

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Hajia M. Onekata

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how (he neglect and shabby treatment of teachers in Nigeria has given the teaching profession in Nigeria a low social image and the consequence of such treatment on the teaching profession and the entire educational system. It is universally acknowledged that no nation can rise beyond the calibre of its teachers and that education unlocks the door to modernization to which the teachers holds the key the teacher holds the key. Consequently, any nation that decides to treat teachers as second class citizens will only have second class medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, accountants and administrators to run its affairs. Based on the issues raised in this paper among other things, it is recommended that since the destiny of any nation is shaped in her classroom, all tiers of government in Nigeria should show more and sincere commitment to the teachers' welfare.

Introduction

The survival of any educational programme depends on a well-planned and steady supply of the teaching personnel both quantitatively and qualitatively. We cannot talk of growth and development of the educational system without a corresponding growth and development of teachers who hold the key to the survival of the educational system. Education unlocks the door to modernization and the teacher holds the key to this door, as the teacher is the link between the learner and instructional programme.

It is universally recognized that the effective implementation of the instructional programmes depends largely upon the skills, knowledge and the resourcefulness of the teachers. Therefore, the preparation of the teacher for this enormous task should be considered as a crucial issue.

The Concept of Education

There is no universally accepted definition of the term education. This is because what education is, depends on the perspective of the various scholars. I consider that by Phoenix (1958), in which he sees education as "the process whereby persons intentionally guides the development of persons" as the most appropriate for this paper. In other words, education is a process of personal growth and learning. However, not all professions involving human development are education. Education as a process of directing personal growth requires a context in which individual's potentialities can be actualized by his interaction with the surrounding entities. The nature of the realized potentiality depends, to a great extent upon what the environment is as well as the nature of the interactions experienced. This, further, exemplifies why the quality of the teachers that guides the learning process is of crucial importance.

The Teaching-Learning Process

The entire curriculum may be regarded as an organized sequence of learning situations arranged so as to be of maximum benefit to the learners. There are three elements involved in the teaching-learning process; the student, the teacher and that which is to be learned. The content or the subject matter includes the whole range of materials in which the student is expected to gain competence. On this note, teaching could be conceived as the process of directing human growth in accordance with a chosen pattern.

The teaching-learning process is rather an orderly progression of physical, cultural and social context in which the teacher then works largely by direction, providing favorable and inviting conditions and relying on the students' own urge towards self-realization to bring about learning process to fulfillment. To Ukeje (1991), this process can only be effectively handled by professionally trained teachers who are well grounded in methodology and child psychology.

At this juncture, I wish to add that the best condition for learning may not always be pleasant and comfortable for the students and that the most significant personal growth often takes place in response to

circumstance of hardship and perplexity. The trained teacher would be able to determine the type of problems and obstacles, which would most effectively challenge students and elicit their most constructive response. But it should be noted that, if the difficulty created are too great, the student will experience frustration and discouragement. The requisite level of difficulty depends on several factors including age and experience of the students, the type of problem presented, and the individual's emotional nature and degree of maturity.

Therefore, only trained teachers can place appropriate obstacles in the student's way so that he may develop the inner resources and habit of intelligence which will prepare him to solve the problems which life inevitably presents. The trained teacher is the only person that can perform this essential function in the development of a person.

The Teacher's Role in the Learning Process

Teaching is an intricate, exerting and challenging job. The teacher is a professionally trained person in the society for the purpose of guiding the development of the young-people in the society. He is trained in the methodology and skills of supervising the learning of the children. Such a person has a sound knowledge of the developmental needs of the children and the skills to help them actualize their full potentials.

What a child is to become is not given in the germ plasma but is a consequence of the natural endowment acted upon by environmental influences including people. Thus, persons inevitably enter into the making of the human being. Hence the teacher is simply one who intentionally and professionally undertakes the task of fashioning the young.

The teacher is the mediator of excellence. Through his agency the student is enabled to realize goals, which would have been otherwise inaccessible to him. This makes the quality of teachers so crucial to the survival of any educational programme.

The common but naive assumption that teaching is what anybody can do provided he knows his teaching subject is baseless and such assumption is just as obscure as to suppose that a person is qualified to remove an infected appendix because he has an excellent knowledge of human anatomy. While Nigerian Medical Council would not allow an individual to operate a person with appendicitis just because he is sound in human anatomy, untrained persons and teachers are allowed to "operate" and often damage the sensitive organism (the child) of the society. It should be noted that the teacher's personal influence on his pupils is often tremendous and indeed almost greater than what the teacher and the pupils realize. This is so because the teacher's attitudes, his tastes, his lifestyles, intellectual curiosity, etc, may turn out to be far more important than the mastery of the subject he is teaching. The knowledge of the subject is important but cannot ensure qualitative and enriched learning without blending which only trained teachers possess.

As Ukeje (1991), rightly said, the teacher is the link between the learner and the instructional programmes. It is only the trained teachers who has the skills and competence to provide opportunities for learning by planning occasions for social participation since much of the content of education relates to social conduct and these lessons are best learned by actually associating with other people in a variety of shared enterprises.

Teaching Profession in Nigeria

A profession is any prestige holding occupation that renders an essential social service, embodies a systematic body of knowledge, requires long academic and practical training, enforced conditions of service possesses a code of conduct prescribed by members and for themselves, has a representative organization as well as provision for professional development (Anadi, 1994.)

Teaching profession in Nigeria according to Adesina (1988), has been a 'low status' occupation and this low status image has persisted since the 19th century though softened considerably by the Udoji Commission of 1973, which gave equal treatment to teachers and other civil servants by giving teachers the same salaries and benefits as other workers in the Federal and State services. Despite this image boosting given to teachers by the Udoji Commission of 1973, it is observed that the heritage of low status of teachers is still having profound effect upon those entering the profession and upon the professional organization itself.

A critical analysis of the teachers' image and status in Nigeria has prompted some observers to

describe teaching profession as the goose that lays the golden egg of the social and scientific transformation. They contend that it is only morally right that whatever the objective of our education, be it societal change or dynamic adaptation and fine turning of an already attained societal equilibrium, it is only fair to properly look after the goose.

Our Newspapers, Radio and Television broadcasts are filled with information on closure of schools and school consolidations and teacher lay-off. Teachers' strikes have been widely publicized with students, parents and the public made acutely aware of lagging teachers' salaries and unfavourable working conditions and job securities. Added to the fact that the beginning teaching counterparts with bachelor's degree receive less net salaries than their non-teaching counterparts working in banks and ministries.

Presently, the teaching job in Nigeria can be seen as a marginal profession in the sense that it shares a number of characteristics with the classical professions yet it fails to achieve similar status and rewards. According to Yusuf (1995), the occupation is full of limitations and therefore, cannot enjoy the respect, security, independence and prestige given to the classical professions.

In the light of the above observation, Adewole (1992), urged the government to restore the esteem in which teachers who are moulders of the society could be upheld by improving their conditions of service so that they are not tempted to become part-time traders and contractors at the detriment of their noble profession. In Ali (1997)'s own view, the failure of teachers to perform up to expectation could be attributed to the teacher Education Programme they were subjected to and the nature of the environment they find themselves.

Marsha (2000) holds that, the low image of teachers affects the teaching profession, which initiates against their effective performance. To her, teaching should be made a more attractive career considering their highly placed position in human development.

Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed in this paper, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Every effort should be made to enhance the status and society image of the teaching profession in Nigeria.
2. It should be enshrined in the constitution that every tier of government in Nigeria must expend about 16% of its annual budget on education and that growth and development of teachers should be aggressively pursued since effective implementation of any educational programme depends on the knowledge, skills and the resourcefulness of the teacher.
3. There is the need for a review of the present teacher education curriculum so as to make the product respond adequately to the present millenary goals of education.
4. To redeem the image of teachers their salaries and other benefits need to be paid adequately and promptly.

Conclusion

From the various issues discussed in this paper the following conclusions could be made;

1. The low social image of the teaching profession in Nigeria is as a result of poor remuneration of teachers.
2. The poor social image of teachers and the teaching profession has been the cause of the decline in the number of bright, students opting to take to teaching career.
3. The present poor socio-economic image of teachers is a factor (that forces teachers to abandon their professional duties).
4. The continued neglect and shabby treatment of teachers in Nigeria would affect Nigeria's ambition to move along with progressive nations in this millennium.

References

- Adewole, A. (1992). Discipline in the Nigerian context: A conceptual framework and some Educational Implication. Institute of Education. *Journal of Educational Studies* 2(V).
- Ali, M. D. (1997). An Appraisal of Teacher Education Programme, Implications for future Research and Development in Nigeria. In *Nigerian Education System and National Development*, Katsina School of Education, Federal College of Education.
- Anadi, C. C. (1994). Appraisal of the quality of socio-psychological factors of teaching in rural secondary schools in Anambra State. In *Journal of Education in Africa* 4(3),
- Marsha, G. (2000). Teacher Initiative and Innovation in the New Millennium. In Tambari: *Kano Journal of Education* (\).
- Phoenix (1958). *Philosophy of Education*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Ukeje, B. O. (1991). The Education of Teachers for New Social Order. In *The Nigerian Teacher* 1(1).
- Yusuf, S. D. (1995). Professionalization of Teaching. A Pre-requisite for salvaging educational system in a depressed economy" A seminar paper presented at school of Education Conference, F. C. E., Katsina 22nd - 24th May.