 by NCCE were discussed. The new minimum standards was said to be predicated on the criticism that the existing NCE programme is tunnel vissioned. The new programme by implication addressed teachers' needs at the basic education level, covering five levels: Early Childhood and Care Education, Primary Education, Junior Secondary Education, Adult and Non-Formal Education, and Special Needs Education.

Accountability in Colleges of Education is affected through the Governing Council, Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria and National Commission for Colleges of Education's accreditation. Mechanism for sustaining Minimum standards in Colleges of Education is achieved through accreditation exercise and sanctions, teaching practice supervision, staff development and resources management. In conclusion it is believed that the ability to sustain minimum standard practice as devised by NCCE will lead to- improved teacher education which in turn will ultimately be the answer to the problem of declining standards in the school system.

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