

THE 21st CENTURY CHALLENGES OF QUALITY AND THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Professionalisation of teaching in Nigeria hinges on the high status of teachers which ILO/UNESCO (1984) describe as both the standing or regard accorded them, as evidenced by the level of appreciation of the importance of their function and of their competence in performing it, and the working conditions, remuneration and other material benefits accorded them relative to other professional groups. The teacher is incontrovertibly the fulcrum on which the curriculum lever revolves. He is the heart and soul of educational enterprise, the live wire of the school system. Teachers belong to the only profession that has the potential of determining the social, economic, and political and moral destiny of every Nigerian citizen. This paper x-rays the history of professional development of teaching in Nigeria, and identifies two broad epochs (a) the period 1842 - 1960 which witnessed the period of exclusive missionary control of education by both the missionaries and the colonial government, (b) The period 1960 to present day, witnessed the period of indigenous government control. The National Policy (1981) recognized -that no educational system could rise above the quality of its teachers. The paper also examines the development of the teacher as a member of the teaching profession and the development of teaching profession, which the teacher is a member. The concept of, and conditions for a profession were also examined. The paper is of the opinion that teaching has satisfied most of the conditions necessary for it to be regarded as a profession, and concludes by stating that the quality and caliber of teachers in teacher production institutions must be of the highest quality for the profession to face the challenges of the 21st century,

Introduction

In the recent years there has been considerations as to whether teaching can be regarded as a profession. The conflicting arguments can be considered only if a profession can be defined.

Professionalism in any field of human endeavour according to Okafor (1988) refers to the special competence exhibited by those who have prolonged and specialized training in that particular field. This means that professionalism refers to the mark or qualities of a profession, which is a field of economic activity requiring academic preparation. It requires sufficient training which is based on systematized knowledge and must show evidence of skill that are common. The training equips the individuals involved in the profession with attributes that make them effective and efficient in their jobs.

Every profession therefore, must have its own standards of competent performance, rules and regulations, academic standards, terms and terminologies. The members must exhibit professional behaviour and discipline unique to it.

Professional Development of Teaching in Nigeria

The history of professional development of teaching in Nigeria is that of gradual but steady and systematic movement towards progress, this can be divided into two broad epochs.

(a) The Period 1842 - 1960

This was the period of exclusive missionary control of education and later, joint control of education by both the missionaries and the colonial government. Within this period, there was no serious thought in the direction of teacher education and training of professional teachers. The missionaries made use of catechists, lay readers and interpreters in teaching pupils. As their emphasis was more on evangelizing the pupils than on giving them adequate formal education, they did not bother much about the quality of the teachers and the quality of education being given. But, with the indication of the colonial Government interest and participation in education, the 1882 education ordinance came into being, and this ordinance provided that local boards be appointed by the General Board of Education to "grant certificates to teachers" among other things.

Furthermore, the 1925 memorandum proposed that the training of teachers should be considered a priority, and that local teachers should comprise both men and women who will be sufficient in number, adequate in both qualification and conduct.

The memorandum also proposed the idea of having specially trained teachers as visiting teachers so as to improve village schools. Among other areas of emphasis was the registration of teachers. The ordinance proposed that a record book containing teachers' names should be kept and that the teachers who could teach are those whose names were found in the record book.

When Hussey became the Director of Education in 1930, he made more dynamic proposals towards improving the training, utilization and development of teachers. His proposals led to the establishment of Teachers Training Colleges at Awka, Ibadan and Warri (Solaru, 1964:11), the enhancement of teacher status and the formation of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1931 with the basic aims of studying, promoting and improving conditions affecting the teaching profession, creating better understanding among teachers and serving as an organ through which teachers' opinion on matters affecting the teaching profession could be channelled to the Government (Fafunwa, 1974:159-160).

(b) The Period 1960 to the Present

This is the period of indigenous government control of education. After Nigeria's independence in 1960, the Ashby Commission was set up to project the future needs of Nigerians with regard to higher education and to make recommendations. Among its recommendations were that "B.A. (Educational) degree courses should be offered in all universities", and that the "Federal Government should sponsor teacher training programmes". These recommendations could serve as a frame for what is obtainable in Nigerian universities today. According to, Ndu, Ocho and Okeke (1997:345) about 85% of Nigerian universities today run faculties and, or institutes of education, for teacher training and research. In addition, to this, there are many other institutions of higher learning that offer teacher-training programmes, such as colleges of education, and the polytechnics. All these institutions serve for the initial training of teachers and their further development. But the 'Ignorance - Knowledge' continuum has shown that there is no end to knowledge. Therefore, the initial socialization a teacher received could not have given him all the knowledge and wisdom he requires for effective performance of his duties. This fact was recognized by the National Policy on Education (1981:34) when it pointed out that:

No matter the efficiency of the pre-service training we give to teachers, there will necessarily be areas of inadequacies.

Moreover, the teaching, guidance and administrative functions of the teacher are social activities that happen within the social context of society and among social beings both of which are dynamic and liable to change. In order to be able to continue functioning amidst such changes, the teacher must acquire new knowledge, wisdom, skills, attitudes and modern strategies through constant development in his profession. The professional development of a teacher has two-dimensional processes involving:

(a) Development of the teacher as a member of the teaching profession.

Development of the teaching profession of which the teacher is a member.

The Development of the Teacher as a Member of the Teaching Profession

The National Policy on Education (1981:31) observed that:

Teacher Education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning because, no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers.

The term quality is generally seen to be cumbersome to explain. It has meant different things to different scholars. Sinfuna (1989:90) opined that:

Quality or standard of education is a term that is commonly on the lips of many educators, and yet it is one of the most difficult terms to explain in precise terms, nor are educators agreed on what constitutes it, and certainly there is no universally accepted method for measuring it.

Similarly, Avalos (1991:23) looks at the question of quality as a difficult question to explain, She noted that:

What is meant by quality is of course a difficult question in the case of teacher training. Judgments are dependent on what are considered to be the appropriate outcomes of such training or more specifically what kind of teachers the system is supposed to produce and how effective their predicted teaching performances will be.

To scholars like Beeby (1966) quality in teacher education is seen in terms of educational background and training of teachers. To Wisniewski (1991:46) quality in teacher education should focus on the process in selective admission standards for those wishing to enter teacher education programme.

Lassa (1998) while focusing on ensuring quality in teacher production in Nigeria put forward that:

By international convention, the major factors that determine standards in teacher education are the selection of entrants into the teacher education, the programme of study and the factors related to teacher preparation institutions.

Lassa (1998) further explained that the international Labour Organisation (ILO) (1990) with regard to policy governing entry into the teaching profession states that the entrants should possess the necessary moral, intellectual and psychological qualities and who have the required professional knowledge and skills. Perhaps, it is in realization of this provision that Watts (1989) remarked that:

The status of teaching profession is closely linked with the criteria for selection into the profession.

She suggested that a high standard of teacher education should start with placing a high value on the criteria guiding the selection of those most likely to be excellent teachers.

From the foregoing examination of the concept of quality in teacher education, it is apparent that the concept of quality particularly in relation to teacher education is relative.

However, the issue of quality in teacher education is a global concern, furthermore, a synthesis of literature on quality in teacher education seems to suggest two principal ideas. In the first place one criterion of ensuring quality in teacher education is for the teacher education institutions to place high standard of selection for entry into teacher education programmes. By this standard, only the competent candidates should enter into the teaching profession so that it does not become the profession of the last hope of the hopeless school leavers! Secondly literature also seems to suggest that the quality of teacher education could be ensured by improving the process of teacher education.

Based on the fore-going observation, the National Policy on Education proposed a number of steps to be taken to ensure accelerated teacher quality development. These steps include -

- (a) Government will direct the universities to work out a programme to make it possible for suitably qualified holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) to complete a degree in education at the university in two years instead of the present three.
- (b) The Federal Ministry of Education with the cooperation of State Ministries of Education and

Higher Educational Institution is already working out a series of new programmes, courses to enable teachers to up-grade themselves from one level to another.

- (c) Government has established a National Teachers Institute in Kaduna. The Institute will organize programmes for in-service training of practicing teachers. Opportunity will be such that every teacher at regular intervals will undergo in-service training.

The Development of the Teaching Profession which the Teacher is a Member

The professional development of an occupation is measured in terms of the extent to which that occupation has been able to achieve a full professional status. Since the introduction of formal education in Nigeria, the occupation has been on the journey toward full professionalisation. But, till date, the professional status of teaching is still being contested, by many among whom are teachers themselves.

The Federal Government action in recognizing teaching as a profession Has been a welcome development, as the National Policy on Education (1998:34) article 64 (a) stated:

Teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria: in this regard. Government has set up the Teachers¹ Registration Council to control and . regulate the practice of the profession in Nigeria.

The article 64 (b) stated:

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.

Concerned about the quality of teaching in Nigerian schools, the National Policy on. Education (1998) article 65 stated that:

Effort towards the improvement of quality education at the primary and secondary levels shall include: (a) appointment of academically and professionally qualified persons as teachers and head-teachers; (b) regular in-service training programmes for teachers and head teachers.

Thus from these policy statements, it is worthy of note that teaching as a profession which the teacher is a member has been legally recognized. However, there-are certain conditions, which must be satisfied by an occupation before such occupation can be accepted as a profession. The extent therefore to which an occupation meets such conditions is the extent to which such occupation will be said to have achieved professional growth. An examination of teaching in Nigeria against the check list of these conditions will help to determine whether the teaching occupation in Nigeria has fully grown into a profession or otherwise. Let us examine the meaning of a profession.

The Concept of and Conditions for a Profession

The concept of a profession has been given several definitions. According to Akubue (1988) in Kpangban (1997:85) states that:

A profession is any occupation which demands of its practitioner a prolonged and specialized intellectual and exclusive knowledge and training for the acquisition of special skill and attitude necessary for their particular type of service in the community as well as recognized association for the welfare both of its members and public service.

Mgbodile (1985:27) sees a profession as:

An occupation requires advanced training and demands of its members a prolonged specialized training in its special field, thereby making them a distinct group.

By way of synthesizing these ideas, a profession is an occupation based upon specialized intellectual study and training, the purpose of which is to supply skilled service by way of either instructing, guiding or advising others for a definite fee or salary.

According to Gordon, Sockett and Hoyle (1983:12) a profession is an:

especially desirable and defined occupation with an implication of intellectual training and largely mental expertise.

For Ezewu (1985; p.29) a profession is:

A body of persons engaged in certain occupations and whose members: (a) are specially prepared for the occupations; (b) practice the occupation freely, guided by a code of conduct; (c) benefit from well spelt-out conditions of service; (d) come together under one umbrella as a union or an association; (e) are clearly seen by non-members to be practicing the same occupation.

For the characteristics of a profession Okeke (1984:50-51) has identified the following: S Involvement of unique, exclusive, specialized and systematic occupational knowledge often represented by skills. S Acquisition of esoteric knowledge and expertise through long period of advanced education and training.

- ✓ Continuous in-service growth
- ✓ Affords a long-life vocation/career and permanent membership -S Possession of closely-knit occupation with group consciousness. •S Profession of self-autonomy and authority to control admission, recruitment, training, qualifying examinations, license, certification, standards of practice and retention of members.
- ✓ Affirmative public recognition and respect and professional mandate or authority often backed up by laws,
- ✓ Service oriented and in the best interest of society for purposes of satisfying some specific social needs.
- ✓ Possessing professional code of ethics for regulating and controlling the conduct of its practitioners.
- ✓ Ability of the professional to demonstrate competence through passing some prescribed examinations usually organized by an approved body.

Examination of Teaching Against the Checklist of Conditions for Professionalism

(a) Involvement of Unique Exclusive Specialized and Systematic Occupational Knowledge

Teaching is one occupation that has numerous techniques and strategies for practice. The different methods and techniques of teaching range from lecture, discussion, questioning, induction, questioning, variety and variation, use of examples, planned repetition and non-verbal communication. All these methods, techniques and strategies require special skills for their selection, application and utilization in the classroom. The implication of this is that it is not just anybody that can teach effectively. Teachers have to be socialized in their unique and general functions in both the school and the society. Teaching satisfies this first condition and therefore should be regarded as a profession.

(b) Acquisition of Esoteric Knowledge and Expertise Through Long Period of Advanced Education and Training

This condition implies that members of a profession have to be specially trained to be thoroughly knowledgeable in the subject matter of their profession. Although the continuing education programmes are helping to reduce the number of untrained teachers in Nigerian schools; there are still quite a number of such teachers who teach without sufficient qualification as professionals. The presence of such teachers reduces the esteem of teaching as a profession, and until such teachers receive proper training as professionals, teaching cannot attain full professionalism.

(c) Continuous In-Service Growth

A profession provides in-service and professional growth for its members. This is necessary because a profession is founded upon a body of knowledge and skills which are constantly in a state of flux. Each profession should have its research elements and the tools for disseminating new information to members. Teaching satisfies this condition and therefore should be regarded as a profession.

(d) Affords Life-Long Vacation/Career and Permanent Membership

Teaching is regarded as a profession, because teachers can now grow both vertically and horizontally within the teaching career. Teachers' salaries and conditions of service have been improved, pension and gratuity for retiring teachers are now well spelt-out and enforced. Teaching satisfies this condition and therefore should be regarded as a profession.

(e) Possession of Closely-Knit Organization with Group Consciousness

A profession should have a comprehensive, self-governing, closely knit professional organization for regulating practice of its members. This organization fights for the rights of members as well as caring for their welfare. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is the organization for teachers to fight for their rights but unlike the Nigerian Medical Association, Nigerian Bar Association, the NUT does not enjoy the solidarity and oneness of its members. This is because, teachers tend to organize themselves in other sub-groups e.g. all Nigerian Conference of Secondary School Principals (ANCOPSS), Graduate Teachers Association, Conference Of Secondary School Teachers (COSST) etc.

- (f) Possession of self-autonomy and authority to control admission, recruitment, training, qualifying examination, licence, certification, standards of practice and retention of members.

The practice in Nigeria today is that teachers are the employees of the Federal, State and Local Governments. Teachers are not autonomous and do not enjoy freedom of practice. Worst is that teachers are not involved in taking the decision concerning their job. This anomaly was identified by Okonkwo and Agada (1993) and Ocho (1992) when they lamented that the Nigerian teacher is usually alienated from formulation of policy even in matters that effect him professionally and personally.

- (g) Affirmative public recognition and respect and professional mandate or authority often backed up by laws.

A profession is expected to be of high esteem in the eyes of the public. Members of a profession are regarded as people of high social esteem and high income. As Cogan (1953) cited in Kpangban (1997) pointed out that, a profession confers on its members and entitles them to have a powerful say in the affairs of state. Continuing, he noted that the association, which protects the image of the profession, is regarded as an important public institution that is entitled to a voice and active participation in the affairs of the community where they operate.

This condition is very necessary because although the Nigerian public perceives the teacher as a member of a particular occupation, the image the public have of the teaching profession is very poor. In this regard, teaching profession does not enjoy full public recognition and respect.

- (h) Service oriented and in the best interest of society for purposes of satisfying some specific social needs.

Teaching is one social activity that is essentially serving humanity. Doctors and Lawyers may deal with single individuals, but the teacher deals with groups of individuals. This makes the function of the teacher unique, for a single malfunctioning of the teacher will destroy not only one or two persons but millions of people. According to Kpangban (1997) the saying that the teachers reward is in heaven points to the selfless nature of the teacher's job. Teaching satisfies this condition and therefore, should be regarded as a profession.

- (i) Possession of professional code of ethics for regulating and controlling the conduct of its practitioners.

Code of ethics are values, guides, social control, principles which govern the conduct of members of organization. The Nigerian Union of Teachers has drawn up code of ethics which stipulates form of professional behaviours for protecting the teachers, the union, the pupils, the parents and the community. Teaching satisfies this condition and therefore, should be regarded as a profession.

- (j) Ability of the professional to demonstrate competence through passing some prescribed examination usually organized by an approved body.

A profession has a long period of specialized intellectual training. This specialized intellectual training

is very crucial because professional work requires special intellectual skills. AM professional training. Teacher trainees are usually assessed and certified as successful through their performance in examinations, both internal and external. The competence of professional teachers therefore cannot be questioned, teaching satisfies this condition and therefore, should be regarded as a profession.

Recommendations

There are lots of educational challenges facing teaching profession, as we enter into the 21st century. Education, the world over, is developing faster with a lot of improvement in science, technology and computer. Teachers in Nigerian schools cannot afford to lag behind as far as moving with time is concerned.

The government should invest in teacher education by not only paying attention to pre-service education but more importantly on the on-the-job development of the teachers. Government should ensure better conditions of service to teachers in order to enhance their commitment to the profession. This will attract and retain the best brains in teaching profession.

The attainment of teacher quality could be achieved and sustained if the following measures are attempted:

Quality of students admitted into teacher training programmes must be strictly monitored through careful selection. In addition to join matriculation examination, a sort of competency test for final selection should be administered to students who intend to read education. Candidates who are found to be deficient in any of these skills should not be allowed to undergo teacher education programme.

There should be a defined means of evaluating the occupational performance of professional teachers. A teacher competency test for promotion is hereby recommended. Such competency test should focus on skills that are required for good and effective teaching. This system will eradicate the idea of depending on "years of teaching experience" or post qualification certificate alone to grade and promote teachers at all levels of education. The quality and caliber of teachers in teacher production institutions must be of the highest quality. Only teachers with the best professional and academic qualifications should be recruited on merit.

Conclusion

The teacher holds the key to nation-building, the aspiration of any nation to transform into a great country can only be possible if there are competent and dedicated teachers to impart the appropriate knowledge, attitude and skill. Teaching should be regarded as a profession since it is a form of public service, which requires expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study. Providing continuing education for teachers is more important now than ever before as the role of teachers is shifting to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society. In order to lead students out of the industrial age and into the information

age, teachers must be prepared to adapt and adjust to the many changes that will occur in the 21st century.

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