TEACHER EDUCATION POLICY, ETHICS, AND QUALITY OF GRADUATES: TRIAD ENTITIES FOR REMODELING GENERAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Abstract

The rating of an education system largely depends on the policy, ethical practices, and quality of the graduates. Thus, this research explores lecturers' perception of the teacher education policy, ethics, and quality of its graduates. The research also theorized that policy, ethics, and quality are triad entities of an ideal educational institution. Hence, the relations between policy, ethics, and quality of graduate teachers were ascertained. The mixed-method design (qualitative and quantitative approaches) was employed. Participants were 606 lecturers of colleges of education and universities in Nigeria. For data collection, questionnaire and focus group discussions were employed. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, while its reliability (α = .889) was determined using Cronbach's alpha method. Quantitative data were analysed with mean, standard deviation, and bivariate correlation. To analyse the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed. Results revealed that teacher education policy and ethical practices in Nigeria were unsatisfactory, as perceived by the lecturers. More so, the quality of graduate teachers from Nigerian tertiary institutions declines. Hence, the need for attention on policy, ethics, and quality in teacher education programmes.
Keywords*: teacher education, education policy, ethics in education, quality of graduates, vocational education*

Introduction

The functionality of every programme or organization (educational and non-educational) largely depends on its effective policy formulation, implementation, and reforms. In the educational programmes (teacher and non-teacher programmes), effective policymaking, implementation, and reforms have become very essential for effective ethical practices and the quality of graduates. In the perspective of teacher education programmes, it will be unprofessional to undermine the importance of policy and its effective implementation and reforms (Hall & Schulz, 2003; Misibi & Mchunu, 2013; Okafor & Chukwuedo, 2015), because the central focus of the teacher education programme is to train teachers with a sound mind, mentally accreted, ethically sound and academically/intellectually sound to train individuals for every sphere of human endeavours (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013). Thus, any teacher education programme with policies and ethics that do not portray generally accepted morals, ethics, and standard in contemporary society may be regarded as dysfunctional (Bennett & Lumb, 2019; Nwakaire, 2011; Omatseye, 2004).

Research Focus

The smooth running of the teacher education programme is hinged on effectively and efficiently formulated, implemented, and reformed educational policy. According to Okafor and Chukwuedo (2015, p. 59), "educational policy is a fundamental document that must guide the smooth running of any educational programme". In the context of the teacher education programmes, this policy promotes effective and efficient teaching-learning processes, management of teaching/learning resources (Duarte, 2019; Toby, 2000), administrative routine (Nwadiani, 2011; Olubor, 2004) and behavioural conducts (Ogbonnaya, 2010) of learners, teaching and non-teaching members of staff of the school system. In its attempt to control behavioural conduct, a policy may be a guide to promoting ethical practices in the educational sector; hence, this research theorized that policy has a connection with ethical practices in the school system as well as the quality of graduate teachers.

Ethics precipitates concerns, matters, or behaviours that dovetail what is right or wrong, what ought to or not to be. According to Mahony (2009, p. 983), "ethics deals, amongst other things, with right and wrong, ought and ought not to, good and evil". Thus, teacher education must reflect moral teachings that depict acceptable societal values and norms (Bullough, 2011), without questionable characteristics. The school-to-work transition period requires the trained teacher graduates to imbibe necessary professional morals, and exhibit the ethical values learned from the school and the society within the work environment. Thus, ethical practices must reflect those norms that the teacher must practice within the school system as well as instil the values in the students to expect similar and improved responses. The implication is that the quality of the graduate teachers must be reflected in the ethical values. This quality is, therefore, characterized by teacher's high teaching competences, moral uprightness, mastery of subject matter, demonstrating contemporary technological skills, implementation of guiding dicta in the school system and the society (Duarte, 2019; Naziri et al., 2019; Weissbourd, 2003).

The present society has so much depended on technological development because of its necessities in all spheres of life. Hence, policy, ethics, and quality are very essential entities in the field of vocational teacher education, upon which the technology teachers are produced to train more technology teachers as well as the technologists who will work in the industrial, agricultural and commercial sectors (Chukwuedo, 2019; FRN, 2013). Thus, vocational teacher education graduates must be guided by a functional policy that will enable them to function effectively. Similarly, such graduates must be able to sustain the technology-based ethical values that will promote educational development in particular and the society at large.

Philosophical and Conceptual Frameworks

The philosophical background underpinning this research is based on epistemology, axiology, and pragmatism within the education context (Mahony, 2009; Omatseye, 2004). Upon the dicta of epistemology (theory of knowledge), the question about what is known is raised. Thus, epistemology is a theory that enables educationists to rationalize the content of the policy (what should be known that is contained in the policy document), the knowledge of the graduate teachers, and the extent to which value should be considered

adequate. Additionally, the dicta of axiology (theory of value), which explains ethics; tend to determine the rights and wrongs of the policy documents, teaches behavioural conducts, and pedagogical content knowledge. Finally, pragmatism is primarily concerned with the workability of a situation. Hence, pragmatism as an educational philosophy helps to determine the workability of policy documents, whether ethics are adequately functioning in the school, and the extent to which teacher's quality is assured.

From the philosophical dicta of this research, three important concepts (viz., teacher education policy, ethics, and quality of graduates) are triad entities that must be observed and aptly taken into consideration and practiced within the school system for an ideal educational institution. Thus, the conceptual model, as theorized in this research, is presented in Figure 1(a & b). The model in Figure 1(a) depicts the interaction between and among policy, ethics, and quality for an ideal educational programme, and indicates that policy, ethics and quality are triad entities. Thus, the interaction between all the two-pairs of the entities - policy and ethics (PE), policy and quality (PQ), and ethics and quality (EQ) – gives rise to triad link among the entities (i.e. policy vs. ethics vs. quality – PEQ) for an ideal education programme. Conversely, from Figure 1(b), it can be envisaged that non-ideal educational programme emerges if any one or more pairs of the entities (e.g. PE, PQ, EQ, or any two pairs i.e. PQ/PE, PQ/EQ, PE/EQ – not shown in Figure 1b) is/are missing. Thus, Figure 1(b) depicts the context of no triad entities in an educational programme.

Figure 1
Policy, Ethics, and Quality (Triad Entities) Model for Educational Programmes
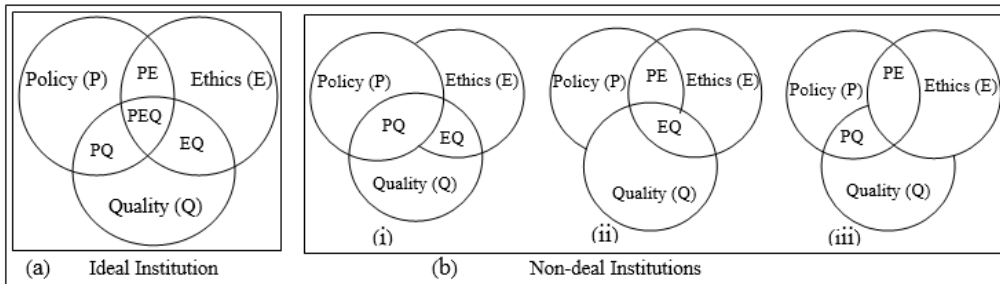
Because of the emerging societal dynamics that may interrupt the effective formulation and implementation of the educational policy, adoption of ethical practices, and the production of quality of graduate teachers, research on education policy together with ethics and quality must be continually conducted.

Research Problem

In recent times, there has been little or no trust on the quality of teacher education graduates. To foster national development in all sectors, there is the need to address issues relating to the quality of graduate teachers in Nigeria. Since teachers are simply agents of educational and human capital recreation in every societal human endeavour (Ginsburg, 2017), it is necessary that critical emphases should be placed on teacher education policy and ethical practices. It is upon this background that this research, in its index state and

novel contributions, ascertains lecturers' perception of the teacher education policy, ethical practices, and the quality of the present-day graduate teachers in Nigeria. Hence, the following research questions were answered in this research:

1. What is the lecturers' perception of the teacher education policy in Nigeria?
2. What is the lecturers' perception of ethics in the Nigerian teacher education programme?
3. What is the lecturers' perception of the quality of present graduates of teacher education?
4. What is the correlation between the perceived teacher education policy, ethics, and quality of graduates?

Research Methodology

General Background

This research was conducted in Nigeria between April and October 2019. The mixed-method research design was employed (quantitative and qualitative, - Creswell, 2014) because it allows researchers to provide more robust and evocative results presentation and interpretation. The quantitative approach was a cross-sectional survey in which data was collected from the participants by administering and retrieving questionnaires once, while the qualitative approach involved focus group discussions (Jalongo & Saracho, 2016) with vocational and technical education lecturers on the themes (based on the first three research questions) of the research. The participants received letters of informed consent, which was approved before data were collected. Thus, qualitative data were collected on the lecturers' perception of the teacher education policy, ethics, and the quality of the present-day graduate teachers.

Sample

From a population of 6065 lecturers (Colleges of Education, $N = 2103$, and Universities, $N = 3962$), the participants of this research were 606 (by applying 10% criteria to compensate for the large population and the use of correlation analysis – Israel, 2003) lecturers drawn using proportionate sampling technique from the teacher education programmes (Colleges of Education, $n = 210$, and Universities, $n = 396$) who took part in the quantitative approach. There were 246 male lecturers and 360 female lecturers for the quantitative data. For the qualitative approach, six lecturers were drawn from the subject areas of vocational education and training from two universities in Nigeria. Three focus groups (sub-groups of the six lecturers) were formed to handle each subject of discussion based on the first three research questions of this research. The identities of the lecturers were coded (e.g. Voc. D 1 to 6) for this research.

Instrument and Procedures

Questionnaire and focus group discussions were used for data collection. The 15-item questionnaire was used to measure the perception of the participant on teacher education

policy (six items), ethics in teacher education (four items), and quality of the present-day graduate teachers (five items). Response options on each item of the questionnaire were based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, SA = 5, via undecided U = 3, to strongly disagree, SD = 1). Focus group discussion was conducted to obtain thorough data on the subject matters (the first three research questions), but more precisely, as it relates to vocational education.

Face and content validities of the questionnaire were conducted by three experts on the items of construct and editorial corrections. Additionally, construct validity was determined using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA, Anderson & Gerbing, 1984 - the ratio of chi-square to the degree of freedom ($\chi2/df \leq 2.50$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI $\geq$ .90), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI $\geq$ .90) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA $\leq$ .08). The one-factor models of the teacher education policy ($\chi2$ = 15.636, $\chi2/df$ = 2.606, CFI = .902, GFI = .918, RMSEA = .080, p < .01), ethical practices in teacher education ($\chi2$ = 2.457, $\chi2/df$ = 1.228, CFI = .993, GFI = .998, RMSEA = .019, p > .05) and quality of graduate teachers ($\chi2$ = 10.846, $\chi2/df$ = 2.169, CFI = .985, GFI = .992, RMSEA = .044, p > .05) yielded good data fit. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was obtained via Cronbach's alpha method: teacher education policy (α = .857), ethical practices (α = .911), quality of graduate teachers (α = .892), and overall items (α = .889). Conversely, the researchers did thorough discussion with one expert on the content of and how to organize the focus group discussion in its direction. This approach helped to come up with the manageable procedure for the focus group discussion (three groups with two members that deliberated on each subject matter).

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was conveniently administered to the respondents, and the data were collated and coded in SPSS. Consequently, SPSS was used to perform the statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The statistics employed were mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*), and bivariate correlation (*r*). Conversely, the qualitative data obtained via the focus group discussion were recorded manually and electronically, coded manually and transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2014). Deductive (thematic) analysis was applied for the qualitative data (Nowell, et al., 2017). Each theme was grouped into the first three research questions of this research. Thus, triangulation was adopted to validate the viewpoints and put the data into a more all-inclusive context (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Kelle, et al., 2019). Similarly, to analyse the data from the focus group discussion, each sub-group's debate was recorded and reported based on the responses (verbal and non-verbal) of each member of the sub-group on a particular theme.

The decision rule for the quantitative results on research questions 1 to 3 was based on mean of items (e.g. *M* < 3.00 represents disagree, *M* = 3.00 to 3.49 represent neutral, and *M* > 3.49 represents agree). Range of correlation values was also used to decide on research question 4 (e.g. *r* between -.30 to +.30 is weak/no correlation; +.30 to +.65 or -.30 to -.65 is a moderate correlation, and +.65 to 1.00 or -.65 to -1.00 is a strong correlation) (Gay et al., 2011).

Research Results

The outcomes of the data analysis are presented under the following themes.

Perspectives on Teacher Education Policy

The outcomes of the data analyses on perceived teacher education policy are reported in Table 1 (for the quantitative data) and in texts (for the qualitative data) as follow:

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation on Teacher Education Policy

S/N	Item Statements	*M*	*SD*	Remark
1	Teacher education policy is not very pragmatic	3.84	1.062	Agree
2	Teacher education policy does not aptly reflect current trends	3.98	.945	Agree
3	I don't think teacher education policy is very functional	3.87	1.125	Agree
4	There is a need to reform teacher education policy	4.18	.991	Agree
5	I have a problem with the procedure for formulating teacher education policy	3.90	.940	Agree
6	There is a mismatch between policy document and expectations in the school	3.81	1.061	Agree
	Aggregate	*3.93*	*.524*	*Agree*

Note. M = mean, *SD* = standard deviation

The results presented in Table 1 reveal the mean and standard deviation of the lecturers' responses on policy of teacher education. The mean responses for the six items on policy range from 3.81 to 4.18, while the standard deviation ranges from .940 to 1.125. Deriving from the mean of the item statements, the cluster mean (M = 3.93) reveals that education policy in Nigeria requires attention for reformulation and implementation. Thus, the lecturers' perception of the teacher education policy portrays deficiency and inefficiency in the policy document.

From the focus group discussions, there was a common consensus that vocational education policy in Nigeria requires attention. Results of two discussants are as follows:

> For me [frowned], I think policy in general and vocational education is just a fantasy. Nigeria should go back to the drawing board in policy matters. We cannot achieve up-skilling in vocational education with this kind of present attention to policy (Voc.D1).
> A good policy does not always create controversy in any organization, but it appears that the reverse is the case in teacher education in Nigeria. I'm not satisfied with the lips services rendered to vocational education policy. How can vocational education and training function in such a scenario? It's almost impossible (Voc.D5).

Ethics in Teacher Education

Data analyses on perceived ethical practices in teacher education are presented in Table 2 (for the quantitative data) and in texts (for the qualitative data) as follow:

Table 2
Mean and Standard Deviation on Ethical Practices in Teacher Education Programme

S/N	Item Statements	*M*	*SD*	Remark
7	Ethical standards of teacher education are questionable	3.58	1.239	Agree
8	Moral guidelines for students'-teachers' behaviours are appropriately applied	3.41	1.138	Neutral
9	Measures should be put in place to re-evaluate ethical standards in the school	4.10	.940	Agree
10	Staff ethics are well observed in the school system	3.42	1.247	Neutral
	Aggregate	*3.63*	*.633*	*Agree*

Note. M = mean, *SD* = standard deviation

Table 2 depicts the mean and standard deviation of the lecturers' responses to the ethics of the teacher education programme. The table reveals that mean responses for the four items on ethics range from 3.41 to 4.10, while the standard deviation ranges from .940 to 1.247. From the mean of the item statements, the cluster mean ($M = 3.63$) indicates that ethical practices in teacher education require adjustment. Hence, the lecturers' perception of ethics of the teacher education programmes depicts ill ethical practices in the school system.

From the focus group discussions, participants generally agree that ethical practices in general and vocational education in Nigeria are defective:

> … As a teacher, I see a lot of misconduct among students and teachers. We are just trying to preach ethics in teacher education. Moral decadence has taken over. So, effective skills acquisition in vocational education is like a mirage (Voc.D3).
> In my opinion, I can't say we have zero levels of ethical practices in the school. Nevertheless, measures must be rightly applied for progress to be made (Voc.D4).

Quality of Present Graduates of Teacher Education

The results of the data analyses on the perceived quality of graduate teachers are reported in Table 3 (for the quantitative data) and in texts (for the qualitative data) as follow:

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation on the Quality of Present-day Graduate Teachers

S/N	Item Statements	*M*	*SD*	Remark
11	The present-day graduate teachers demonstrate higher academic soundness	3.02	1.221	Neutral
12	Behavioural conducts of present-day graduate teachers are more acceptable	2.79	1.390	
13	These days graduate teachers are easily fitted to the world of work	3.24	1.301	Neutral
14	The teaching competences of the present-day graduate teachers are preferable	3.18	1.287	Neutral
15	I am convinced that the ICT skills of present-day graduate teachers are higher	4.18	.896	Agree
	Aggregate	*3.28*	*.785*	*Neutral*

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation

The results presented in Table 3 reveal the mean and standard deviation of the lecturers' responses to the quality of present-day graduates of the teacher education programme. The table shows that the mean responses for the four items on quality range from 2.79 to 4.18, while the standard deviation range from .896 to 1.390. Based on the mean of the item statements on the quality of graduate teachers, the cluster mean ($M = 3.27$) indicates that the quality of present-day graduate teachers is unsatisfactory. Thus, the lecturers' perception of the quality of graduate teachers indicates decline in the quality of graduate teachers.

Based on the focus group discussions, discussants also agree that the quality of graduate teachers of general and vocational education in Nigeria declines:

> When shall we get there? [Smiled]. A comparison between the quality of education then and now tells us that we are not getting there. Rather, we are losing trust in the quality of graduate teachers and skills acquisition in vocational education and training (Voc.D2).
> Until we 'sit back' to the grassroots and trace where the errors stemmed from, we will continue to cry for the decline in the quality of the graduate teachers of general and vocational education. I will also like to say that 'politicking' matters in Nigeria are a factor in the poor quality of education, and this has long crippled the education sector. In essence, quality and standards are now questionable (Voc.D6).

Establishing Correlations between Policy, Ethics, and Quality

The test of triad entities for this research is ascertained in the correlation results of Table 4.

Table 4

Bivariate Correlations between the Variables

Variables	Institution	Gender	Policy	Ethics	Quality
Institution	1				
Gender	-.070	1			
Policy	.074	-.026	1		
Ethics	.120*	-.058	.018	1	
Quality	.070	.091	-.010	.330**	1

Note. **p < .001, *p < .05, Institution (college = 1, university = 2), Sex (male =1, female – 2)

Table 4 represents the correlation matrix for the links between education policy, ethics, and quality of graduates. The table also shows that the correlation between policy and ethics (r = .018, p > .05) is positively weak and not significant, policy and quality (r = -.010, p > .05) is negatively weak and also not significant. However, ethics and quality (r = .330, p < .01) is positively moderate and significant. From the model presented in Figure 1(b), it is found that there is no significant link between policy and ethics (Figure 1bi) as well as policy and quality (Figure 1bii). Although there is a significant link between ethics and quality, the triad entities of policy, ethics, and quality in the Nigerian teacher education do not suffice.

Discussion

This research investigated perceptions of teacher education policy, ethical practices, and quality of graduate teachers from the tertiary institutions (colleges of education and universities) that are saddled with the responsibilities of training and producing graduate teachers for the educational institutions in Nigeria (FRN, 2013; Omatseye, 2004). One critical aspect of any educational institution is the policy of the institution. Where the policy is not regularly reformed, the functionality of such institution may be defective. Hence, the finding of research question 1 revealed that the current state of the policy of the teacher education programmes in Nigeria calls for policy reform. The research shows that there is an unsatisfactory state of mind on the policy of teacher education as well as vocational education and training. This outcome may be likened to the fact that the conditions for the formulation and implementation of teacher education policy are defective. The findings of this research concur with the fact that there is a need to develop more contextually attained access and equity policies in higher education because of policy misrecognition (Bennett & Lumb, 2019). Similarly, the findings are inconsonant with the logical and theoretical reviews of Okafor and Chukwuedo (2015) on the need for policy reformation in TVET programmes.

Another important entity of the teacher education programme is ethics, which helps to determine the meaning, categories, and hierarchies of the teacher education values. Thus, the findings of research question 2 show that the ethical practices in the teacher education programme have not aptly depicted the comprehensive meaning and hierarchies of the teacher

education programme. Simply put, the results of the research have shown unsatisfactory ethical practices in teacher education as well as vocational education programmes in Nigeria. This result might have emanated because of the decadence in morals and the increase in social vices in recent times. Any teacher education programme that undermines the inclusion and review of ethics and moral matters in the initial and ongoing professional learning of teachers (Bullough, 2011) treads toward belittling the profession. Similarly, the arguments of Gewirtz in Mahony (2009) demonstrated that moral values are the heart of professional practices in education and that ethics appear to be gradually missing from the professional preparation of teachers.

From research question 3, it was found that there seems to be a decline in the quality of graduate teachers from the teacher education programmes in Nigeria. The findings of research question 3 could be as a result of the economic degradation and poor attention given to educational institutions in Nigeria. Although this research showed that the present-day graduate teachers demonstrate higher ICT skills for pedagogy, there is little trust in the quality of the teacher for the school system (Duarte, 2019; Ginsburg, 2017). Finally, the outcome of research question 4 showed that there is a 'disconnect' in the interaction between policy, ethics, and quality of graduate teachers in the teacher education programme in Nigeria. This implies that the outcome from research question 4 can be represented in the Figure 1(b). In other words, the triad entities' theory of policy, ethics, and quality do not suffice in the Nigerian teacher education programmes. This may be as a result of the gap between the teacher education policy, ethical practices and quality of graduate teachers in Nigeria. This result supports the view of Okafor and Chukwuedo (2015), that policy reformation and implementation are required for a functional education system. Thus, the concerns in teacher education policy and ethics should be addressed.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This research has provided important evidence on the need to place more emphasis on education policy, ethics, and quality. However, one limitation that needs to be mentioned in this paper is the research design (cross-sectional survey). This design does not give rooms for researchers to make causal inferences. Thus, repeated cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys on policy, ethics, and quality are recommended. Interview can also be employed in future research.

Conclusions

Research attention on the links between teacher education policy, ethics, and quality of graduates is lacking. This gap, which this research has filled, is the novelty of the research. The authors conclude that teacher education policy, ethics, and quality are perceived unsatisfactory in the Nigeria education system. It is also concluded that the links between teacher education policy, ethics and quality are very weak. Thus, the general and vocation education and training programmes can be remoulded when the triad entities (policy, ethics, and quality) are considered the utmost priority in education. With functional policy and ethical practices, teaching-learning process will receive significant improvement. Hence, teaching profession will be properly focused for professional development. All in all, as

a novel contribution to literature, this research uniquely proposed testable models of triad entities of policy, ethics and quality of graduate teachers in an ideal or non-ideal educational programme for future research pursuit.

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