

# CHANGING THE TRAJECTORIES FOR TEACHER QUALITY IN NIGERIA: INNOVATIONS THROUGH IDEATING AND SELF-HELP

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*ABSTRACT:* Meaningful development in a society requires a sound teacher education. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is saddled with the responsibilities of regulating the teaching profession in Nigeria, and it plays a pivotal role in regulating and ensuring quality control of the teaching profession across the country. It promotes partnerships with teachers' capacity building organizations across the country through providing guidelines for accreditation of programmes to enable for harmonization, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation and most importantly, to enable participants in such programs to get their status updated in the TRCN database for the purpose of renewing their teaching license. Self-help initiatives empowered by interested individuals collaborates and creates space for teacher autonomy to influence a future vision on teaching, and help build teachers' capacities in emerging issues. The organizations include *One Million Teachers*, *SEED Care & Support Foundation*, *SCHOOLINKA*, *Schoola*, *SabiTeach*, *TY Danjuma Foundation*, *TeacherX* and a host of others. This study focuses on the various self-help initiatives by well-meaning individuals across the country and how TRCN accreditation is changing the trajectories for teachers in Nigeria. The findings will enrich advocacy tools in advocating for consideration for more individuals to venture into system strengthening in education.

*Keywords:* Nigeria, teachers, self-help initiatives, TRCN Accreditation

The quality of education in any country is dependent on the quality of its teachers. NCTE (1998) affirms the pivotal role the teacher plays in the implementation of any educational process thereby putting the teacher at the heart of delivery of quality education to learners. Wokocha (2013) affirmed that the quality of a teacher is determined by intellectual competence, mastery of content, teaching experience, skills and dissemination of knowledge and highlights that Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (MCPD) programmes plays critical role in enabling these capacities. Awodiji et al. (2020) buttressed that teachers' quality output is largely determined by the quality of the teachers. The incidences of unqualified teachers that permeate all levels of education continues to threaten the quality of education, (Awodiji et al.). Students' learning outcomes and the overall development of the country is not alienated from this quality.

Teacher quality in Nigeria has been hampered by inadequate training, lack of continuous professional development, and insufficient support systems. Akpan et al. (2009) buttressed that the quality of education teachers deliver is dependent on the constant and appropriate professional development they receive. Thus, emphasizing the importance of Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (MCPD). This aligns with Alimigbe and Avoseh (2020), who emphasized that "one of the best ways to raise the quality of teachers is by building their capacity through Mandatory Continuous Professional Development Programmes" (p. 14). "Continuing Professional Development (MCPD) refers to a set of developmental goals, capacity building and strategies and service delivery for on-going, ceaseless improvement in the pedagogical and professional capacities of teachers" (p. 22). Despite efforts to improve the educational system, teacher quality in Nigeria remains a critical issue. More so, traditional methods of teacher training and development have not yielded the desired results, hence the need for innovative approaches, such as ideation and self-help, to change the trajectory of

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teacher quality. Ideation and self-help could be likened to what Biswas (2015) described as Public Private Partnership in teacher education. An approach where services are delivered by the private sector, with resources sourced from philanthropists, foundations, donor agencies and other private concern. This paper explores the potential of ideating and self-help strategies that are changing the trajectories around teacher quality in Nigeria.

### **Current State of Teacher Quality in Nigeria and Nigerian Teachers**

Teacher education in Nigeria is governed by various policies and regulations aimed at standardizing the profession. Amongst some of these policies are the National Policy on Education, the National Policy on Teacher Education, the National Policy on Information, and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Education (EdTech). The National Policy on Education Nigeria (FRN, 2013) stipulate that all teachers in the educational institutions shall be professionally trained while teachers education programmes are structured to effectively equip teachers for the performance of their duties. However, the gap between teacher training in Nigeria and actual teaching competence remains a significant challenge. Little wonder Gbadamosi and Abosede (2004), inferred that the nation seems to have entered the 21st century insufficiently prepared to cope or compete in the global economy, where growth will be based even more heavily on technical and scientific knowledge. Akintola (2013), gave the impression that the process for human capital formation in Nigeria seems abysmal where the required technical, managerial and professional skills have become evasive and the need to re-invent education system is paramount. Akintola underscored the need for vigorous efforts towards producing competent teachers to uphold the versatility of the teaching profession which requires the accurate identification of indices of developments in the society and the need to move away from regarding everyone who possesses paper qualifications as competent teachers. Akintola's assertion was sustained by Adah et al. (2012) who faulted the inadequacies and inability of some secondary schools' teachers to make simple and correct sentences or prepare effective lesson plans in their areas of specialization. There abound scenarios of teachers with teaching qualifications and certification who are incapable of delivering quality instructions to learners in the classroom. This upholds research findings indicating that many teachers lack the necessary skills to deliver quality education effectively.

The ability to withstand the extremely difficult, complex and demanding processes needed in teaching and learning, is dependent on teachers' capabilities to demonstrate a wide range of knowledge and skills, (Childs et al., 2012). Rafaila and Duta (2015) maintained that, teachers becoming lifelong learners and sharing their expertise with fellow teachers and education stakeholders has potential of addressing the complexities associated with teaching and learning to teach. Similarly, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014), buttressed that, teachers' professional knowledge and skills can be improved through continuous professional learning. Abakah et al. (2022) described continuous professional learning as that intricate ingredient required for upgrading teachers' content knowledge and improving their classroom practices. Danso-Mensah (2016) upheld professional development as those progressive learning opportunities available to the teachers and contemporaries to upgrade themselves as educators. Professional development for teachers is a *sine qua non* for acquiring topical and innovative ideas needed in upscaling their teaching, reflecting on their practice, improving teaching and learning and improving personal and professional development, (National Teaching Council, 2017). However, in Nigeria challenges impeded teachers from getting regular and needed continuous professional development.

## **Challenges Confronting Quality Teaching in Nigeria**

Olugbenga (2013), related the major challenge confronting teacher competence to what he refers as “the low-brook of candidates into the teachers training programme.” This referred to the low criteria and procedures by which candidates are selected or recruited for entry to teaching programs and teacher education institutions, which Aghenta (2016) described as a major undoing of the profession. Aghenta argued that the selection criteria and procedures for teacher education program in Nigeria are flawed, leading to unqualified candidates being admitted, which ultimately affects the education quality. Siddiqui (2010) likened the cause of this challenge to the status ascribed to the teaching profession in Nigeria and the economic resources of the system. Other challenges are: (1) poor teacher training programs; (2) lack of continuous professional development; (3) inadequate resources and support; (4) socio-economic factors; (4) paucity of funds; (5) poor remuneration of teachers; (6) lack of motivation and orientation, poor infrastructure in schools especially the public schools; and, (7) low budgetary allocation to education amongst others. Remediating these challenges calls for concerted efforts from government, education stakeholders, education enthusiast and all well-meaning Nigerians to ensure the quality of instruction learners receive at school is up to date and can allow them the chances of competing globally and for the delivery of top-notch education in line with the set goals of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (2013) and National Teacher Education Policy (2009) of producing quality, highly skilled, knowledgeable and creative teachers capable of raising a generation of students who can compete globally (Akintola, 2013).

### **The TRCN, Mandates and Imperative of its Regulation to MCPD Providers**

Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education established by Act 31 of 1993 (Now TRCN Act Cap T3 of 2004). It controls and regulate the teaching profession at all levels and sectors of the country’s educational system to match teacher quality, discipline, professionalism, reward and dignity with international standards. In cognizant of the vagaries in the teaching profession in Nigeria, TRCN monitors and regulate teachers’ continuous training and ensures high quality teaching standards. TRCN programmes includes; Professional Qualifying Examinations for Teachers, Certification & Licensing, Accreditation of Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (MCPD) Providers, Induction of Teachers, Issuance of Letters of Professional Standing, Updating of Teachers Register and Career Path Policy and Professional Standards for School leadership in Nigeria. TRCN continues to ensure that there is standardization, coordination and leadership in the delivery of continuous learning for teachers hence the Accreditation of MCPD Providers. MCPD facilitates; promotion, appointment to leadership position, renewal of the teaching license, qualification to participate in teacher MCPD evaluation test and enablement of providers to achieve consistency in the provision of high-quality continuing professional develop. TRCN initiates and encourages teachers to attend MCPD by TRCN or accredited providers. The detailed contents and credit units of respective programmes are determined by TRCN based on the needs of the teaching profession for a given time. Generally, the MCPD programmes cover annual general meetings, annual conference of registered teachers organized by TRCN, workshops and seminars as well as other training programmes approved by TRCN. Once a teacher is certified to have participated fully in a training programme and acquires a higher qualification, such person automatically earns the credit allotment designated to such training to qualify for license renewal.

All individuals, Agencies, and Ministries intending to organize MCPD expected to count towards the re- licensing of registered teachers in Nigeria shall get such MCPD recognized by

TRCN. This recognition is for the purpose of:

- Quality assurance;
- Maintaining a central/coordinated national data on MCPD of professional teachers in Nigeria;
- Complying with the provisions of the TRCN Act Section 1(1), which vests the Council with the responsibility of determining the knowledge and skills required for the teaching profession and raising those standards from time to time. The Act further empowers the Council to accredit, monitor and supervise training programmes intended to confer professional status on teachers in Nigeria.

According to TRCN (2017), to become a recognized MCPD provider by TRCN, the provider shall at least two months before the commencement of the programme formally notify TRCN and attach the requisite information thus;

- Synopsis of the programme.
- Names, contact addresses and qualifications of the resource persons.
- Type and scope of training provided, Venue of the programme.
- List of instructional facilities available for use at the programme.
- Estimated number of participants.
- Instruction/mode of training (physical, online/blended), and duration of the programme- including days and hours covered.
- Sponsorship of the programme/participants and fees (if any) payable by the teachers.

TRCN (2017) stated that, recognition of the MCPD shall be conveyed in writing to the provider at least a month before the commencement date of the programme. TRCN endorsement indicate that the programme has been evaluated and approved and that the approved provider can offer the endorsed activity for a maximum of three years before another re-evaluation. Part of the recognition conditions include those organizers must forward the names and contacts of all participants to enable upgrading their details in the TRCN database. Additionally, the Department of Regulation, Accreditation and Enforcement of TRCN is required to monitor the delivery of the activity to enable the Council to get feedback on the quality of the training. The feedback will also consist of a carefully designed questionnaire administered to participants at the close of the programme to obtain some vital information regarding the training. However, service providers who fail to comply with the MCPD guidelines are blacklisted for two years, and re-application is required after the suspension period for reconsideration.

### **Self-Help in Teacher Improvement and Professional Development**

Self-help initiatives in education are grassroots efforts inspired by education enthusiasts aimed at empowering teachers to own their professional growth through accessible, innovative, and community-driven methods. These initiatives addressed gaps in formal systems by providing tools, resources, and opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills independently. Focused on underserved areas with limited professional development options, these programs established sustainable models of professional growth. They envisioned a cultural shift where self-help becomes a standard practice, fostering a more skilled and motivated teaching workforce. Ultimately, these initiatives aimed to ensure high-quality education for all by equipping Nigerian teachers with the skills and confidence needed to deliver exceptional education, regardless of their circumstances. This paper explores various self-help initiatives in Nigeria as explained by initiators.

## **Successful Ideation and Self-Help Initiatives in Nigeria**

Alimigbe and Avoseh (2022) emphasized the importance of partnerships in infrastructural development and other issues related to education delivery. Governments in Nigeria (federal, state and local education areas) are so overwhelmed, leaving education solely to them will exacerbate the educational divides. This section highlighted specific case studies and examples of self-help initiatives in Nigeria helping to bridge the gap in education to improve teacher quality. Examples of these interventions are; One Million Teachers (1MT), SEED Care & Support Foundation (SEEDs), Teacher X, Bleu Sapphire, Schoolinka, SabiTeach, Schoola Initiative (Cori AI), TY Danjuma Foundation (TYDF), amongst others.

### **One Million Teachers (1MT)**

One Million Teachers (1MT) is a non-profit organization founded in 2016 by a Nigerian entrepreneur to improve education quality in Africa through enhancing teacher professional development. 1MT's vision is to expand access to quality education globally through technology, empowering educators in under-resourced communities. The initiative provides inclusive, gender-responsive education through innovative tech-based programs, aiming to build a critical mass of trained education changemakers. 1MT's approach includes online and face-to-face training, workshops, mentorship, and collaboration with governments and organizations. It has impacted over 10,000 teachers across Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, enhancing their confidence in using technology and modern teaching methods, which has improved student outcomes and community engagement. By empowering teachers, 1MT seeks to create a ripple effect, positively influencing millions of students and contributing to a more educated and prosperous Africa.

### **SEED Care & Support Foundation**

SEED Care and Support Foundation, is a non-profit focused on improving access to quality education for all children by supporting the affordable non-state education sector, particularly in low-income communities. SEED works with low-fee private schools, faith-based schools, and alternative learning centers to expand education access and improve learning outcomes. Despite their vital role, these institutions often lack support in addressing educational challenges in Nigeria. To tackle the shortage of qualified teachers and improve education quality, SEED initiated the SEED Teachers-in-Training Fellowship (STiTF). This program provides free online access to world-class teacher training, coaching, mentoring, and employment opportunities. By collaborating with teacher training institutions, governments, and other organizations, SEED aims to build a pipeline of qualified teachers, enhance professional development, and ultimately improve learning outcomes for Nigerian children, contributing to a more educated and prosperous Nigeria.

### **Blue Sapphire Hub**

The Blue Sapphire Hub was established to break barriers and drive innovation across Northern Nigeria, focusing on developing sustainable solutions and building entrepreneurial communities. It brings together teachers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and freelancers to tackle challenges in digital learning and educational technology (EdTech). The hub addresses issues like teacher shortages and economic growth by enhancing teacher professional development through localized online content, webinars, and peer learning communities. It ensures education is accessible to all by creating culturally relevant, language-inclusive digital content tailored to

Northern Nigeria's diverse learners. The hub empowers teachers with digital tools for continuous professional development and data-driven instructional strategies, fostering inclusive learning environments. Additionally, it advocates for supportive policies and conducts ecosystem mapping to identify gaps and opportunities in the local EdTech landscape. Through its efforts, the Blue Sapphire Hub aims to transform education and improve livelihoods in the region.

## **TeacherX**

TeacherX stemmed from the need for teachers to come together, support one another, and enhance their teaching practices, especially during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic was launched in 2020 as "One teacher, one topic," community formed to support teachers. The inclusion of "X" in the name signifies the unique and exceptional qualities teachers bring to the community. It fosters teacher development and connection through technology, primarily using WhatsApp for inter-house-training sessions where teachers demonstrate educational apps. TeacherX is self-funded with additional support from teachers and well-meaning education lovers. It celebrates educators' achievements and has significant collaborative efforts with government initiatives like the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and other organizations to promote teachers' well-being and address educational challenges. In 2023, TeacherX members won all major education awards in Nigeria, and two members were recognized among the top 50 educators for the Global Teacher Prize.

## **Schoolinka**

Schoolinka was founded to address the lack of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers in Africa, aiming to enhance teaching quality and student outcomes. The platform offers accessible, high-quality training through self-paced courses, live masterclasses, and community-driven learning, particularly benefiting underserved areas. Supported by self-funding, partnerships, and grants, Schoolinka has scaled its operations while maintaining quality. Collaborating with government bodies, especially in Nigeria, it aligns its programs with national educational goals, including training primary school teachers in Ogun State. Schoolinka has trained over 5,000 teachers, with 86% reporting their professional goals were met, leading to improved classroom outcomes and significant cost savings for schools. The platform's cost-effective approach has reduced training expenses by over 90% for schools, making professional development more sustainable. Additionally, Schoolinka has influenced policy discussions on integrating CPD into national education strategies.

## **Schoola**

Schoola was created to keep education accessible during COVID-19 lockdowns, initially focusing on assessments that rewarded students for completing schoolwork. Recognizing the need for engaging and interactive learning, Schoola evolved into a platform that enhances the teaching experience for African K12 educators. Its flagship tool, *Curri AI*, uses artificial intelligence to help educators create lessons 45 times faster, offering customization and integration with other e-learning platforms. Supported by National Information Technology development agency (NITDA), Schoola secured \$200,000 in funding and now serves over 60,000 users. Despite challenges, such as a pilot with Kaduna state ending due to budget constraints, Schoola continues to expand, partnering with private schools and organizations like International Rescue Committee (IRC) and USAID to improve foundational literacy in

underserved regions. Through initiatives like Lessonthon, Schoola empowers teachers with technology, leading to better educational outcomes and a commitment to enhancing education quality across Africa.

### **SabiTeach**

SabiTeach was founded to address challenges in Nigeria's education system, including inconsistent educational quality, limited access to specialized tutors, and the need for personalized learning. The platform connects students in underserved areas with expert tutors, bridging educational gaps and providing personalized support. It empowers underutilized teachers by offering them opportunities to reach more students and earn additional income. Leveraging digital technology, SabiTeach makes quality education more accessible, impacting over 7,000 teachers and 10,000 learners since 2020. Though independently funded, including grants from the Mastercard Foundation, SabiTeach aligns with broader educational goals, such as improving access to education and enhancing teacher empowerment. The platform ensures students receive instruction from vetted, qualified tutors and offers professional development for teachers, encouraging innovation and continuous skill improvement. SabiTeach also provides flexible income opportunities for educators, expanding their reach and recognition.

### **TY Danjuma Foundation (TYDF)**

The TY Danjuma Foundation's initiative to upgrade teachers' quality in Nigeria was developed to address the significant skill gaps among educators in public schools. Research highlighted that many teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, lack the necessary qualifications and pedagogical skills, with nearly a quarter of primary school teachers unable to perform basic arithmetic. Recognizing that effective teaching is crucial for improving learning outcomes, especially in public schools, the Foundation focuses on enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills, ensuring access to instructional materials, and creating a better learning environment. The initiative aims to reduce the number of unqualified teachers, improve pedagogical skills, and provide necessary teaching resources. The Foundation partners with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and government agencies, using a catalytic grantmaking approach that includes Annual and Discretionary Grants. The impact of the initiative includes the empowerment of teachers, improved teaching quality, and strengthened institutional capacity in target communities, particularly in Taraba and Edo states.

### **Impacts and Future Trends**

The impacts of self-help initiatives abound in the many testimonies shared by beneficiaries because, the initiatives are shaping the educational landscape in several ways. Overall, self-help initiatives are likely to continue evolving, driven by technological advancements and a growing recognition of the need for localized, teacher-driven professional development solutions. They will be evident in the increased teacher empowerment, skills enhancement, autonomy, accessibility, addressing gaps in professional development, increased digital integration and a platform for advocacy and policy influence.

### **Conclusion**

By examining innovative approaches, this paper dissected some practical solutions adopted by stakeholders to impact education. It presented insights of how self-help initiatives could leveraged to achieve educational goals and quality. The low quality of teaching has direct

consequences on student outcomes, hence, improving teacher quality through innovative approaches has the potential to enhance student learning outcomes, thereby contributing to national development.

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