

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING IN NIGERIA: A CHALLENGE TO TEACHER EDUCATORS

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Abstract

The problem of teachers for many years could be solved by full professionalization of teaching. Therefore, this paper discussed barriers to full professionalization of teaching as well as ways to overcome the barriers among others.

Introduction

Teacher education is very central to any educational plan and process. This is because teachers are the product of teacher education who 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. A teacher who possesses desirable abilities, competencies, attitudes and values necessary to transform educational policies into practices. Razik (1972:9) opines that "the validity of any educational system is dependent upon the quality of the teaching and the availability of competent teachers". By implication, it is the teachers that determine the quality of the education system. This quality is equally dependent on the relevance, functionality, efficiency and effectiveness of teacher education; 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 teachers' role depend could well be positively and comfortably taken care of by the full professionalization of teaching (Ilorah, 2001:158). Therefore, it is important to address very seriously the issue of professionalism in teacher education especially now that new approaches to teaching such as team teaching, stimulated teaching, computer assisted instruction etc. are emerging.

Premised on the above perhaps, the federal government of Nigeria indicated in the National Policy on Education (1981:14) that the National Register of Teachers was being compiled as a prelude to the full professionalization of teaching; and in 1993, General Ibrahim Babangida's administration subsequently promulgated the Essential Services Decree which formally recognized teaching as a profession. Also, section 6, paragraph 64 (a) and (b) of the National Policy on Education (1998:34) states that "teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria". Continuing, the policy states: Government has set up the Teachers' Registration Council to control and regulate the practice of the profession. Those already engaged in teaching but not professionally qualified shall be given a period of time within which to qualify for registration or leave the profession.

The above, though a step in the right direction, is but still a mere theoretical precept. This is because no national register of teachers has been compiled and no new entrants into teaching accredited and registered by anybody or organization of teaching. Besides, many teacher educators currently are not trained in the pedagogy of teaching and hence are not qualified. Thus, these presuppose a clear understanding of what a profession is and also as may be distinguished from occupation.

What is a Profession?

Many definitions of a profession abound but in all these they seem to be talking of the same thing. For example, the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* defines a profession as "an occupation or calling especially one in which special education or training is required, example, the law, architecture, medicine, the church". *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* also states that a profession is "the occupation, if not commercial, mechanical, agricultural or the like, to which one devotes oneself, a calling which one professes to have acquired some special knowledge used by way either of instructing, guiding or advising others, or serving them in act as the profession of arts, of learning". From the definitions above, one may deduce that a profession is an occupation but not all occupations are a profession. For example, an

electrician can wire a house and install all electrical appliances without a deep understanding of the principles of electricity. That is why the idea of special educators or training connoted in the two definitions above becomes important. This is because it is this acquired special education or training that makes all the difference. Hence, Okean (1989) sees a profession as constituting essentially of power groups seeking basically to improve their worth and market situations in an increasingly more competitive modern society. In addition, the power groups seek to share the authority, prestige, integrity and autonomy and to receive from the public the mandate to practice. In fact, "the ordinary man respects and secretly envies them (the professional), because they possess an attractive sub-culture foreign to the un-initiated" (Mgbodiie, 1982:16). With these important elements inherent in a profession, one can then begin to define a profession as an occupation based on prolonged specialized training or intellectual study of the principles, theories and other academic matters connected with the profession for the purpose of supplying skilled services to others for a definite fee or salary.

From the above definitions and explanations, a number of deductions could be made.

1. A Profession Provides Skilled Social Services

The idea of skilled services means that a professional should be able to provide practical solutions to problems of members of society, as the need arises, otherwise society will suffer greatly. For example, the legal profession settles cases and medical officers are involved with health matters.

2. Prolonged Period of Training

The period of training for a profession takes some prolonged years. For example, in medical profession, the period of training becomes longer. Instead of spending four years in the university, the prospective medical practitioner spends six years taking both theoretical and practical courses in medicine. After which such a person spends an additional one year as an intern in a reputable hospital. Hence, the period of training becomes prolonged.

3. A Profession is Founded Upon a Systematic Body of Knowledge

A professional must command a body of knowledge and skills that are essentially intellectual. For example, medical doctors are professionally and intellectually trained to handle health problems. Also, lawyers are intellectually trained to settle cases. What this portends is that both doctors and lawyers are trained to acquire a body of knowledge that will enable them to solve problems of people relevant to their disciplines.

4. A Profession Has a Code of Conduct or Ethics for Members

Ethics connote a system of moral principles, rules or conducts. It is those conducts or guiding principles required by anybody in the profession to abide by. Therefore, professions prescribe rules and regulations guiding the conduct of members of the profession in the exercise of their professional functions.

5. A Profession Provides In-Service Training and Growth for Its Members

This is premised on the fact that a profession must command a body of knowledge. As we know, knowledge keeps changing. Today, there is knowledge explosion in various academic fields. This new knowledge must be accommodated by professionals. They can only do this through attendance at conferences, seminars and workshops.

6. A Profession Enjoys a High Degree of Autonomy

The regard given to any profession by the citizenry depends in the main on its autonomy. The professional should be free to take decisions regarding the ways and means of supplying his/her skilled services to his/her clients. This is important because it enables the professional to develop initiative in solving certain professional matters.

7. A Profession Offers a Life Career and Permanent Membership to Its Members

A profession is often a life career and membership is permanent and automatic. Where conditions in the profession are not favourable to one, one has to work to improve it. In extreme cases of nonconformity however, one is either fined or sacked. For example, if one is admitted into a legal or medical profession, one becomes a professional lawyer or doctor as the case may be and one can almost certainly spend one's

entire career in that regard. However, in the extreme case of contravening of the profession, the professional certificate is withdrawn.

8. A Profession is Characterized by Public Recognition

Usually, a profession has the seal of the government. In other words, the government promulgates laws extending official recognition to the professional body in the state.

9. Control of Entrant Into the Profession

There should be a standard of training and performance before one is accepted into the profession. For example, in notable professions, such as law, medicine, and engineering, no individual, no matter how highly placed in society or his academic qualifications can be allowed to practice the profession without first being accepted into the profession by the respective accredited professional body.

10. Closely Knit Professional Organization

A profession must have a strong closely knit professional organization. This organization strives to hold members of the profession together. Thus, a professional is autonomous to the extent that he pays allegiance to the professional organization especially in pursuance of more global and enduring goals. This is in contradiction to a trade union organization.

Professional Status of Teaching in Nigeria

This could better be assessed from the above characteristics. 1)

Provision of Skilled Social Services

Teaching meets this criterion because the socializing efforts of the school are carried out in the main by teachers. Besides, teachers are involved in the educational, socio-cultural, economic, political and technological upliftment of any society. Hence, they render social services.

2) Prolonged Period of Training

Teaching in Nigeria satisfies this criterion since the period or number of years of training for all professions is not common and definite. However, notable professions in Nigeria such as the legal, medical, engineering professions take a longer period of training than teaching. The situation is compounded by categorizing teachers such that the period of training exists for different teachers such as NCE teachers, university graduate teachers, ACE teachers, Grade Two Teachers etc. This is one of the barriers towards professionalizing teaching in Nigeria.

3) Systematic Body of Knowledge

Obviously, teaching meets this criterion. There are two things to being an effective teacher. These are having knowledge of the subject matter and being grounded in the principles and methods of teaching. Hence, these two activities of the teacher are highly intellectual. The problem, however, is that so many people not trained in the technique and pedagogy of teaching are still in the classroom. This class of people are more in the universities and polytechnics. This category of people (teachers) cannot be called teachers otherwise teaching is far from meeting this criterion. Besides, some of the so-called teachers are trained through crash programmes and sandwich courses that made it impossible for teachers to be exposed to an adequate body of knowledge necessary for the discharge of their duties of teaching.

4) Code of Conduct for Members

There is a code of conduct for teachers. This teacher's code of conduct was formulated in 1969. However, it seems that this code of conduct has no strong backing. Hence, teachers are not enforced to observe it. In this regard, it could perhaps be described as part of the conditions of service for teachers. Therefore, the enforcement of the code of conduct is a very strong characteristic of a profession. Hence, with regard to this, teaching is lacking as a profession.

5) In-Service Training and Growth for Its Members

It is on record that as early as the 1930s, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) organized several seminars, workshops and conferences that have positively influenced school curricula and teacher education programmes as well as the policies of education at different levels of the education system.

In the past 10 years, such services have been replaced by sandwich programmes which in many cases run into problems like strikes. Hence, Mgbodile (1982:17) opines that the in-service training of teachers in Nigeria has been poor, unorganized and lacking in purposeful direction. Thus, this criterion is not fully met.

6) High Degree of Autonomy

Teaching is one area one should have the freedom to associate, to speak one's mind, to plan and execute teaching. In fact, the Nigerian teacher enjoys some measure of autonomy. Though the teacher is under the supervision of the school head (principal, headmaster etc.), supervisors and inspectors from the ministry of education etc. the activities of all these personnel are directed towards helping teachers to improve instruction.

However, teaching has not got a self-governing body such as the likes of the Nigerian Medical Council and the Legal Council of Nigeria that control the performance of members in the medical and legal professions respectively. The activities of these councils are similar. For example, they are responsible for issuing licences to practitioners or withdrawing them when there are cases of misconduct or incompetence. Viewed against this background, teaching in Nigeria does not fully satisfy the criterion of professional autonomy.

7) Life Career and Permanent Membership for Its Members

It is evident that this criterion is not met by teaching. This is because in spite of the unforceable policy to flush out non-trained teachers from the classroom, this group of persons are still there. In this regard, teaching becomes, so to speak, a dumping ground for job seekers who sooner than later, leave teaching. Today, many trained teachers would wish to opt out to teaching than remain permanently as teachers. This is because teaching enjoys a comparatively low status and esteem than the medical, legal or other known professions. Hence, young girls turn down marriage advances by teachers even when they themselves are teachers.

8) Public Recognition

As mentioned earlier, the government downgrades teaching. Not only does teaching not enjoy public recognition, teacher's prestige is also very low. Salaries are not paid in time and regularly. In Enugu State for example, teachers are owed arrears of salaries up to four months and other emoluments up to three years while other civil servants are paid. Yet teachers continue to go to work.

9) Control of Entrants Into the Profession

As earlier mentioned, teaching is a dumping ground for job seekers. This means that one enters into teaching freely and leaves freely. Hence, this characteristic of a profession is not met by training. In all profession, such as the medical, legal, as well as engineering professions, no person, not even his status in society or academic qualifications, will be allowed to practice without first being certified by the relevant professional body charged with such responsibility. Entry into teaching is controlled by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the State Education Commission serving as agents. Therefore, there is no association of teachers, the NUT inclusive, to determine the employment of teachers.

10) Professional Organization

Teaching in Nigeria does not have any professional body. The NUT could better be described as a trade union than a professional organization. This stance of the NUT as a trade union is rooted from 1931 when it was formed to fight for the improved conditions of service of its members, and thus becomes a pressure group. Hence, Adesina (1990) opines that the teachers' union in Nigeria plays the role of a trade union rather than a professional association. Hence, this criterion is not met by teaching in Nigeria.

In conclusion, one can certainly state that teaching in Nigeria is not a profession. However, efforts should be made towards its professionalization. Luckily, some of the characteristics of a profession are partially enjoyed by teaching.

Barriers to Full Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria 1.

Poor Quality of the Entrant

Professions like teaching naturally requires people with the best brain and aptitude so as to improve productivity, quality and functionality of education. This was the case when the missionaries controlled schools. The best brains were found teaching in both primary and secondary schools.

However, with the evolution of occupations and professions, most of our best brains, left teaching for the more prestigious and better professions like law, medicine, and engineering, leaving few and poor quality individuals to teach. For example, during the Universal Primary Education of 1976, poor quality teachers were mostly recruited because there was a shortage of teachers. Hence, Ukeje (1981:9) avers that;

Either by accident or by design, we tend to have our best brains, cure our sick, design our roads and bridges and make and interpret our laws while our poorest brains teach our youth. The consequence of this is hospitals that kill more than they cure, roads that wash away after one rainy season, telephones that are perpetually out of order and industrial products that are defective, incongruous laws and purchased justice.

This situation is pathetic because in a populous and developing country like Nigeria, this will be devastating. This is because teachers are involved with future generations and whereas the mistake of a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer affect few people, that of a teacher affects generations yet unborn.

2. Certification of Teachers

In Nigeria, some certificates to teachers are issued by examination boards while others are issued by the Ministry of Education and not by any teachers' professional association. This runs counter to the characteristics of a profession.

Besides, many people who assume the role of teacher educators are not trained in the pedagogy of teaching. Hence, non-professional teachers and lecturers take a very active part in the production of teacher educators. Hence, Ukeje (1983:5) says that:

Unfortunately, we do have today in the teaching profession and in teacher education institutions people who do not have the necessary ethical requirements, the needed moral courage and attributes which make it a noble profession, the necessary expertise to satisfy its sense of calling, to make it a rewarding occupation. These are cheaters rather than teachers.

The above lamentation is very serious especially when we critically assess that without qualified and conscientious teacher educators, no meaningful development can be achieved. Hence, Obanya (1982:33) maintains that:

While our universities contain the best scholars in the nation, they also contain her worst teachers. One only need to audit a typical university lecture to see the amount of dictation of notes that goes on and the absolute lack of resourcefulness on the part of some lecturers.

Therefore, it is anachronistic, unacceptable and unfortunate for non-trained teachers to be involved in the business of teacher production in Nigeria. This has made it extremely difficult for teachers to come up with one voice in matters concerning them.

3. Lack of a Unifying Professional Association

Teaching in Nigeria has no one unifying professional association for every teacher in Nigeria. What we have may be described as shadows of interest groups and trade unions. Hence, at the university level of education is the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) whose membership includes trained and un-trained teachers that teach in the universities in Nigeria. At the colleges of education are the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU). Perhaps, not all COEASU members have teaching qualifications. Many of them obtained educational qualifications by engaging in short remedial diploma courses which in the writer's mind do not expose them enough to the pedagogy of teaching. At both the secondary and primary school levels is the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT).

Membership of the NUT ranges from unqualified or un-certifloated teachers to graduate and non-graduate teachers. Each of these groups in turn aggregates into small groups with interests to grab the leadership of the

NUT. This has thus made the NUT an ineffective association of teachers which could be described as a trade union rather than a professional association. For instance, the code of ethics of teaching produced and adopted by the NUT in 1969 is binding on all members but it is far from being enforced on members by the NUT. Besides, the Teachers' Special Salary Scale (T.S.S.S.) promised teachers by the federal government has not been realised. There are severe limitations on the personal life of teachers, some of which make it difficult for interested individuals to remain in teaching which the NUT has remained adamant to. Such restrictions include restrictions on movement, restrictions (regarding clothing and) whom to associate with as well as restriction regarding drinking while on duty. This is the greatest obstacle to the full professionalisation of teaching in Nigeria.

4. Low Status of Teachers

Teachers in Nigeria enjoy comparatively low status vis-a-vis lawyers, medical doctors, architects, engineers, clergy etc. Because of this, people do not willingly want to teach. Those who are qualified by training often leave for more lucrative and supposedly prestigious jobs leaving it for unqualified persons. Hence, there is no life commitment to teaching.

Also, because of the low status accorded teachers, young men opt out of teaching leaving it for inexperienced young women who are only too eager to leave as soon as they get married. The preponderance of girls has really diminished teaching, since many of them do not pay serious attention to it.

5. Lack of Uniform Minimum Qualifications

There are no uniform minimum qualifications and periods of training for teachers. Hence, teaching is both vertically and horizontally segmented. *Vertical segmentation* refers to a hierarchical order where different categories of teachers emerge. For example, in Nigeria, the first category is the Grade Two (T.C.II) teachers at the lowest ladder. A little higher up are those with the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E.), holders of the Bachelor's degree in Education (B.Ed.), holders of postgraduate Diploma in Education, holders of the Master's degree in Education (M.Ed.), and finally, holders of the Doctorate degree (Ph.D.) in Education.

Vertical Segmentation of Teachers:

Grade Two Teachers;

Holders of A.C.E.;

Holders of N.C.E.;

Holders of B.Sc., B.A. (Ed.);

Holders of Postgraduate Diploma in Education;

Holders of Master's Degree in Education;

Holders of Ph.D. in Education.

The obvious implication of this is the differences in the programme and courses of the various categories of teachers. Besides, with this kind of segmentation, the pupils and laymen can categorize teachers according to status and mentality. This is unlike the medical or legal professions. Also, vertical segmentation makes it very difficult for all teachers to aggregate together for a common purpose, since some of (the teachers who teach at the tertiary level of education belong to other associations like the ASUU, as is the case with the colleges of education. These teaching in the primary and secondary levels of education are members of the NUT.

Horizontal segmentation is when the teachers are arranged according to subject specialization. In secondary schools for example, you have Mathematics, English, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Geography, Literature, Igbo, History teachers etc.

Horizontal Segmentation of Teachers:

English Teachers;

Mathematics Teachers;

Chemistry Teachers;

Biology Teachers;

Physics Teachers;

Geography Teachers;

Literature Teachers;

Igbo Teachers;
History Teachers;
Fine Arts Teachers;
Introductory Technology Teachers etc.

The subjects listed above can be categorized into science and arts and in the same way teachers are linked either as arts and science teachers. This arrangement makes it difficult for teachers to come together as one. Today, in secondary schools, science and mathematics are paid science allowance. This allowance is not paid to teachers of arts subjects.

6. Code of Ethics Not Enforced

The NUT produced and adopted a code of conduct/ethics for the occupation of teaching in 1969. This is a step in the right direction. However, the problem does not lie in the production of the code of ethics but in the enforcement or implementation of the tenets contained in the code. Therefore, though the code of ethics is binding on all members it is not enforced by the NUT.

7. Government Neglects of the NUT and Teachers

What quickly comes to mind is the establishment of government and private illegal schools without reference to the NUT. The genesis of illegal private schools can be traced to the frequent and lengthy disruption of school activities by teachers' strikes for the non-payment of their salaries. In fact, in the past ten years, strikes by primary and secondary school teachers over non-payment of their salaries have led to the closure of many schools. Between 1991 and 1993 alone, primary schools in 130 local government areas were in session for fewer than five months (Newswatch, 1994). Because of the strikes, most pupils lost the opportunity to take entrance examination which would enable them to enter colleges in October of that year. New intakes into federal colleges could not start classes until January, 1995. This situation led to an increase in the number of illegal schools. For example, in Lagos State alone, Ministry of Education officials estimated that there are two hundred and fifty illegal nursery and primary schools. Because the proprietors of these schools have no money to hire qualified teachers they employ people who ordinarily have no business being in the classroom. Other effects of frequent strikes include despondency, lack of interest in teaching, lack of trust, feeling of indifference, and lack of commitment to teaching and learning. For example, most teachers no longer prepare their lesson notes, fill their diaries and log books, they even come to school late.

This situation of neglect occurs because employment, certification and dismissal of teachers were ' handled without consulting the NUT. This is why the NUT is more a trade union than a professional organization.

Recommendations for Action

- 1) Given the lopsided nature in interest and establishment of the NUT that contributed immensely to weaken it, a replacement association that is more embracing is urgently necessary. This association should be named Nigerian Association of Educationists (NAE).
- 2) The NAE should be empowered to work to achieve group solidarity, professional ideals, recognition, adequate remuneration and teachers' self-esteem.
- 3) To achieve this, the NAE should endeavour to flush out quack or untrained teachers.
- 4) Government efforts should be vigorously pursued to actualization by the NAE and other similar associations. Such efforts of government to be pursued include those contained in the *National Policy on Education (1981:146)* which states that "teaching, like other professions will be legally and publicly recognized as a profession. Government will set up a Teachers' Council among whose functions will be Accreditation, Certification, Registration, Discipline and Regulations governing the profession of teaching... and maintenance of a National Register of (Professional) teachers¹.
- 5) Government efforts should be geared towards retraining qualified teachers. Qualified teaching is premised on a combination of academic and professional qualification that make one a professional. In other words, it makes a long period to produce competent teachers. Therefore, it is a necessary task by government to retain them by paying them not only handsome salaries but

- regularly as well, and also making them have a sense of job security.
- 6) The long awaited teachers' special salary (TSS) should be vigorously pursued and implemented. Once this is achieved, teachers' morale and job satisfaction will be at its optimum and this will ensure teachers life commitment and dedication.

Conclusion

The primary problem of teachers in Nigeria is that teaching is not professionalised. Because of this, teaching is today a dumping ground for job seekers, quacks and those who ordinarily had no business being in the classroom. This is also the reason why the problems that have bedeviled Enugu and Anambra State teachers particularly and others in general occurs. Teachers in this States are owed arrears of salaries up to five to 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 are 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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