

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING AS A PANACEA FOR QUALITY TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Over the years, all bold attempts made towards the professionalization of teaching by the various regimes in Nigeria, have been an aberration due to certain obstacles that tend to militate against such policies. This paper, examines the following: concept of teaching, importance of teaching, the concept of a profession, characteristics of a **profession**, teaching as profession, obstacles to the full professionalization of teaching as well as the need for the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. This paper suggest that it will not only engender teachers preparations, employment of qualified professional teachers, effective lesson delivery but also in the planning and implementation of educational programmes like the Universal Basic Education,

Introduction

Teacher's preparation is very central to any educational process. This is because teachers are the product of education that are involved in the planning and implementation of educational programmes, hence, the realization of the philosophy and objectives of national education depends on well-trained and conscientious teachers who possess desirable abilities, competencies, attitudes and values necessary to transform education policies into practices that are beneficial to the society. Razik (1972: 9) opined that "the validity of any educational system is dependent upon the quality of the teaching and the availability of competent teachers". The engendering of teachers is equally dependent on the relevance, functionality, efficiency and effectiveness of teachers' preparation, the extent teachers are satisfied with their work, the extent of work motivation as well as the socio-cultural environment and school climate. These factors on which the excellent performance of teacher's role depend, could well be positively and comfortably taken care of by the full professionalization of teaching. (Ilorah, 2001: 158)

The Concept of Teaching

Teaching is an activity in which a teacher is involved. It is the process of assisting and guiding the learner to acquire knowledge, skills and information. Imogie (1999) referred to teaching as essentially a means of guiding students in securing the amount and quality of experience that will promote the optimum development of their potentials as human beings. This implies that there is an interaction, which goes on between the teachers and students designed to bring about change. Opute-Imala (1998) saw teaching as the teacher behaviour or activities designed and performed to produce a change in students (learners) behaviour. According to Opute-Imala (1998).

- A poor teacher tells.
- An average teacher informs
- A good teacher teaches.
- An excellent teacher inspires.

Therefore, teaching involves filling the mind of the learners with the desired skills, information, and knowledge, which will make the learner to be a useful citizen of his country. It refers to the process of aiding, guiding, helping and assisting the learner to discover and acquire skills, knowledge, attitude that are relatively permanent.

Importance of Teaching

Teaching is inevitable in the educational system. The teacher through the art of teaching leads the learners to discover knowledge and skills. Therefore, the quality of teachers determines the quality of any educational system. The importance of teaching is summarized as follows:

- Educational programmes are translated into action at the classroom level.
- The quality of teaching exhibited by teachers will determine the extent of national development in Nigeria and even worldwide. The quality of teaching influences the quality of

graduates produced, thus quality teaching brings about functional nation.

- Through teaching, the teacher transfers his attitude, manners and conduct to the learner. This is so because students are good imitators and emulators.
- The teacher through the art of teaching, facilitate the normal up-bringing of the learners. The teacher is involved in all round development of the child, hence the saying that, no educational system can grow above the quality of its teachers.

The Concept of a Profession

Many scholars have been involved in the study of a profession. They have varied opinion on the concept. Molagun (1996) saw a profession as an evaluative concept, which has to do with the desire of an occupation to attain a status, a standard and recognition of the uniqueness of social services that professionals render. According to Ojoagwo (1996) a profession should be seen as any vocation practiced by special people with a monopoly of specialized knowledge needed to practice the vocation.

Ezeani (2006) opined that a profession has some features and these include

- A profession is characterized by a specified period of training and acquisition of academic knowledge and specialized skills.
- It has a system of control or a code of ethics for its members.
- There is control over entry by members and some measures of autonomy. The control over entry ensures that only those qualified to be members are admitted.

Characteristics of Profession

A profession is recognized with the following character} sties:-

- It involves the acquisition of unique, exclusive, specialized and systematic occupational knowledge and skills.
- The training and preparation for a profession take enough definite time for the mastering of the techniques of the professional (long period of specialized training).
- It involves continuous in-service growth and development.
- It has affirmative public recognition, respect and professional mandate or authority often backed up by law.
- The two most recognized profession where autonomy is guaranteed are the law and medical professions. In these professions, the issue of withdrawal of license to members is the sole right of these two professions. Government must recognize autonomy of the profession, and authority to control admission, recruitment, license, certification, standard of practice, and retention of members.
- Through professional tests, members are certified competent and eligible.
- Professional groups usually, enjoy the freedom of practice for economic benefits.
- It has professional code of ethics for regulating and controlling the conducts of members of the group.
- It is service-oriented and there is careful selection and limit to the number of members admitted to its ranks.
- It regulates the conditions under which its members are admitted or are dismissed for professional misconduct,
- It has maximum period of training and minimum qualification to be allowed to practice.
- It forms an organization to improve on the standard of the profession.
- A profession must have the legal and social recognition by the public.
- Members enjoy high self-esteem.

Is Teaching a Profession?

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) recognized teaching as a profession in Nigeria. In the policy on education, the Federal Government clearly stated that teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria; the policy also stated that all the teachers in educational institutions should be professionally trained. Teacher preparatory institution shall be structured to equip teachers' for effective performance of their duties. The following institutions among others, shall give the required professional training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standards:

- Colleges of Education
- Faculties of Education
- Institutes of Education

- National Teachers' Institute
- School of Education in the Polytechnics
- National Institute for Nigeria Languages (NINLAN).
- National Mathematical Centre (NMC)

Teaching can only be regarded as a profession when it maintains the full characteristics of a profession. Therefore government should try a much as possible to adhere to these features that can make teaching retain its lost glory.

Why Professionalized Teaching?

One of the characteristics of a profession is autonomy for the professionals and authority to control, admit, recruit, train and retained members. In addition, every profession has the authority to regulate and control its members.

Currently, looking at the operation and management of teaching profession, there is no gain saying that teaching is not yet developed and has not been fully professionalized. Teaching should no longer be referred to as a second choice job, and the mobility of teachers should be reduced. Recruitment of teachers should be on the basis of merit and qualification. The ethics of the profession should be put into practice and teachers should be recognized as valuable resource contributing to the growth and development of man and the economy. The conditions of service for teachers should be made attractive and this will make teachers to be more dedicated, committed and enthusiastic in discharging their numerous duties thereby, culminating into the successful implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria.

Teachers should be given the opportunity to undergo in-service training, which leads to their engenderment and also make them to be current and abreast with current issues like Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Presently, there is a union called the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), which is not effective and cannot exercise its authority. The full professionalization of teaching will lead to the formation of very solid and functional Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) that is supposed to help in piloting the affairs of the profession.

The union will be mandatory for all teachers in all levels of education to belong and participate in all the activities involved. If the teaching profession is fully developed and professionalized, the aims and goals of education vis-a-vis the Universal Basic Education (UBE) will be achieved.

Obstacles to the Full Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria

Teaching has not achieved that status and prestige accorded medicine, engineering etc. There are criteria yet to be attained by teaching to merit a full profession.

Some factors pose as obstacles to the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. These include:

Discrepancy in Teaching Profession

In teaching profession, there are qualified teachers and unqualified teachers. This is not supposed to be because a fully developed profession ought to have all the members fully qualified for the jobs, which they are employed to do. Due to the discrepancy, members of the teaching profession are not organized and not committed to their duties. Ezeani (2006) opined that the teaching profession is a dumping ground for all who have no alternative place to go. Thus, the profession becomes flooded by uncommitted members who see teaching as a last resort for survival and a sure base for the take-of into other more lucrative areas. It can also be called an-all comers forum, the home for all who wish to teach whether qualified or not.

Lack of Autonomy

The teaching profession lack autonomy compared to other profession like engineering, medicine, and law. Teaching profession does not have autonomy on the control of the members. Government is still in full control of the standards on which teaching profession operates Government formulates policies and fully controls employment of teachers, payment of salaries, discipline, transfer and retention of teachers.

Attitude of Government:

The Nigerian National Policy on Education stipulates that all teachers in teachers' preparatory institutions shall be professionally trained. This is a very laudable policy, which has not been implemented for the interest of the society and mankind. Government should always Endeavour to implement formulated policies. This lukewarm attitude has endangered quality teacher preparation. The policy also stated that teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria. In this regard, government has established - Teachers

Registration Council to control and regulates the practice of the profession. This is also in theory because the issue of recruitment of manpower into teaching profession is still in the hands of the politicians who are always satisfying their selfish ends.

Gender Problem

In teaching profession, a large proportion of the working forces are women. This is so because of poor conditions of service. This has been a problem to the profession, because of the marital status and problems associated to it, as they seem not to be very committed and dedicated. This imbalance in number of male and female teachers is a great obstacle to the professionalization of teaching.

Low Status

Due to low status of teachers, teaching is not accorded public recognition in Nigeria. Teachers in the secondary schools feel more elevated than those in the primary school; hence, there is inferiority complex among them. Government contributes to this problem by its policies e.g. primary school teachers with B.Ed, cannot go beyond level 14 while their counterparts in the secondary school can rise to level 16 as graduates.

Poor Working Conditions

It is a known fact that among all other profession, teaching profession has the poorest condition of service. Teachers are poorly paid and there are no fringe benefits accruing to them apart from the bare monthly salary. The working conditions are not conducive and the materials and equipment that are needed in the various schools are not available. Teaching thus, serves as a stepping-stone to other profession.

Low Entry Qualification

The entry qualification into teaching is too low compared to other professions. This is the reason why different categories of people are found in the profession. The maximum qualification used to be T.C.II, though this has been changed to NCE, but T.C.II holders are still in the profession. There are also low cut-off marks for those offering education in the universities. This has affected the products that are meant to teach in our various schools.

Lack of Strong and United Organization

Teaching profession lacks a strong organization like other professions. The only recognized organization for teachers is NUT, which is not effective and efficient and does not take the interest of the members into consideration. Worse still, the organization is only concerned with primary and secondary school teachers' affairs neglecting teachers in the tertiary institutions who feel they do not belong to the body. Rather they form other associations like Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), College of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN). This is not operational in other profession like NBA and NMA who take adequate care of their members in the country. Even the regulation of teachers in private schools is not within the mandate of the NUT.

Lack of Control by Teachers Themselves

A profession has control of its members, but in Nigeria, teaching profession has no control on its members, rather, government is in full control hence, all decisions and actions come from the public. Teachers have no power to determine who comes in or moves out of the profession. The government takes the responsibilities of certification, discipline and also determines the number of teachers to be employed. This deficiency has made it difficult to terminate the appointment of unqualified teachers.

The Need for Professionalization of Teaching

The country has realized the fact that the neglect of teachers has translated into neglect of the quality of education in Nigeria. This is a fact because the National Policy on Education clearly stated the fact that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Thus, the country enacted a law to give teaching all the benefits of a profession. The law is the Teachers Registration Council (TRC) Act No. 31 of 1993.

The lukewarm attitude of government towards teaching, poor conditions of service and the presence of quacks in the teaching industry are some of the reasons why teaching should be professionalized. A profession is an occupation that claims exclusive technical competence and conduct.

Consequently, this will also go a long way in engendering teachers' welfare for an effective and efficient lesson delivery, geared towards the successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education. (UBE).

Recommendations

The following have been recommended as possible steps for the professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria:

- * Employment of qualified teachers in teaching profession. E.g. T.C. II, NCE; B.Ed; M.Ed; and Ph.D.
- * Serving teachers should be given the opportunity of undergoing in-service training like conferences, workshops, and seminars for their growth and development and to be abreast with current issues such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- * Making teaching autonomous without the interruption of government or politicians.
- * Allowing the teaching profession to set standards and control over the members.
- * Enactment of laws making teaching a profession.
- * The Teachers Registration Council board set up by the Government should be manned by the teachers themselves without undue interference.
- * Introduction of attractive and motivating conditions of service for teachers as a way of retaining them in the profession.
- * Code of ethics should be prepared for teachers by themselves and be enforced also by the teachers.
- * A long duration of training should be adopted.
- Make entry qualifications to be high and comparable to other professions.
- * Establishment of Teaching Service Commission in all states of the federation.

Conclusion

The primary problem of teachers in Nigeria is that teaching is not professionalized. Teaching today, is regarded as a dumping ground for job seekers, quacks and those who ordinarily, had no business being in the classroom. At times, teachers are owed arrears of salaries up to five or eight months. More often than not, while civil servants are paid, teachers are not paid. At times, money meant for the payment of teachers' salary is diverted into private pockets and are fixed in the bank for months. This situation is pathetic and should not be allowed to continue. Therefore, it is a challenge and also a cardinal duty of teacher educators and all who are concerned with the welfare of teachers to help and see that teaching in Nigeria is professionalized.

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