

THE TEACHING VOCATION: THE MISSING LINKS IN TODAY'S EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND CHURCH MISSION ASSIGNMENTS

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Education no matter how succinctly or elaborately defined is aimed at improving the quality of human life in all its ramifications. If we go to the origin of the word education, we will return to its Latin origin which is **educare** which means to draw out. In other words, education is the process of drawing out the hidden potentials in an individual. If we take education as the process of **knowledge acquisition** it means that someone serves as a medium for the process to take place. If we agree with Fafunwa (1984) who sees education as the aggregate of all the processes through which a child develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society, here again there is somebody who has the arduous task of unbundling these hidden and latent potentialities. This unnamed individual prepares the child to enable him fit satisfactorily into the society, enables him choose and pursue a career and sharpen his quest for a continuous acquisition of knowledge. The job of this individual is not finished. He opens the door for his subjects to attain self-realization, develop self-confidence and national consciousness that enable them to promote unity and attain economic, cultural and political maturity. Therefore, there is no gain-saying the fact that education is a major catalyst of development. All said, there is a positive correlation between good education and the level of wealth and economic growth and development of nations. In accepting this scenario there is fundamental question that needs to be answered. Who is at the epicenter of making the dreams of these individuals not a mirage but a reality. Who is this unsung and sometimes unpopular actor in the knowledge acquisition? Who is the unrecognized pillar which ultimately bears the whole burden of education? No matter how you frame the question the answer remains constant. The answer is TEACHER. It therefore behooves us to examine the teacher factor in the whole industry of education.

The Place of Teacher in the Process of Education

In the whole process of education the place of the teacher is very fundamental. According to UNESCO (2007), teacher quality exerts extensive effects on the school system especially in the areas of enrolment, participation and achievement of learners. Teacher quality embraces a whole lot of requirements on the part of the teacher him/herself some of them need to be heightened in a forum like this where we have some school and church teachers who are still active in the field. These include:

- i. **The Equipped Teacher:** For a teacher to be effective he needs to be properly equipped in quality. In this area of quality many teachers in the system are deficient in content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge as well as in pedagogic content knowledge. This translates to some teachers having low literary competence, shallow subject matter knowledge, and inadequate exposure to teaching practice as a result of the rush to fit the student teacher into the three or four years

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degree programmes for graduation and certification. A recent case in Edo state was when a primary school teacher could not read the Court Affidavit she presented to a screening panel. It was also sometimes reported (The Nation Nov 27, 2008) that in Kwara state less than one percent of the primary school teachers scaled through an assessment test in English and Mathematics given to them. More seriously in a national survey carried out by Okebukola (2005) similar weaknesses were found among some graduate teachers. All said, teacher quality is fundamental and cannot be swept under the carpet if the nation's aspiration to a top rated economy by the year 2020 will not remain mere proposal

- ii. **Teacher's Exposure:** Inadequate exposure of teachers is another crucial factor that serves as a cog in the wheel of teacher's effectiveness. Exposure connotes that the teacher is constantly abreast with the matters of the moment. The teacher, literally speaking, is an encyclopedia to his students or pupils- In order to fit into the mold, the teacher should be all knowing and remains a student all his working life. At no time will he be tired of reading and doing research. However, cases abound where some teachers terminate reading on the day of their graduation from Teachers College, Pastoral Colleges or University. The poor reading culture pervading the whole nation can be ratified if teachers take the lead in reading and inculcating the same in their students. The ancient saying has it that reading makes a teacher.
- iii. **Innovativeness:** Man by nature is resistant to change, he wants to stick to status quo. Teachers are not different. Some teachers would like to discharge their duties the way they were originally trained at St Paul's Awka, St Mark's Nibo Nise, St Andrew's Oyo, or Trinity College, Umuahia. No doubt, these institutions and their counterparts established a good foundation, but things have changed. No teacher of today will feel comfortable with the old ways of doing things and develop some phobia for information and communication technology (ICT) which today has gained wide acceptance. Present day teacher should embrace such simple communication and information gadgets as laptops, desktops, e-mail, e-learning and virtual library. The students we are teaching are vast in these technologies and for the teacher to remain relevant in this 21st century he cannot afford to be trotting far behind his student.
- iv. **The Teacher as a Role Model:** The teacher as an individual is a special specie more so when he is a church teacher of any rank. He is a special specie to the extent that to many he remains their visible God. The teacher is an open gospel being read by all and sundry. The teacher as a role model carries with it unfathomable requirements and responsibilities. The student wants to speak, dress, walk, write and behave like his teacher. If this is the image of the teacher, he stands on an elevated platform and is the cynosure of all eyes. As a role model the teacher is the Noble man, the man of character, a special human being who pontificates, and for an Anglican Church teacher he is a **Canon**, a **Venerable** or a **Bishop**, Each of

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these titles carries a bundle of respect and dignity. The teacher therefore stands the risk of misleading a host of followers who look upon him to provide a model character in and out of the classroom -an onerous task indeed.

- v. **Resourcefulness:** The teacher's working environment is a peculiar one. It is peculiar in the sense that all he needs to deliver his assignment may not be available or may be short in supply. No matter the circumstance he still has a duty to perform despite the absence or shortage of resources. This is where the ingenuity of the teacher is put into test. The teacher has to improvise teaching apparatus, he has to create a conducive atmosphere for learning where there is none. He can invent the wheel where no technology exists. Some concepts in science education are very abstract. To an uninitiated, the understanding of these concepts is almost impossible. The resourceful teacher is the one who simplifies these concepts and possibly uses local examples to drive them home. Professor Fafunwa sometime advocated strongly the use of local language in the teaching of science. The experiment was however abandoned half way. But the hope is not lost that some resourceful teachers would find a way of making some abstract concepts and terms in science and technology find equivalence in the local language. The secret behind Chinese rapid advance in technology is their ability to localize some scientific concepts and adapt them to their culture. The average Chinese or Japanese is very resourceful. If you cannot transfer technology to them they will steal it. You will end up saying that this product is made in China or Japan but it solves their problem. A teacher's resourcefulness is couched on the fact that he cannot afford to disappoint his students or if a church teacher, he cannot leave his congregation high and dry.
- vi. **Networking and Peer Review:** There is no gainsaying the fact that the world is a global village. This implies that the whole world is interconnected and the teacher should not bask in the euphoria of being a local champion. Networking is an essential aspect of improving one's skill and knowledge. This could be done through attendance to local and international conferences and workshops. The students, the teacher is training, are not restricted to the local environment but are released to the open world where they are to compete with others. It then demands that the teacher should adopt a peer review mechanism to update his knowledge and affects a cross-cultural or cross-country comparison. The ubiquity of **Internet** and **Facebook** facilities has made networking relatively easy. Teachers should avail themselves of these modern technologies to be in the mainstream of what to teach and how to teach.

The submission in the foregoing section of this paper is that the teacher has to be equipped as regards his quality encapsulated in content and pedagogic knowledge. The teacher's working environment is equally important if his expectations are to be realized.

Impediments to Teacher's Effectiveness

A well-articulated education policy is a *sine qua non* for effective educational system. The equipped teacher is a pivotal instrument for realizing this goal. However, there are a number of obstacles hindering the full realization of the intended goal despite the quality of the teacher. Some of them are discussed below.

- i. **The Teacher's Environment** The teacher's environment comprises all that surround the teacher some of which impede his effectiveness. We will lack space to exhaustively x-ray these impediments but suffice it to mention the following: the physical environment, resources, culture, government and its policies and the learners themselves. The poor physical environment in most of our schools is sufficient to discourage any enthusiastic teacher. This spreads from non-availability or inadequacy of space to poor ventilation and overcrowded classrooms. How can the teacher be effective when classes are held under trees and the children sitting on the bare ground?

Resources for effective teaching are usually in short supply. The students or pupils are taxed to supply chalk, white board markers, and sometimes made to contribute money for the purchase of school registers and other record books. Although the teacher can improvise but the basic infrastructure has to be in place.

The culture of the people can be a significant impediment to a teacher's effectiveness. The **almajiri** practice in some northern parts of the country is a case in point. How effective can the teacher be when he has to trace his pupils to markets, fishing grounds or streets where begging or hawking may be taking place. Also the culture of gender discrimination affects gender equity and can affect in the long run the sex ratio of teachers and other products of the school system.

In sum, the school environment in most situations is not teacher-friendly. According to Nwagwu (2011) the school environment is characterized by the shortage of everything except students. These inadequacies appear to be growing worse and becoming systemic since the ever increasing school population makes it difficult, if not impossible to meet the expectations and requirements.

- (ii) **Lack of Capacity Building:** Added to the hostile environment where the teacher operates, the teacher himself is left to decay without occasional retouching. Today, teacher training has lost its glamour and those teachers in the field are hardly exposed to avenues of professional growth such as (a) study leave with pay (b) training leave (c) study leave without pay (d) sabbatical leave (e) examination leave (f) teachers induction course (g) teachers orientation course (h) in-service training (i) workshops (j) conferences (k) seminars (l) symposia.

The above practices are avenues of capacity building and professional growth for teachers. In addition, some people have suggested that teachers should be motivated through recognition of excellence, award of prizes to outstanding teachers and special promotion. All these are rare occurrences. Generally, the teacher is neglected and his zeal to work is dampened by the stakeholders of which the government is the chief culprit.

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(iii) **The Government and the Tender:** The preceding sections of this discourse have dwelt on the teachers' environment and the impediments it brings on the teacher that prevent him from exercising his utmost potentials. Perhaps, the most formidable impediment is government itself. Space and time will not allow us to discuss in details the obstacles which the government presents in the teachers' path to excellent performance. These obstacles include poor policy for education, inconsistent policies, poor funding, lack of continuity and curriculum deficiency.

In all these the teacher is at the receiving end. The teacher is expected to create something out of nothing. The teacher is expected to use his meager salary to purchase or improvise what he needs for a successful impartation of knowledge in his classroom. When there is a mass failure in examinations the teacher is blamed, forgetting that when education is properly planned and funded the teacher's job is made lighter and interesting. But when there is a myriad of unresolved problems plaguing the system, teaching becomes a drab assignment in which no joy is derived.

(iv) **The Learners Factor in Teachers' Effectiveness:** One area that is often glossed over in measuring teachers' effectiveness is the role of the taught. The learner's interest, readiness to learn, his mental and physical illness, his capabilities and previous exposure affect the effectiveness of the teacher in many ramifications. A student or pupil is, all things being equal, clay in the hands of the potter (the teacher). The student is expected to be malleable and educable. Sometimes, however, some of the pupils are ineducable either by nature or they may have been spoilt by their parents, peers or the society. Where this is the case, the teacher cannot turn a magician but he may remain to carry the blame of poor performance by the pupils both in examinations and their general conduct. In this era of mobile phone, computer games and pornographic films, the extent of control by the teacher is highly limited. Some parents also have not helped the teacher to succeed. The amount of time non-boarding students stay with their parents or guardians is far more than the lime they stay at school. The question which needs to be answered is: Is the time spent at home quality time? What value has the parents added to the students' or pupils' education? Are their assignments supervised? There are more questions that need to be asked about the learners and their parents or guardians. The teacher's assignment will have fewer road-blocks if there is a synergy between the teacher and the taught and facilitated by the parents and other stakeholders.

The Church Teacher and His Effectiveness

In winding up this discussion, permit me to recognize the church teachers in our midst. They are the pioneers of education in Nigeria. In the field of education, the church realized quite early that literacy was an important key to understanding the scriptures. For that reason, there was a strong interest in promoting the teaching of indigenous languages as a strong vehicle to deliver the WORD. Schools were established at all levels to teach people to read and write local language as well as the English language and to meet the spiritual needs of their followers. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was a pioneer in this venture and the church teachers

were trained to be school and church teachers. In recent years the role has been defined and church teachers were then meant to mind the church. It is rather surprising that although the role of the church teachers has been reduced and more defined the activities of old have been relegated to the background. One may ask: How about the Friday class where communicants are prepared for the Holy Communion? How about the Monday class? How much of evangelical work is currently carried out? There may be diverse answers to these questions. Some answers may be in defence of dereliction of duty. Some answers may blame the congregation for not devoting enough time to church activities. No matter the answers given, church teaching is a vocation voluntarily undertaken and all the requirements that make an effective teacher should equally apply to church teachers, the church teacher is even more exposed than the school teacher because the Bible says that judgment will start from the house of God where the church teachers are the custodians (see 1 Peter 4 vs 17). It is therefore pertinent to conclude that all teachers are teachers and one rotten apple affects the whole bunch.

Supplying the Missing Links

The focus of this brief discussion has been on the road blocks to teachers' effectiveness. We have tried to put the teacher at the centre stage because, according to Professor Kilpatrick. "Unless the student has learnt the teacher has not taught other intervening variables notwithstanding. Teaching and learning are like selling and buying". It is these intervening variables that we have tried to elaborate — they are the missing links in the chain of teaching and learning. The tendency many a time is to heap all the blames on the door steps of government. But it is crystal clear that government is only a facilitating institution. There are other variables needed to make teaching and mission assignments effective.

We expect the government to come up with a well-articulated education policy flexible enough to accommodate the dynamics of time and technology. Government also has the onerous task of funding education adequately. Nurturing education is costly but harbouring ignorance and illiteracy is far more costlier. As much as adequate funding is required for the provision of infrastructural facilities and other educational materials, the teachers have to be well paid. The poor salary of teachers at all levels is a great impediment to teacher's effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Another missing link is teacher quality. The Latin dictum translated in English says that **you cannot give what you do not have** summarizes the need to have quality teachers in order to have quality children. Training and retraining of teachers should be a fundamental practice not an exception. How many teachers have gone for refresher courses since they left their training institutions? They are very few.

A measure of the success of a teacher is the quality of his product. The recent cry about the poor quality of the products from our colleges, polytechnics and universities, even our secondary and primary schools speaks volume of what the teacher needs to be effective. The cure to this is problem-oriented curriculum. Education is for problem solving and oriented to facing the problems of the society. Where the curriculum is not fashioned to do this, the products of the teacher do not prove him efficient and effective. Teaching should be made

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problem-oriented to make his products employable. There are many unemployable graduates today roaming the streets. In the long run the teacher carries the blame for not equipping them adequately for the world of work.

In summary, the missing links should be viewed from a holistic perspective. No one sector will blame the other. All the stakeholders should see teachers' effectiveness as a burden for all and contributions are expelled from all quarters.

Conclusion

That teaching as a profession is no longer debatable. The recent move to have all practicing teachers registered is a step in the right direction. It is aimed at making teaching not to be an all comers affair. However, the onus is on the teacher to prove that it is a noble profession.

This paper has centred on getting the teacher prove that he is not a push-about. To do this demands total commitment to the job and relying on other stakeholders to play their parts. Gone are the days when government and Christian missions claimed monopoly of funding and managing education in the country. The reality today is that till hands should be on deck to salvage education which from all indications is going down the drain.

Reforms in education are inevitable to make education a problem- solving venture. This associating organizing this lecture has a purpose in mind. I guess that the ultimate aim is to improve the teacher at all levels and at all domains be it in the classroom or in the church. We cannot fulfill the purpose for education if we allow some yawning gaps to exist between the linking chains. Education is for development and if the teacher facilitates access to education through his endeavours, then he is the pillar of development. If the pay is not commensurate with the teacher's efforts there is no doubt that somewhere and sometime the diligent teacher will get his reward.

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