INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POST COVID-19 NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The outbreak of the Corona-virus created a global health crisis which has affected educational systems globally, resulting in near-total closures of schools with far reaching economic and social consequences. Countries adopted different strategies to ensure learning was sustained using digital technologies. However, the majority of children in Nigeria were not able to benefit from this intervention due to some barriers. Primary barriers included poor knowledge of technology, infrastructural deficiencies, epileptic power supply, and funding amongst others. Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is the Teachers Regulatory Agency and Centre for policy issue regarding teachers. TRCN, reached out to its critical stakeholders including the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Foreign Cooperation Development Organisation (FCDO), and the British Council. The focus was how to respond to the disruption caused by COVID-19 to education, through collaboration to help adopt evidence-based strategies and measures. This paper focuses on partnership between international agencies and the TRCN in Nigeria through the "Technology Enabled Learning Futures" framework. It explores focus-creating innovations to reposition teachers for effective, efficient, and transformative teaching. The paper uses secondary data to discuss the various interventions from International Development partners. It further discusses the impact of all the interventions on teaching and learning in Nigeria and its implications for international partnerships in teacher education.

Keywords: international organizations, digital technologies, Nigeria,

The Challenges of Teachers' Professional Development

The 2019 Corona-virus (COVID-19) has remained the most potent disruptive force that went across the globe without discrimination. Several authors have described the impact of COVID-19 in different ways but with thesame message. Boucouvalas (2021) says "COVID-19 presents a potent but basic lesson that what happens in one part of the world can reverberate in other parts" (p.vi). Similarly, Alimigbe (2020) looks at the impact from the perspective of adult literacy and global citizenship. According to her "the advent of the COVID-19, saw to the halt in many countries' adult literacy programmes, so much so that, series of adult literacy programmes that did exist were suspended with just a few courses continuing virtually, through TV and radio, or in open air spaces" (np.). The prominence of the virtual world necessitated by the realities of COVID-19 also throws up issues of unequal access to technology. Roumell et al. (2020) stress the importance of addressing "digital equity, and inclusion as a fundamental basis for human thriving in the 21st century" (p. 317). These impacts and challenges of COVID-19 have had excruciating impacts on education in Nigeria and especially on teachers' professional development.

The quality of teachers to a large extent determines the quality of instruction they will give. The general challenge of teachers' professional development in Nigeria is many unqualified teachers. Awodjii et al. (2020) say this low quality makes teachers' continuous professional development an imperative and the tapestry for attainment of

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quality education. In achieving quality education, there must be adequate quality teachers who have gone through quality training (Lengoiboni, 2013). Wokocha (2013) avows that mastery of content, teaching experiences, skills and dissemination of knowledge are visible evidence of teachers' quality. Thus, to monitor and regulate this continuous training in Nigeria, the TRCN was established.

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was established in 2004 in fulfilment of the quest for the professionalization of the teaching profession in Nigeria. The phenomenal expansion of the education system in Nigeria created a plethora of problems including poor teacher quality and inadequate number of teachers. The TRCN was empowered to control and regulate the teaching profession in Nigeria, (National Policy on Education). TRCN's mandate includes determining who teaches, standards for registered teachers, and quality assurance. TRCN has mapped out several strategies toward the achievement of its mandates, which includes regulations and control of teaching. These activities are expected to enable TRCN to oversee the quality of teachers and teaching at all levels of education including public and private institutions.

One of the ways TRCN ensures quality is through the registration and licensing of teachers to meet international best practices and achieve the professionalization of teaching. Thus, to be qualified for registration and licensing, education graduates must pass the Professional Qualifying Examinations (PQE), which is an entry requirement for registration and licensing. Notwithstanding efforts by the TRCN in the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria, there are still many unqualified teachers in Nigeria. The National Council on Education (NCE) has persistently given deadlines on ejection of unqualified teachers from Nigerian classrooms. Based on the NCE decisions and directives, TRCN mandates states to raise Teacher Investigative Panel (TIP) in each state to help the enforcement of the removal of unqualified teachers from classrooms in Nigeria. The real hindrance, however, has always been the political will and the fact that education is in the concurrent list. The politicking has made it an almost impossible task to eject unqualified teachers. The NCE's directives cannot be effective without the support of the state Governors who are responsible for recruitment and remuneration of teachers in their states.

TRCN and Its International Stakeholders

Partnerships are life wires of progress and development and key for the global community in meeting the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals and Education for All. This explains why Global Partnership in Education (GPE) (2013) is annexing resources together to ensure helping improve national education across the globe by bringing partners together to develop measurable quality education sector plans, by investing in underfunded and strategically important elements and by mobilizing the expertise of country-level partners to leverage their comparative advantages via the Global Learning House initiative. No doubt, partnerships are also crucial for capacity building in developing countries, hence capacity building involves empowering individuals and organizations with the knowledge, tools, and other resources they need to reach their goals. International support is important for strengthening skills in communities around the world. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal

(SDG) Goal 17 focuses on building and improving partnerships between countries and international organizations. Thus, highlighting that, working together is the plausible way forward to building support networks between developed and developing countries. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2017) identifies that as events continue to unfold across the globe, there is need for government, civil society and academia to make great alliances to bring these different sectors together to manage challenges and make the needed transformations, as one sector alone might not be able to handle the transformations underway. All these making it evident that cross-sector partnership is essential to achieving scale and sustained impact needed in the world of today. The partnerships, the WEF says, have the capacity to unleash innovative ways of working, mobilizing expertise and hard to reach resources, and creating shared accountability in an increasingly complex world.

Although the TRCN CAP T3 of 2004 did not mandate the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria to liaise with International Development Partners in attaining its mandates and other objectives, the realities of the present times and the recognition by TRCN indicate that partnership is the new way forward. TRCN, though faced with the issues of paucity of funds amidst the growing number of the teaching community, have had to leverage on partnerships since its inception in the year 2000 to be able to meet its numerous responsibilities. These partnerships have been real strongholds of TRCN.

Collaborations have existed between the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria and its various partners in different projects and interventions based on the focus of the collaborating partners at the time as well as areas TRCN is needing interventions. Amongst these International Development Partners TRCN has worked with are: World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Foreign Cooperation Development Organisation (FCDO) and British Council.

TRCN and Stakeholders

TRCN usually reaches out to stakeholders, acquaint them with the programs and activities of TRCN, and identifies areas of collaboration and support. The initial groundwork for the TRCN Teachers National Conference was born from a fallout from the technical meeting between the TRCN Registrar/Chief Executive and the UNESCO Regional Officer. UNESCO promotes international collaboration with participating countries in education, scientific and cultural activities to contribute to peace and security. UNESCO collaborates and supports policies that enhance educational advancement of participating countries. UNESCO and TRCN have synergized in key teacher policy issues over the years. Amidst the COVID-19 disturbances, TRCN called a meeting with the UNESCO Regional Officer to improve on collaboration and support for teachers' professional development and teachers career advancement. In the course of the meeting, the TRCN Boss communicatated the need for remote learning facilities (platforms) such as radio and television to train teachers, prepare them to cope with the challenges of teaching in rural areas and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on education. UNESCO indicated interest in continued collaboration between TRCN and UNESCO to

ensure rebuilding education in Nigeria. As a first step TRCN developed a concept note for the first partnership with UNESCO taking into consideration the impact of COVID-19.

The first collaborative effort between TRCN and UNESCO focused on capacity building of teachers in digital literacy through an online conference of registered teachers to share ideas for best practices. This first collaboration aligns with the implementation of a joint work plan between UNESCO and ECOWAS to support ECOWAS member states in their response to the pandemic. The training of master teachers, media personnel and other relevant school personnel on distance learning was in line with the UNESCO and ECOWAS work plan and makes TRCN's concept note very attractive to UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) Addis Ababa.

Key Stakeholders and Partners

In the last two decades of TRCN's existence, through the Federal Ministry of Education, TRCN in strategizing to accomplish its programs and activities has regularly interacted and obtained the cooperation and support of the following international development partners. World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), United State Agency for International Development (USAID), British Council, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), FHI 360, Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL), and Save the Children, amongst many other stakeholders. The area of support and co-operation obtained from the above mentioned, development partners vary depending on their own focus at the time. However, highlighted below are some collaborative efforts with some international partners and the TRCN.

UNESCO has collaborated with TRCN on a series of programmes, including capacity building of teachers on digital literacy, online conference of registered teachers and capacity building programs for TRCN state coordinators and some selected Staff. While digital literacy was geared toward building teachers' knowledge of information technology, the virtual online conference helped the sharing of ideas especially in mitigating learning challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The capacity building for TRCN staff was essentially to train staff on monitoring the TRCN program and pedagogical training. Other programs that UNESCO is bringing TRCN in to collaborate are UNESCO-ECOWAS capacity building for teachers, radio and TV personnel on distance learning. The overall goal of the project is to ensure continuity of learning during school closures occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare schools to be resilient and respond to future shocks to the education system.

FCDO/UKAid, a fundamental part of teacher education in Nigeria, has collaborated with TRCN on some Teacher Development Programme (TDP) to effectively implement the National Teacher Education Policy (NTEP) to train in-service teachers, teacher educators and student teachers. Their technology enabled interventions have been evident in their work with relevant federal and state actors including the TRCN to improve teacher effectiveness across states in Nigeria. Sight Savers is an FCDO program that supports

education for children with disabilities and address the challenges faced by teachers and some ways of addressing them.

UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education (GPA) COVID-19 response program, is aimed at strengthening Nigeria with a COVID-19 response programme on "Continuing Learning through home-based platforms". The program includes a teacher capacity development component which will enable teachers to utilize flexible digital and remote / home-based learning resources. The project is expected to gather data on the digital needs assessment to enable development of the training program for teachers on how to respond decisively and effectively to disruptions created by conflict or a pandemic.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Accelerated Funding on Education in Emergency organized a workshop on a U.S acceleration funding grant given by GPE in Emergency in Nigeria. UNICEF serves as the grant agent in Nigeria. TRCN and NTI, under the GPE projects have the responsibility of training 28,000 unqualified teachers. One of the objectives of the GPE project is to establish robust teacher preparation, professional development and recruitment. Another project goal is the capacity building of head teachers, on leadership development to address the challenges of the out-of-school children.

British Council focuses on and helps with language and education in Nigerian language and numeracy, Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) in early grades, teacher development and Kano Literacy and Mathematics Accelerator (KaLMA). KaLMA is a pilot programme aimed at strengthening the foundational skills in literacy and numeracy for children in primary 4 to 6 in public primary schools in Dawakin Tofa and Wudil LGEAs of Kano state. Since 2020, the program has experimented with a variety of models. TRCN is deeply involved with the British Council on this program to ensure only registered teachers are engaged to ensure continuity and sustainability.

USAID funded Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI plus), a project to improve literacy instruction for primary 1- 3 pupils, as well as operating non-formal learning centres geared towards increasing access for out-of-school children. TRCN was fully involved in the process of the development of a national reading framework with NEI Plus. The project printed and distributed state of the art "Mu Karanta" (Let's Read!) teaching and learning materials in Hausa and English to primary and non-formal learning centres and trained teachers in early grade reading (EGR), providing professional development for teachers.

The Technology Enabled Learning Futures

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, learning operated traditionally in the four walls of the classrooms for most places, especially in Africa. As Oyanna (2020) suggests, COVID-19 transformed the education of students across the globe, and the change is an indication of better transformations in education. The pandemic, without a doubt, has re-innovated teaching and learning so much that education is now being re-imagined on virtual platforms. Nevertheless, the real question would be, how ready is the entire world for these transformations? Especially in the developing world where infrastructural and knowledge dearth are issues to contend. All thanks to the Global Education Coalition

(GEC), which is launching the Global Learning House to help mobilize international solidarity and innovative solutions to support learning, especially for the most disadvantaged learners. This platform, that provides supplemental and remedial educational resources and instruction, at no cost, to mitigate COVID-19 induced learning losses, will also provide at least one million learners with new learning opportunities anywhere, at any time.

It has become apparent that learning should be blended to avoid the catastrophe experienced during the first and second waves of the Coronavirus. More so, as Cleveland-Innes et al (2019) posits opportunities have been created for content delivery and administration owing to the shift to an online and blended learning approach. On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic no doubt has enabled a nouvelle learning space and technology such as virtual learning. On the other hand, it has reshaped the education delivery across the globe. Rightly so, Oyanna (2020) buttresses that the COVID pandemic, which resulted in school closures, made countries across the globe "take decisive actions to accelerate the learning of school students through" (Oyanna, 2020, p.1) virtual learning.

However, to effectively and productively enable a technology learning future, some core prerequisites like access to technological tools, data availability and accessibility and requisite operational skills, will be needed. Little wonder Cleveland-Innes et al. (2019), retraces that, to a considerable extent, knowledge, expertise, support and leadership styles available for transmission to online and blended learning, determines the success rate. Similarly, Porter et al. (2014) strengthens that academic should take a stand for seeing the Technology Enabled Learning initiatives through. Murphy (2016) on the other hand, feels that the best way to approach the change and opportunities offered by Technology Enabled Learning is investing robustly in capacity building of educators not only to function appropriately in the new phase but to as well remain in control of the teaching process. Talking about a technology-enabled future is to talk about smart futures, e-futures and all the virtual e- modes of learning you can refer to. Although this seems quite a tall dream for Nigeria due to the many inherent challenges that on the face value seems insurmountable. Of the two major identified areas to enable a realistic technology future, just one is prioritizingfor now, "getting requisite skill." The interventions ongoing in Nigeria now are to build educators' learning through adequate training and retraining to ensure that they move learning to virtual platforms. UNESCO (2020) emphasized the fact that "policy-makers must take decisions that carry enormous repercussions for a wide range of stakeholders under time pressures and often with conflicting or incomplete information" (p. 2).

Based on the observations above, partnerships are needed in the aspects of infrastructural development and other issues relating to broad bands. Governments across Nigeria (Federal, State and Local education areas) are practically overwhelmed, whereby leaving all these in their hands will just widen the educational divides amongst the haves and have nots even more.

Conclusion

Partnership is inevitable in a COVID-19 era. The imperative of partnership requires the strong of the world to assist the vulnerable of the world especially in education. Teacher professional development in Nigeria is a good example. There are many other African countries with areas in need of partnership. Because a high percentage of disadvantaged learners are in Africa, partnerships will help ensure no African child is left behind in the new future of technological learning.

This explains the TRCN advocacy for "**ONE TEACHER, ONE LAPTOP.**" Possible collaborations that can see this idea through could be that a company agrees on mass production and supply of laptops to the teachers while the cost is gradually built into the teacher's salary to enable them to pay in instalments without really feeling the pinch of a huge deductions. Education has a direct or indirect impact on all the SDGs, and we can leverage education and assure attaining the 17 SDG goals by 2030.

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