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Characteristics and Concerns of Recruits Into Primary Teacher Education Program in Nigeria

Introduction

Aware that the primary level of education is the "key to the success or failure of the whole [educational] system" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977, p. 7), the Nigerian government has been making concerted efforts to produce competent teachers in adequate number and quality for this level of education. One of the major problems hindering the effectiveness of these efforts, however, is the poor qualifications of the entrants into teacher education programs. This is mainly because teaching is not an attractive profession in the country, and so it is mainly the academically weak students who cannot aspire for more prestigious professions that enter teacher education programs (Akinpelu, 1972; Fadipe, 1992; Nwosu, 1976). Consequently, most of these teachers are poorly educated and unable to offer their pupils quality education (Anikweze, 1991).

After the expansion of teacher education facilities in the mid-1970s to train the large number of teachers needed for the universal primary education (UPE) scheme in the country (Nwosu, 1976), these facilities have been reduced in number in an effort to improve the quality of the teachers who graduate and to ensure quality education in the primary schools. Also in order to improve primary education, the Nigerian government has adopted the policy of making the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) the minimum qualification for teaching in primary schools in the shortest possible time. However, the success of this measure depends largely on the quality of entrants to the relevant teacher education program.

The Study

In accordance with the above-mentioned policy, one state established a college of primary education in 1994. Like the other colleges of education in the country, it operates a three-year teacher education program under the same guidelines and regulatory body. Unlike other colleges of education, the graduates of the college are prepared for teaching only in primary schools. I report here part of an evaluative study of the college's academic program. This aspect focused on the quality of the recruits into the program and their concerns about it. It was an attempt to answer the questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the students enrolled in the program?
2. What are the major concerns of the students about the program?

Answers to these questions are important not only for program planning and resource allocation, but also for understanding the results of program evaluation. Moreover, studies on the concerns of preservice teachers are virtually nonexistent in Nigeria.

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Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire administered to all final-year students of the college. The questionnaire contained, among others, items seeking background information about the students, their work experience, and their major concerns about the academic program of the college. Of the 117 questionnaires given out and returned, 108 were found useful for the purpose of this study.

Findings and Discussion

Characteristics of the students. Of the participants in the study, 30 (or 27.8%) were male and 78 (or 72.2%) were female. Their ages ranged from 16 to over 30, with 81 (or 75%) within the 21-25 age bracket. Only three (2.78%) were over 30. Only 22 (or 20.37%) of them had previous full-time or part-time working experience before gaining admission into the college. Eighty-three (or 76.85%) were admitted into the preliminary studies program of the college before entering the normal program. Before entering the college 35.18% had taken the University Matriculations Examination once or twice, and 27.78% and 5.56% had taken similar examinations to Nigerian polytechnics and colleges of education respectively without success. Thirty-four participants (or 31.48%) had not previously sought admission to any higher education institution.

Students' Major Concerns

The students' concerns about the program expressed by five or more students are shown in Table 1, which also indicates the number of students expressing these concerns.

The apparent overrepresentation of female students in the study sample reflects the present trend in Nigeria where teaching in primary schools in particular is becoming the realm of women. The preliminary studies program through which about three quarters of the students entered the college's normal program is designed for students without requisite qualifications for admission into the college. It is through this program that the college presently receives the bulk of its students. Added to the fact that none of the students in the sample could secure admission into a higher institution of learning, this casts some doubt on whether they were characteristic of prospective teachers who would be capable of enhancing the quality of primary education.

Table 1 shows that apart from concern for lecture rooms, the students' concerns focused mainly on the consequences of following the program. It would seem that many were uncomfortable with teaching in primary schools, probably because it is seen as a low-prestige job in the country.

As this college of education is relatively new and the only one in the country that awards the NCE in primary education, it is not surprising that some students expressed concern about its status and the acceptability of its certificate.

Conclusion

The above findings suggest that recruits into the college program were predominantly young women who were entering the program after unsuccessfully seeking admission into other institutions of higher education. The academic program of the college has yet to attract recruits of high academic standing.

Table 1
Students Concerns With Their Academic Program in Order
Frequency and Percentage

S/N		No. of students	%
1.	Having to teach in only primary schools	59	54.63
2.	Prospects of reading other professional courses in higher institutions of learning	47	43.52
3.	Number of college lecture rooms	44	40.74
4.	Possibility of changing profession after completing the program	38	35.19
5.	Instructional materials in the college	26	24.07
6.	Prospects of teaching in secondary schools	17	15.74
7.	Course contents of the program	15	13.89
8.	College library facilities	14	12.96
9.	Textbooks	13	12.03
10.	Quality of college academic staff	13	12.03
11.	College laboratories and studios	10	9.26
12.	Salary after graduation	8	7.41
13.	Number of candidates seeking admission into the college	8	7.41
14.	Recognition of primary education certificate by employers	8	7.41
15.	Status of the college in relation to other colleges of education in the country	7	6.48
16.	Relevance of program to future career	7	6.48
17.	Relationship with college lecturers	6	5.56
18.	Tuition fees	5	4.63
19.	Accommodation	5	4.63

The major concerns of the students, apart from the college lecture rooms, which they considered too few, are not those of people who are genuinely interested in teaching in primary school or concerned with acquiring skills that will contribute to quality instruction in primary schools.

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