The NCE–Degree Dual Mandate for Quality Teacher Education in Nigeria: Prospects, Challenges, and the Way Forward

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Abstract

Teacher education remains the cornerstone of educational quality and national development, making reforms that enhance teacher preparation essential for sustainable educational advancement. This paper examines the NCE–Degree Dual Mandate as a transformative policy reform aimed at redefining professionalism and improving the quality of teacher education in Nigeria. The Dual Mandate, established through the Federal Colleges of Education Act, 2023, empowers eligible Federal Colleges of Education to award bachelor's degrees alongside the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), thereby eliminating dependence on university affiliations and strengthening institutional autonomy. Adopting a conceptual and policy analysis approach, the paper reviews relevant literature, national policy documents, and international perspectives on teacher education and professionalism. It discusses the conceptual foundations of the Dual Mandate, its rationale, objectives, and its implications for teacher competence, professional identity, curriculum innovation, research capacity, quality assurance, and access to higher education. The paper argues that the integration of a three-year NCE programme with a two-year bachelor's degree pathway provides a coherent framework for producing competent, reflective, technologically proficient, and research-oriented teachers capable of meeting twentyfirst-century educational demands. It also identifies major implementation challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, limited research facilities, shortages of qualified academic staff, increased workload, and the need for effective curriculum harmonization and quality assurance. The paper concludes that while the Dual Mandate represents one of the most significant reforms in Nigeria's teacher education system, its success depends on sustained government investment, staff capacity development, robust regulatory oversight, strengthened institutional quality assurance mechanisms, and continuous curriculum innovation. It recommends increased funding, enhanced professional development, improved digital infrastructure, stronger collaboration among regulatory agencies, and regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the reform achieves its intended goal of producing highly competent, ethical, innovative, and globally competitive teachers for Nigeria's educational system.

Keywords: NCE–Degree Dual Mandate, teacher education, teacher professionalism, quality assurance, Colleges of Education, educational reform, Nigeria.

Introduction

Teacher education occupies a strategic position in the development of every educational system because the quality of any educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. Teachers are central to curriculum implementation, learners' academic achievement, and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013; UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, strengthening teacher education has remained a major policy priority in Nigeria.

In response to emerging educational demands and global best practices, the Federal Government introduced the NCE–Degree Dual Mandate, empowering Federal Colleges of Education to award bachelor's degrees alongside the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). The policy is intended to improve teacher quality, expand access to higher education, enhance institutional autonomy, and strengthen the professional preparation of teachers under a unified teacher education framework (FRN, 2023). The Dual Mandate represents one of the most significant reforms in Nigerian teacher education in recent decades because it removes the long-standing dependence of Colleges of Education on university affiliations for degree programmes and establishes them as autonomous degree-awarding institutions, subject to meeting regulatory standards.

Concept of the NCE–Degree Dual Mandate

The NCE–Degree Dual Mandate refers to the statutory authority granted to Federal Colleges of Education to simultaneously offer the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and bachelor's degree programmes in education. Prior to the enactment of the Federal Colleges of Education

Act, degree programmes in Colleges of Education were conducted only through affiliations with universities. The 2023 Act now provides the legal basis for qualified Colleges of Education to independently award bachelor's degrees in education (FRN, 2023).

According to the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the preferred implementation model consists of a continuous five-year programme comprising three years for the NCE and an additional two years leading to the award of a bachelor's degree, thereby enabling students to obtain both qualifications within the same institution.

Quality Teacher Education

Quality teacher education refers to the systematic preparation of competent, reflective, innovative, and ethical teachers who possess adequate subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, research skills, technological literacy, and professional values required for effective teaching and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2015).

The National Policy on Education emphasizes that teacher education should produce motivated teachers with sound intellectual and professional backgrounds capable of adapting to changing educational needs (FRN, 2013). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2017) argues that highperforming educational systems invest heavily in rigorous teacher preparation because teacher quality remains the single most important school-related factor influencing students' learning outcomes.

Teacher Professionalism

Teacher professionalism refers to the application of specialized knowledge, pedagogical competence, ethical values, and professional judgment in facilitating effective teaching and learning. It encompasses teachers' commitment to improving learners' academic achievement while maintaining high standards of integrity, responsibility, and continuous professional growth.

Darling-Hammond (2017) argues that effective teacher professionalism combines strong subject knowledge with pedagogical expertise, reflective practice, collaborative learning, and commitment to learners' success. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that teacher professionalism requires continuous professional development, research engagement, inclusive instructional practices, digital competence, and adherence to professional ethics.

Within the Nigerian context, teacher professionalism is guided by the National Policy on Education, professional standards developed by regulatory agencies, and quality assurance mechanisms coordinated by the NCCE. These frameworks recognize teaching as a profession requiring formal preparation, practical experience, ethical conduct, and continuous learning throughout one's career.

The implementation of the Dual Mandate provides an opportunity to strengthen teacher professionalism by enabling Colleges of Education to offer more comprehensive programmes that integrate pedagogical knowledge, disciplinary specialization, educational research, instructional technology, and practical teaching experiences.

Professionalism and Teacher Education in the Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century has fundamentally transformed expectations of teachers worldwide. The rapid expansion of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, globalization, inclusive education, competency-based curricula, and knowledge economies requires teachers to possess broader competencies than ever before.

Consequently, teacher education institutions are expected to prepare graduates who can facilitate learner-centred instruction, integrate digital technologies into teaching, employ innovative pedagogical approaches, conduct classroom-based research, support inclusive learning environments, and cultivate higher-order thinking skills among learners (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023).

For Nigeria, these global developments present both opportunities and challenges. The country requires a teaching workforce capable of responding to educational reforms, technological advancement, and increasing learner diversity. The Dual Mandate therefore provides a strategic platform for repositioning Colleges of Education as centres of excellence in teacher preparation.

The policy also reflects the broader shift from qualification-based professionalism to competence-based professionalism. While academic qualifications remain important,

contemporary professionalism emphasizes demonstrable competence, ethical practice, innovation, research productivity, and lifelong learning. Consequently, the success of the Dual Mandate should not be measured solely by the number of degree programmes introduced but by the quality of graduates produced and their capacity to improve educational outcomes across Nigeria.

Conceptual Linkage between the Dual Mandate and Professionalism

The relationship between the Dual Mandate and professionalism can be conceptualized as a progressive developmental framework. The Dual Mandate expands opportunities for teacher preparation by combining foundational NCE training with advanced degree-level education. This progression strengthens disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical competence, research skills, digital literacy, leadership capacity, and professional identity. Furthermore, the policy encourages institutional transformation by promoting curriculum innovation, improved quality assurance, staff development, and stronger collaboration between the NCCE, NUC, TETFund, and the Federal Ministry of Education. These reforms collectively contribute to enhancing teacher quality and restoring public confidence in Colleges of Education.

Ultimately, professionalism should be viewed as the desired outcome of the Dual Mandate rather than merely an accompanying objective. The policy provides the structural framework through which Colleges of Education can produce competent, ethical, innovative, and globally competitive teachers capable of contributing meaningfully to Nigeria's educational and national development.

Objectives of the Dual Mandate

The introduction of the NCE–Degree Dual Mandate seeks to achieve several objectives, including:

- expanding access to quality teacher education (FRN, 2023);
- improving teacher professionalism (NCCE, 2024);

- strengthening institutional autonomy (FRN, 2023);
- increasing enrolment in Colleges of Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025);
- reducing dependence on university affiliations (NCCE, 2024);
- promoting curriculum innovation and educational research (OECD, 2019).

Rationale for the Dual Mandate

The introduction of the Dual Mandate was informed by several educational, economic, and professional considerations.

First, there is increasing demand for higher education opportunities that existing universities cannot adequately accommodate. Allowing Colleges of Education to award degrees expands access to teacher education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025).

Second, the reform strengthens the professional status of teaching by providing prospective teachers with opportunities to earn bachelor's degrees within specialized teacher education institutions (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Third, institutional autonomy enables Colleges of Education to design innovative programmes, improve governance, strengthen research activities, and respond more effectively to national educational needs (FRN, 2023).

Finally, the policy aligns Nigerian teacher education with international trends that recognize teacher education institutions as specialized degree-awarding institutions
(OECD, 2019;
UNESCO, 2015).

Contributions of the Dual Mandate to Quality Teacher Education Improved Teacher Competence

Degree programmes provide broader academic preparation, deeper subject specialization, educational research competence, and enhanced pedagogical knowledge necessary for effective classroom practice (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Enhanced Professionalism

Professional teacher education requires continuous learning, ethical practice, critical reflection, and lifelong professional development. The Dual Mandate provides opportunities for teachers to acquire these competencies (UNESCO, 2015).

Improved Research Culture

Independent degree-awarding institutions are expected to strengthen educational research through undergraduate projects, staff publications, conferences, and innovation. Research-based teacher education contributes significantly to evidence-based instructional practices (OECD, 2019).

Curriculum Innovation

The reform encourages the integration of emerging areas such as digital pedagogy, artificial intelligence, STEM education, entrepreneurship, competency-based education, and inclusive education into teacher preparation programmes (OECD, 2019).

Increased Access

The Federal Government has indicated that the Dual Mandate will significantly increase opportunities for qualified candidates to pursue bachelor's degrees in education without relying exclusively on universities.

Stronger Quality Assurance

Implementation of the Dual Mandate requires compliance with standards prescribed by both the

National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), thereby strengthening quality assurance in programme delivery.

Challenges

Despite its enormous potential, several implementation challenges remain.

Many Colleges of Education continue to experience inadequate funding, insufficient ICT infrastructure, shortages of qualified academic staff, limited research facilities, and inadequate instructional resources (World Bank, 2018).

The simultaneous implementation of NCE and degree programmes may also increase staff workload and require careful curriculum harmonization to avoid unnecessary duplication of course content (OECD, 2019).

Furthermore, effective implementation requires continuous monitoring to ensure that rapid expansion does not compromise academic standards (NCCE, 2024).

Strategies for Effective Implementation

To ensure successful implementation of the Dual Mandate, the following strategies are recommended:

- Government should substantially increase funding for Colleges of Education (World

  Bank, 2018).

- Academic staff should receive continuous professional development in digital pedagogy, research, and innovative teaching methods (UNESCO, 2015).
- Modern laboratories, digital libraries, internet facilities, and smart classrooms should be provided (OECD, 2019).
- NCCE and NUC should strengthen accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms.

- Colleges should establish robust internal quality assurance units to monitor programme implementation.
- Curriculum review should emphasize competency-based teacher education, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and inclusive education.

Conclusion

The NCE–Degree Dual Mandate represents a transformative reform in Nigerian teacher education. By empowering Colleges of Education to independently award bachelor's degrees while retaining the NCE, the policy strengthens teacher professionalism, improves institutional autonomy, expands access to higher education, and enhances the overall quality of teacher preparation (FRN, 2023).

Nevertheless, the success of the policy depends on adequate funding, infrastructural development, staff capacity building, curriculum harmonization, research promotion, and rigorous quality assurance. If these conditions are met, the Dual Mandate has the potential to produce competent, innovative, and globally competitive teachers capable of meeting the educational aspirations of Nigeria

Recommendations

1. Governments at all levels should provide adequate funding for Colleges of Education.
2. Academic staff should receive continuous professional development in teaching, research, and digital pedagogy.
3. Modern ICT facilities, laboratories, and digital libraries should be provided.
4. Regulatory agencies should ensure strict accreditation and quality assurance.
5. Curriculum for NCE and degree programmes should be harmonized to ensure coherence and progression.
6. Colleges of Education should strengthen internal quality assurance systems.

7. Partnerships with universities, industry, and international organizations should be encouraged to enhance research and innovation.
8. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the impact of the dual mandate on teacher quality.

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