

CORE CURRICULUM MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS (CCMAS) AND QUALITY OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: AN ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION COURSE CONTENTS

By

EFEGHELESA OMENA (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Foundations, School of General Education,
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto

Abstract

The training of professional teachers in any progressive society is tied to the quality of programmes designed for utilization in her teacher training institutions. This necessarily follows that courses designed for the grooming of would-be-teachers are not to be treated with levity and/or kid's glove. The inclusion of philosophy of education which is seen as an applied philosophy in institutions of teacher education is aimed at infusing into prospective teachers not only the spirit of inquisitiveness, but to open up their minds to different ways of finding solution to life's challenges. However, there seems to be an attempt by policy-makers to expunge the discipline of philosophy of education from among teacher training programmes by lumping up foundational course contents. Therefore, this paper is designed to peep into what seems to be shallow course content of philosophy of education as enshrined in the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) designed by National Universities Commission (NUC) for Nigerian University System (NUS). To this end, this paper is qualitative in nature; utilizing library documents, reputable journals, books, and various reports about the topic were used as a source of data collection. Some recommendations and suggestions were made at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Philosophy of Education, Teacher Education, Minimum Academic Standards

Introduction

Philosophy of education seems to be unpopular within the same epistemic community of teacher education. Consequently, in our teacher training institutions today, pre-eminence is often placed on disciplines with visual immediacy with the view that reality constitutes of our phenomenal world knowable through sense experience and experimentation. Courses in science education and social science education tend to meet such yearning within the corridors of teacher's training institutions in Nigeria.¹ Arguably, one is at liberty to speculate that there is an attempt by policy makers to ensure that philosophy of education is finally shown the way out from the concert of intellectual disciplines. This position is hinged on the fact that in the recently approved Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), philosophy of education seems not to be given the prime of place it deserves in teacher education. Unfortunately, philosophy of education

¹ Omena, E. (2020). *Introduction to Philosophy of education for Teacher Training Institutions in Nigeria*. Zaria, Nigeria: ABU Press, pp. 3.

cannot be relegated to the background without consequential adverse effect on the quality of teacher education. This was the view of Enoh² when he stated that:

There is an increasing threat to the quality of teacher education in this country which affects not only the quality of instruction in the classroom but also the quality of decision-making in the education system due to the continuous neglect of philosophy of education in teacher training programmes ... It is my view that much of the nation's educational problems emanate from the underutilization of philosophy of education in training teachers and in decision-making; that the policies and decisions which drive the education system and which to my best understanding have turned it into an educational wasteland are the direct outcome of this neglect.

Among other benefits, philosophy of education incites students/teachers to think clearly and carefully about what they are doing; the modesty associated with the discipline of philosophy of education forbids any to arrogate to oneself the repository of knowledge; and it helps at higher levels of policy making and setting goals for education.

The call for an overhauling of the entire educational practice in Nigeria to meet up with contemporary demands has gained traction in recent years. In this call, the desire for change in teacher education becomes imperative. Sadly, such imperativeness gives policy makers, that is, those with statutory obligation who both make policies and those who enact them into law the impetus to be front liners in the change process in most cases; without recourse to those who execute such policies. In seeking change, policy makers have asserted their right to unilaterally make changes in the educational enterprise by marginalizing both scholars and practitioners. This brings to mind the accusation leveled against National Universities Commission (NUC) by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) of imposition of the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) on Nigerian Universities. Among other things, the NUC was accused of not having a wide consultation before the migration from the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) to the CCMAS. As a result, many important components of university academic programmes were completely phased out in the new 70% CCMAS and the 30% local content is considered insufficient to remedy the vacuum created by the CCMAS. To this end, in a press release by ASUU, it is believed that CCMAS portends serious dangers for quality university education in Nigeria.

As the title suggests, the concern of this paper is with the quality of teacher education programmes in the face of the newly released CCMAS documents. The aim is to isolate for analysis the course contents of a foundational course (philosophy of education) in line with what is obtainable in the new CCMAS. The imperativeness of looking into courses designed to groom would-be-teachers that would reflect the three domains of learning cannot be treated with kid's gloves. This is so because the training of professional teachers in any progressive society is tied to the quality of courses designed for utilization in her teacher training institutions.

The Concept of Teacher Education in Nigeria

² Enoh, A.O. (2013). *The Neglect of Philosophy of Education and the Spread of Nigeria's Educational Wasteland*. Spindrel Int. Printers, pp.4.

Teacher education occupies an important place in the enterprise of organised education and it is primarily concerned with the preparation of teachers both in pre-service and in-service/on-the-job training. The acquisition of professional skills of imparting knowledge at all levels of educational system cannot be treated with levity. This is because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Hence, teacher education could be defined as an “institutionalised procedure designed for professional training of those who engage in the act of teaching in preparation of competent teachers who are knowledgeable in specialized area of knowledge and professional practice”.³ In other words, teacher education refers to professional education of teachers towards attainment of attitudes, skills and knowledge considered desirable so as to make them efficient and effective in their work in accordance with the need of a society at any point in time.⁴ In Nigeria, teacher education has witnessed a catalogue of changes. Teacher education started during missionary/colonial era when there was no formal training for teachers. Today, teacher education programmes are classified into three levels based on training, acquisition and certification. They follow the understated sequence;

- (a) Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE)
- (b) Bachelor’s Degree in Education Programme
- (c) Post-Graduate Degree in Education Programme

The minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession in Nigeria today is the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). The goals of teacher education in Nigeria are clearly enunciated in the National Policy on Education. The goals are as follows:

- i. To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system.
- ii. To further encourage the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- iii. To help teachers fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
- iv. To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to changing situations, and
- v. To enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession.⁵

To realise these objectives, certain institutions are charged with the responsibility to provide professional training for teachers. These are:

- i. Faculties/ Institutes of Education of Universities
- ii. Colleges of Education
- iii. The National Teacher’s Institute (NTI)
- iv. Schools of Education in Polytechnics
- v. National Mathematical Centre and
- vi. The National Institute of Nigerian Languages.⁶

³ Rose, A.A., Anthonia, E.I., and Ikpi, I.A. (2014). *Teacher Training and Teacher Labour Sustainability in Nigeria*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science: Vol. 29 (3), (Mar. 2014), pp. 1-7.

⁴ Osuji, S.N. (2009). *Teacher Education Curriculum in Nigeria in the Perspective of Lifelong Education*. The Journal of International Social Research: Vol. 2 (8), Summer 2009.

⁵ FRN (2013). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.

⁶ Okoli, N.J., Ogbondah, L.E. & Abdullahi, J.E. (2015). *Preparing Teachers for Contemporary Nigeria*. Journal of Education and Practice: Vol. 6. No. 14. (2015), pp. 130.

Our focus in this paper is on Faculties/Institutes of Education since there is a recent change in the curriculum of teacher education in Nigerian universities as reflected in the new CCMAS.

Emergence of Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS)

The issuance of the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) by National University Commission (NUC) for application in Nigerian University System (NUS) has been greeted with criticisms particularly from the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in what they described as ‘hazy procedures’, which lacks inclusivity. Agreeably, the need for a review of the curricula of university education that would address local issues, and square with international standards with the ultimate aim of producing competitive graduates is imperative. Exerting its legal obligation to set minimum standards for the Nigerian University System (NUS), the first attempt was in 1989, which led to the emergence of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all programmes in Nigerian universities.⁷

Considered to be obsolete, NUC mooted the plans to review the MAS documents in 2001. After a hiatus of about three years, in 2004, the NUC developed outcome-based benchmark statements for all the programmes in Nigerian University System through a workshop that allowed for a wide consultation and far-reaching discussions by relevant stakeholders. Following comments and feedback from the universities to the effect that the Benchmark-style Statements were too sketchy to meaningfully guide the development of curriculum and inadequate for the purpose of accreditation, the Commission, in 2007 put in place a mechanism for the merger of the Benchmark-style Statements and the revised Minimum Academic Standards, which birthed the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS).

Sadly, the meticulously and exhaustive consultation that characterised the issuance of the BMAS seems to be lacking in the process that led the CCMAS though NUC admits that the commencement of the process started in 2018. The recently approved Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) by the National Universities Commission (NUC) was hastened up and completed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and there are fears that the Commission failed in due diligence. In fact, the Secretary General of the NUC admitted that:

*Bearing in mind the need to adhere to covid-19 protocol as prescribed by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the Commission was compelled by prevailing circumstances to finalize the curriculum virtually ... Each discipline and programme had NUC representatives who assisted panelists with all the tools and working materials. Several online meetings were held at programme level, where the real business of developing the CCMAS took place...*⁸

In 2022, NUC finalised modalities of the CCMAS documents and issued it for use in Nigerian University System with seventeen (17) academic disciplines as against the fourteen (14) disciplines contained in the BMAS. The CCMAS documents are structured to provide for 70% of core courses for each programme, while allowing universities to utilize the remaining 30% for other innovative courses in their peculiar areas of focus. It is against this backdrop that it becomes

⁷ NUC (2022). *Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards for Nigerian Universities*. Abuja: NUC Press, pp. 6.

⁸ *ibid*

imperative to peep into course contents of foundational courses in teacher education, particularly philosophy of education as this ought to have direct bearing on the quality of teachers to be produced with the new CCMAS.

An Overview of Philosophy of Education Course Contents in the CCMAS

The need for a constant review of a curriculum cannot be over emphasised. The basis for curriculum revision emerges from the need to achieve stated objectives effectively and institutions saddled with such responsibility undertakes curriculum revision on regular basis to remove irrelevant aspects and to strengthen the weak ones in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of the entire system. In doing this, practitioners and professionals ought to be consulted. Unfortunately, among the forty three (43) reviewers and other NUC members that came up with the CCMAS, none represented philosophy of education. The resultant effect is that, the new CCMAS is skewed against core and foundational courses in teacher education programmes. This is attested to by ASUU in a press release titled ‘Imposition of Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) on Nigerian Universities’. Foundational courses in teacher education plays vital role in the grooming of teachers. Such courses include philosophy and sociology of education, educational psychology, history of education and principles and methods of teaching.

What are the course contents of philosophy of education, sociology of education, educational psychology and history of education as designated for the grooming of would-be-teachers in Nigeria in the CCMAS? This question is perhaps at the heart of this paper as it cannot be devoid of quality teacher education; and to provide an answer, it is pertinent to X-ray the minimum standards approved for use by NUC for Nigerian University System. Empowered by law to lay down standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities, the NUC first came up with the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) documents as a major instrument of quality assurance in 1989; then the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in 2007; and today we have the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) which is expected to take effect from 2023.

An examination of the basic elements of the operation of the benchmark minimum academic standards (BMAS) in education programmes reveals that the course structure and synopses of common foundation courses of education degree programmes lumped sociology and philosophy of education together under the course title ‘Foundations of Education I’ and coded ‘EDU 102’ a two (2) units course. Sadly, the synopses and statement of the course contents of EDU 102 is nebulous so much so that it requires the intellectual competence of professionals to make sense of it; by bringing out the salient tenets in the form of learning experience(s). For example, the only part of the contents with allusion to philosophy of education states: “...An introduction to major sociological and philosophical ideas, which have influence”.⁹ In comparison, there seems to be not only a change in nomenclature of the course titled ‘Foundations of Education I’, but a further lumping together of key foundation courses such as history of education, sociology of

⁹ NUC (2014). *Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for Undergraduate Programs in Nigerian Universities*. Abuja: NUC Press, pp. 20.

education, educational psychology and philosophy of education in the newly issued CCMAS documents.

From the CCMAS, one notices that the only course with reference to philosophy of education is entitled 'Introduction to Teaching and Foundations of Education' and coded 'EDU 101' a two (2) units course. From the learning outcomes of the course, it is observed that items 5, 7, 8 and 9 alluded to history of education in Nigeria, educational psychology, sociology of education and philosophy of education respectively.¹⁰ And part of the course contents that bothers on philosophy of education states: "...Values of education, major tenets of idealism, realism, neo-thomism, experimentalism and existentialism and their applications in education". Just like the abrogated BMAS, the course contents of philosophy of education as stipulated in the CCMAS requires the intellectual competence of professionals to sieve out of it what could be termed learning experience(s). While this may not be a problem to a trained philosopher of education, this could not be said of non-philosophers of education teaching the course in our institutions of teacher education. Enoh¹¹ once posited that philosophy of education: "has no content of its own, but arrogates to itself the mandate to challenge everything that other discipline ever do ... thus leaving always those who attempt listening to them more confused than they ever were..." Whilst it is true that the study of philosophy (of education) requires the intellectual competence of learners; over the years, usurpation by non-philosophers dispensing its learning experiences to students in teacher education institutions in Nigeria may have added feather to the mystification of philosophy (of education) as a cryptic discipline.

Hurdles Facing Philosophy of Education in Teacher Education in Nigeria

The challenges bedeviling the noble discipline of philosophy of education seems to be multifarious ranging from repudiation of its methodology, usurpation by quacks, lack of practitioners among policy makers and many more. Babarinde¹² succinctly summarises the hurdles faced by philosophy of education as follows:

- i. Proliferation of courses and dwindling expertise;
- ii. Quackery
- iii. Shallow content;
- iv. Inability and failure to defend the discipline against tyranny of socio-scientific disciplines in education;
- v. Oppression and suppression of the discipline by colleagues in other discipline due to ignorance;
- vi. Declining/poor quality of research and publications;
- vii. Weak policy and advocacy;
- viii. Poor professional network and support;
- ix. Poor attitude to technology utilization.

¹⁰ NUC (2022). *Op. Cit.* pp. 41.

¹¹ Enoh, A.O. (2013). *Op. Cit.* pp.5.

¹² Babarinde, K. (2017). *Rethinking the Future of Philosophy of Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*. A Pre-Conference Paper Presented at PEAN Annual Conference, Organized by Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba Lagos State on Tuesday 24th - Friday 27th October, 2017.

With the recent attempt by policy-makers to attenuate philosophy of education and other foundational courses in teacher education, practitioners must wake up to the task of defending the discipline in the light of its many benefits. Such advocacy has the ability to heighten awareness both to policy-makers and usurpers (quacks) within the corridors of teacher training institutions teaching and mystifying the true essence of the discipline. The challenge of shallow content is not only connected with the absence of philosophers of education among policy makers/curriculum planners; but also as a result of lack of advocacy and awareness.

Towards a Robust Course Contents of Philosophy of Education

What is the scope of philosophy of education? Or put in another way, what ought to be the subject matter, contents, task or area of coverage of philosophy of education? Like many philosophical questions in education, there is no universally accepted answer. Opinions differ as to what should be the area of coverage in philosophy of education and some are of the view that philosophy of education has no content of its own. This notwithstanding, there are certain identifiable scope of the discipline though such a scope could not be said to be watertight. For clarity, suffice one to summarise the scope of philosophy of education as put forward by Azenabor¹³, which includes the following:

- i. **Branches/Elements of Philosophy** – Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic and their implications on education.
- ii. **Values or Goals of Education** which scope includes:
 - (a) Educational aims, objectives and importance
 - (b) The nature of human personality as he is capable of being educated.
 - (c) The goal and character of the truly educated person
 - (d) The abilities that human beings acquire in achieving this goal
 - (e) The agents of education by which human beings are educated.
- iii. **The development of Schools of Thought in Philosophy** (Idealism, Realism, Naturalism, Pragmatism, Existentialism) and their implications on education.
- iv. **Philosophers of Education or Educational Thinkers**, such as Froebel, Pestalozzi, Quintilian, Dewey, Montessori, Whitehead, Erasmus, Blyden, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, Locke, Rousseau, Russell, Nyerere, Henry Carr, etc.
- v. **Central Concepts in Education**, such as; Teaching, learning, Instructing, Conditioning, Training and Indoctrination.
- vi. **Educational Theories or Theories of Philosophy of Education**, such as, Humanism, Scientism, Progressivism, Essentialism, Perennialism and Re-constructionism.

Conclusion

The desire for change in teacher education is everywhere. There seems to be a consensus among educational practitioners of different genre, policy-makers and the general populace that quality of education at all levels is abysmally low and the need for an overhauling of the entire system

¹³ Azenabor, G.E. (2017). *Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice in Education: Towards an Indigenous Philosophy of Education for Nigeria*. Lead paper presented at the 37th Annual Conference of Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN) on 24th – 27th October, 2017 At the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

becomes inevitable. This makes the review of the curriculum of the substratum of teacher education even more important because teacher training institutions are the lifeline of any educational system. The training of professional teachers in any progressive society is tied to the quality of programmes designed for utilization in her teacher training institutions. This necessarily follows that courses designed for the grooming of would-be-teachers are not to be treated with levity and/or kid's glove. The inclusion of philosophy of education which is seen as an applied philosophy in institutions of teacher education is aimed at infusing into prospective teachers not only the spirit of inquisitiveness, but to open up their minds to different ways of finding solution to life's challenges. Therefore, the focal concern of this paper is aimed at creating the necessary awareness why philosophy of education must be given the prime of place it deserve in the enhancement of higher quality teacher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Cognizance of the statutory obligation of NUC to set standards and assuring quality in the Nigerian University System, policy-makers ought to robustly consult professionals and practitioners in the daunting task of curriculum review. Even in instances when the role for practitioners and scholars are acknowledged, policy-makers tends to enact changes at the national or federal level while leaving to others the need to fix programmes at the local or institutional level. The need for the community of academics and professionals to reclaim a role and to pose a set of solutions cannot be over emphasised. It is thus recommended that this has to be done at the local level, rather than the national level and that the single measure of success will be student learning gains. Since the CCMAS provides for 70% minimum core courses for graduation, individual institutions ought to augment the remaining 30% by making enough room for philosophy of education be enriching its course contents. To this end, it is recommended that sound and seasoned philosophers of education be engaged by institutions of teacher education to guide and expose student/teachers to the leaning-experience(s) of philosophy of education. Having a fundamental knowledge of philosophy of education is not enough to teach it to others. It is a disservice and usurpation to engage non-professionals carry out a task they are not well suited. It is also recommended that EDU 101 entitled 'Introduction to Teaching and Foundations of Education' in the CCMAS be unbundled and the course content of philosophy of education be broadened to reflect the robustness it deserves. Lastly, members of Philosophy of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN) must rally together to ensure that the discipline of philosophy of education is not shown the way out of the podium of intellectualism in our institutions of teacher education in Nigeria. This they can do by ensuring that on their annual conferences, there are publications that stress the importance of philosophy of education in teacher training programmes; and reaching out to NUC and NCCE leaders to ensure that the discipline is given the prime of place it deserves.

Bibliography

1. Omena, E. (2020). Introduction to philosophy of education for teacher training Institutions in Nigeria. ABU Press, pp. 3.
2. Enoch, A.O. (2013). The neglect of Philosophy of Education and the spread of Nigeria's educational wasteland. Spindrel Int. Printers, pp.4.

3. Rose, A.A., Anthonia, E.I., & Ikpi, I.A. (2014). Teacher training and teacher labour sustainability in Nigeria. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science: Vol. 29 (3), pp. 1-7.
4. Osuji, S.N. (2009). Teacher education curriculum in Nigeria in the perspective of lifelong education. The Journal of International Social Research: Vol. 2 (8), pp. 12-21.
5. FRN (2013). National policy on education. NERDC Press.
6. Okoli, N.J., Ogbondah, L.E. & Abdullahi, J.E. (2015). Preparing teachers for contemporary Nigeria. Journal of Education and Practice: 6. No. (14), pp. 130.
7. NUC (2022). *Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards for Nigerian Universities*. Abuja: NUC Press, pp. 6.
8. Ibid
9. NUC (2014). Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for Undergraduate Programs in Nigerian Universities. NUC Press, pp. 20.
10. NUC (2022). *Op. Cit.* pp. 41.
11. Enoh, A.O. (2013). *Op. Cit.* pp.5.
12. Babarinde, K. (2017). Rethinking the future of Philosophy of Education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. A Pre-Conference Paper Presented at PEAN Annual Conference, Organized by Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba Lagos State on Tuesday 24th - Friday 27th October, 2017.
13. Azenabor, G.E. (2017). Bridging the gap between theory and practice in education: Towards an indigenous Philosophy of Education for Nigeria. Lead Paper Presented at the 37th Annual Conference of Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN) on 24th – 27th October, 2017 At the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria.