

Creating A Vibrant Ghanaian Teacher Force

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posted September 2011, OLE Ghana

Many will agree that the educational sector has been constantly besieged with a number of challenges that though tackled at various levels, are still yet to be solved in a sustainable manner. One such issue is that of initial teacher training and their continuous professional development. This article revisits this issue in light of the National Education Sector Reform (NESAR), as hosted in May 2011 by the Ministry of Education and envisages how the upcoming National Teachers' Education Forum (NATEF) could help us collectively address teacher related problems in the country.

The National Teachers Education Forum, NATEF, is intended to be a forum targeted at addressing issues directly related to teachers – both in terms of service and quality. To be hosted by the Open Learning Exchange (OLE) Ghana, it seeks to be one of several opportunities for discourse amongst educational stakeholders supported through civil society lobby and advocacy. For the maiden edition, the theme is 'Meeting the Direct Needs of the Job Market via Quality Education: The Role of The Professional Teacher'.

Generally statistics relating to teacher education available from sources such as the Preliminary Education Sector Performance Report for 2010, and presentations made at this year's National Education Sector Reform is promising in some respects, and sobering in others. National averages for Pupil-Teacher Ratio as shown by Table 1 seem encouraging. However the reality on the ground is seen in an answer given by the then Minister for Education, Hon. Alexander Tetey-Enyo to a question posed by Hon. George Boafo MP for Asunafo on the floor of parliament on 14th July 2010. He indicated in his answer that 33,185 teaching vacancies had been declared for 2010 expected to be filled by 8,625 trained teachers from the country's colleges of education leaving a difference of over 24,000. This does not take into cognizance the backlog from previous years. The Chief Inspector of Schools in a press briefing indicated that as a country we will need 60, 000 more professional teachers to meet our teacher requirement. As indicated also by Table 1, as a country we are far from meeting the targets set for supply of trained teachers.

INDICATORS	2020/2015 TARGETS	2010 TARGETS	2011 (ACTUAL)
Increase the % of trained teachers			
KG	95%	45%	31.1%
PRIMARY	95%	63%	50.6%
JHS	95%	79%	65.8%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio			
KG	25:1	45:1	36:1
PRIM	35:1	35:1	31.9:1
JHS	25:1	19:1	16:1

The 2010 preliminary education sector report also indicates challenges associated with Teacher-Pupil contact hours and this seems to be on the ascendancy. In 1993 contact hours lost amounted to 20 percent. In 2003 according to a study conducted by Karikari-Ababio, (2004, p. 28) the percentage of Teacher-Pupil contact hours lost was 27% in the southern belt and 14% in the middle belt. In 2008 absenteeism on average was about 37 percent (*Brookings institution, 2007 cited in MOE, 2008, p. 16*).

In every education reform the teacher is the central focus. The teacher could modify the syllabus and time table to enable effective teaching and learning to take place. The teacher could improvise to make up for lack of textbooks (*Preliminary Education Sector Performance Report 2010*). Taking a cue from this statement, the maiden edition of NATEF intends to focus on a number of discrete teacher related issues that were also raised as matters of general concern at this year's NESAR. These include but are not limited to the following:

Teacher Education Related Policy Issues.

A number of issues have been identified as working against initial teacher preparation and professional development. These include addressing the teacher identity crisis, teacher training entry requirements as well as duration for taught courses and the out segment, teacher deployment and utilization, re-alignment of professional and academic development programmes with basic school academic calendar, teacher licensing vis - a - vis the enforcement of code of conduct, and various support services to teachers to enhance quality teaching and learning. In 2009 the Teacher Education Division of The Ghana Education services began work on a Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development And Management policy and framework which was expected to address the above and many more. The maiden edition of NATEF will look at the state of the policy started in 2009, review its content vis-à-vis the 1966 ILO/UNESCO recommendations on initial teacher preparation and professional development as well as current trends in teacher education. It will also look at the ramifications as well as preparations needed for the smooth implementation of such a policy.

The 21st Century Teacher And The 21st Century Work Place

Many questions have been raised about the kind of workforce we produce currently as a country. How ready are they for the work place of today? To prepare them adequately to meet the demands of the challenges imposed by the new work culture we need a new kind of teacher who should be responsive to the demands of the current workplace on today's classroom. There is a perception out there that very little linkages exist to ensure that industry and the classroom teacher are in tune with each other. Others also question the strength of the existing few linkages. The maiden edition of NATEF seeks to institutionalize stronger structures and avenues for industry and academia to constantly engage over specific issues at a times to make teaching in particular and the education system in general responsive to the dictates of the job market

Pre – Service and In-Service Teacher Training

Of major concern has been the quality of some of the teachers who come out of the Colleges of Education. Of equal concern has been how many of the teachers we have in the system have seen very little quality continuous academic and professional development. Issues have been raised as to how well teacher training programmes equip teachers with subject matter knowledge. Questions have been raised concerning the content of teacher preparation and continuous professional development programmes, delivery of the content, duration for delivering the content, the quantity and quality of the human resource available for delivering the content, as well as facilities for both pre-service and in-service teacher training. The maiden edition of NATEF will closely explore how to deal with the issue of subject content deficiency, the sacrificing of vertical for lateral coverage and discuss innovative ways of making the curriculum of teacher training and professional development as well as the mode for delivering it more in tune with current trends. It will also explore alternatives for increasing the numbers trained without sacrificing quality.

Last mile solutions by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Education delivery has always been seen as a complex all hands on deck process. The last mile role played Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in education delivery can not be ignored. However there are lots of CSOs in the country all purporting to play a crucial role in education delivery with many of them calling for their greater involvement in issues pertaining to education delivery by government and Development partners (DPs). The maiden edition of NATEF will seek to examine the readiness of CSOs to effectively play this 'last mile' role, how CSOs can benefit from existing arrangements such as the Aid Policy to help address teacher related issues and also propose a framework within which CSOs, government and DPs can continuously engage each other to ensure quality education delivery in the country, especially at the pre-tertiary level.

In conclusion it must be indicated that NATEF is expected to provide an additional forum that is complementary to NESAR, with a focus on achieving practical plans with measurable outcomes.