

# THE NEW TEACHER IN THE FACE OF EMERGING CHALLENGES IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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By

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## **Abstract**

*Nigerian education system, like the education systems of many developing countries is faced with many challenges which have hampered the growth and lowered the standard of education in these countries. It is believed that the new teacher who is strongly equipped with innovations in content, methods, instructional materials and instructional delivery have roles to play to improve the situation. The crux of this paper therefore, is to highlight these challenges and identify the roles the teacher will play to surmount them. However, the paper clarified the concept - 'new teacher', highlighted the challenges facing the Nigerian education sector and x-rayed the role of the new teacher in reducing these challenges.*

The importance of the teacher in any educational system cannot be over emphasized. This is so because there can be no meaningful talk about quality education without first discussing the moving force - the teacher. That is why Agulanna (2005) pointed out that the teacher is the most important of the four components of quality education - the content, the learner, the environment and the teacher because the teacher controls and modifies the other three variables.

The issue of the new teacher couldn't have come in a better time judging from the public outcry about a down turn in the quality of education in Nigeria. Students are perceived as not learning the competencies needed to cope successfully with today's challenges. This decline is borne out of various challenges that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the system. These challenges according to Odia (2007) could be grouped under three broad issues - access, quality and cost while Onyidoh (2010) opines that the criteria for assessing the quality of any education system should be: the educational curriculum, the status of the infrastructural facilities, the quality of students and teachers, the competency of leadership, the level of funding and the direction and consistency of policy. It is the desire of every well meaning Nigerian to see that these challenges are reduced to the barest minimum. That is why Oyaziwo (2009) suggested that the teacher who is at the centre of the education system should be prepared to face these challenges. The big question is, are there human and material resources and above all, the political will to initiate and sustain reforms in the education system?

In dealing with this problem, the paper will look at the following issues:

- i. The clarification of the concept - the new teacher.
- ii. Emerging challenges in the Nigerian educational system and
- iii. Tackling the educational challenges; the new teacher perspective.

## **The New Teacher**

The word 'teacher' can mean different things to different people. Generally the word teacher refers to that person who engages in various activities to enable another person (the learner) acquire skills, attitudes, knowledge and ideas that will help him\her live meaningfully. Pullias and Young (1968) in

Imogie (1999) referred to a teacher in these ways, a guide, a creator, an authority, an evaluator, a builder of community etc while the Nigerian Policy on Education (2004) gives a clearer explanation of what a teacher should be in the Nigerian educational system – an individual who has been professionally trained in any teacher education programme of the following institutions, colleges of education, faculties of education in universities, institutes of education, National Teachers' Institutes, schools of education in the polytechnics. This means that any person produced outside these categories of institutions would not be regarded as a teacher.

The question that nags the mind when the issue of the 'new teacher' is raised is, who is the new teacher in the Nigerian education context? The term, 'new teacher' could be seen from two different perspectives – 'new' in terms of newly trained or newly employed teachers. These are teachers who are professionally trained in the teacher education institutions as enumerated above. Professional training as indicated in the Nigerian Policy on Education (2004) encompasses the components of: (a) General Studies (b) foundation studies (c) studies related to the student's intended field of teaching and (d) Teaching practice. These components operate at all levels of teacher education with variations in depth and scope depending on the programme. This professional training for teachers could be obtained at different levels or programmes such as NCE, B.ed, M.ed and Ph.D. Anybody who is professionally trained in any of the above programme could be employed to teach as a new teacher in any level of Nigerian educational system.

The second perspective of the new teacher refers to teachers who are already in service at various levels of the educational system who are being upgraded from time to time in quality and standard in tune with innovations in the goals and objectives of education, content, learning experiences, methods, instructional resources and evaluation.

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The society is dynamic so are the needs, aspirations, and interests. These changes no doubt have profound influence on the curriculum planned for the society since the curriculum is the vehicle or wheel that drives the educational system. The teacher whose role is to implement these innovations should continually update their knowledge through in service training programmes like workshops, seminars and conferences.

Therefore if the teacher is not well equipped for this job, he cannot perform effectively to effect the changes. This is aptly stated by Ughamadu (1992) that the general level of education of the teacher, his professional needs and interest can exert profound influence on the degree of success of a planned and developed curriculum.

Oyaziwo (2009: 5) affirmed that,

*it is a common knowledge that most teachers graduated from teacher education programmes over two – three decades ago. Despite the fact that the teaching profession is one of the most dynamic professions in the world, our techniques of teaching and the contents of what we teach seem not to have changed, thereby continuously imparting old and stale ideas on our students.*

Onyemerekeya (2002) calls it refusal to change. In his words – 'several teacher educators who were trained with the traditional methods have refused to deviate from old approaches to methods of instructions and this reaction to change is a devastating limiting factor in our educational process ...' The teacher in this category cannot be called new in any ramification, they are rather static, stale, and conservative in their approaches to teaching and learning. Perhaps it is in recognition of the dynamism of the teaching profession that the National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that teachers should take cognizance of changes in methodology and in the curriculum of subjects taught in schools and that teacher should also be regularly exposed to innovations in their profession. However, Teacher's Registration Council (TRCN) produced a manual titled Mandatory Continuous Professional Development

(MCPD) programme for registered teachers in Nigeria. The focus of the programme is retraining teachers, especially on the core courses and also emerging issues. Teachers who avail themselves of these opportunities to update and upgrade themselves are those perceived to be new teachers.

### **Emerging Challenges in the Nigerian Educational System**

Onyidoh (2010) reminisces that around the 1970s, the quality of Nigerian education was the pride of the black race and the envy of many developing countries of the world. After about three decades of systematic mismanagement by both military and civilian rulers, the Nigerian education has deteriorated to a mere shadow of its past glory. He further identified areas of challenges facing the Nigerian educational system to include: curriculum of study, the state of infrastructural facilities, the quality of students, the quality and quantity of staff, the competence of leadership, the level of funding and the direction and consistency of policy. Iwuamadi (2008) also highlighted some other areas which may be offshoot of the other challenges to include: lack of motivation of staff, examination malpractice, incessant strike actions, ~~inadequate quantity and quality of teachers, increase in population of students at various levels of education-poor preparation, malpractices, exploitation, poor parenting/guidance, poverty and fall in standard.~~

In the area of policy making, the problem has never been the formulation of education policies but the implementation. The implementation of these laudable policies has often been hampered by incessant change of governments, unstable academic calendar occasioned by incessant strike actions embarked upon by teachers. Other factors that can militate against the effective implementation of Nigerian educational policies include among others, poor and inadequate facilities, lack of motivation for staff and lack of government commitment.

The Nigerian schools and campuses have become breeding grounds for cultism, gangsterism, hooliganism, armed robbery, sexual promiscuity, examination malpractices and lots of other vices. The Nigerian youths are yet to imbibe the right type of values and attitudes as proposed in the Nigerian objectives of education. Rather, the school system tends to turn out graduates who are deficient in both character and leaning, and who cannot make meaningful contribution to the development of the nation.

Another area of serious challenge is the quality and quantity of staff. Adequate number of qualified teachers needs to be recruited into the school system to cater for the upsurge in the population of students at the various levels of the educational system and also there is need to constantly retrain the existing teachers.

Successive Nigerian governments are not helping matters by not allocating adequate fund to the education sector. Their allocation falls short of the UNESCO recommended 25% of the annual budget. The effect of inadequate fund in the education sector is enormous. It affects the provision of infrastructural facilities, instructional materials, payment of wages to staff, retraining of teachers, sponsorship of researcher programmes etc. The big question that follows is what is the role of the new teacher in the face of these educational challenges?

### **Tackling the Educational Challenges; The New Teacher Perspective**

A number of challenges have been identified as contributing to the fall in standard in the education system and the new teacher has a lot to do to improve the situation. In order to tackle the challenge of quality and quantity of teachers, it is pertinent to review and enrich the teacher education programmes and also ensure that the existing teachers are constantly retrained through seminars, workshops, conferences etc to take up the challenges in the educational sector and to produce children who are productive in their thinking. The Nigerian government recognizes the importance of teachers in the propagation of education in Nigeria. That is why the National Policy on Education (2004) states that (a) teacher education shall be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development (b) the

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minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be NCE and that all the teachers shall be professionally trained. It is pertinent therefore, to ensure these policies are implemented.

Inadequate funding have negative effects on various aspects of the education system – infrastructure, resources (human and material), payment of staff salaries, provision of libraries, establishment of resource centers sponsorship of research activities etc. In situations like these, the new teacher should be effective and efficient and be able to demonstrate such qualities as resourcefulness, problem solving and good moral judgment (Izuagba, 2004). These qualities have implications on factors listed above in the sense that when the needed instructional materials are not available, the teacher who is resourceful should be able to improvise and sponsor himself/herself for conferences, workshops and seminars. Furthermore a teacher with a good moral judgment will not abstain himself from classes because the classroom environment is not conducive or be quick to go on strike or engage the authorities in a confrontation because the salaries and allowances are not paid as at when due rather he/she should display his/her good personality traits such as friendliness, understanding, patience, perseverance, tolerance. Additionally, the new teacher should leave above board, shun corruption and behaviours classified by the NUT code of ethics as professional misconduct; immorality with learners, misappropriation of school fund, suppression and falsification of school records or statistics, bribery, corruption, extortion in connection with school duties, dishonest conduct in relation to examinations and teaching the children outside school hour for private gain.

Other problems plaguing the school system include cultism, hooliganism, armed robbery, thuggery, examination malpractices etc. In the face of these, the new teacher should stand her grand to condemn these unwholesome acts. A situation where teachers are members of one cult group or another should not be condoned neither should aiding and abating of examination malpractices be tolerated. The new teacher should rather speak out on these evils and also put in efforts to curb them.

### **Conclusion**

The teacher is at the center of the instructional delivery at all levels of our educational system as he is vested with the responsibility of imparting knowledge, skills, competencies and capabilities to the learners. Therefore the relevance of the teacher in achieving social change in any nation cannot be over emphasized. The challenges facing the Nigerian educational system are enormous but these problems and challenges as highlighted in this paper are not insurmountable. What is required is the collective efforts of all stakeholders-the governments, non-governmental organizations, teachers and members of the community. All hands should be on deck to move the education sector forward.

The role of the new teacher in this situation should not be overlooked. That is why efforts should ~~be made to boost and enhance the teacher education curriculum to cater for the reforms~~ **Academic Excellence** that is sweeping across the educational system. Furthermore, producing well equipped and adequately trained teachers is a welcome development but additionally, evolving strategies to make and keep the existing teachers (those who are already in service) ‘new’ in pedagogy, methodology and good personality traits should be encouraged. Doing this will put the teacher, on whose shoulder lies the production of youths who will lead this nation to sustainable development, to be in a position to face squarely the emerging challenges in the Nigerian educational system.

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