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Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria: Strategies, Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

The teaching profession in Nigeria has gone through many stages and even today there are disagreements as to whether it should be called a profession; and this has been an issue of concern among educators, teachers, administrators, organizations and the public at large. This paper thus looked into the issue of professionalizing teaching for the development of the education sector in the country. The concepts of teaching and profession were viewed; traits of professionalism; the teaching profession in Nigeria; strategies, prospects and challenges facing teaching profession were identified; The study recommended that the government should look into the problem of general dissatisfaction with the teaching profession, such as poor teacher education programme; poor salaries and allowances; poor public image of the profession; and the desire of most teachers to enter another type of work with attractive remunerations.

Keywords: *Teaching; professionalization; Nigerian Union of Teachers; Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria; National Teachers Institute*

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Introduction

Teaching is a noble profession, and as an activity which consists of actions intended to induce learning through the conscious and deliberate effort by an experienced person to impart knowledge, information, skills, attitudes and beliefs to an immature or less experienced individual (Adesina, 2005). Teaching has been described by various scholars; Oladosu (2004) sees teaching as an activity aimed at bringing about meaningful learning through a method that is morally and pedagogically acceptable. According to him, teaching involves a teacher, a learner, and content in form of knowledge, facts, information and a skill to be imparted. Ehindero (2006) sees teaching as a nomadic interactive human process involving complex decision making on different aspects of classroom interaction.

He draws an analogy between teaching and marketing. According to him, the teacher, like the sellers, has a product (packaged knowledge) to “sell” to an active, critically minded “buyer” the students, to sell the knowledge or message call it concept, generalization, principles or laws embedded in the different disciplines of the school curriculum. The teacher has to make the product attractive to learner. These, he believes are pre-requisites for effective teaching. Aladejana (2006) is of the view that teaching is interpreted in its broadest sense to include academic guidance and intellectual motivation as well as classroom, laboratory and studio instruction. NTI (2007) defines teaching as many activities and processes by which human beings are assisted to learn what are regarded as useful and worthwhile as determined in the context of literacy or western type of education. Ozano (2013) views teaching is the systematic presentation of facts, ideas, skills and techniques to students. It involves the sharing of knowledge in the process of developing the individual.

Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo (2014) asserted that teaching in Nigeria has been patronized by the people who could not succeed in their chosen vocations and the people who believe that teaching is a “spare time job” that allows them to simultaneously engage in other profit making businesses which they considered more lucrative than teaching. In the olden days, teachers were given due honour and respect in various society in Nigeria. Today, they are being looked down upon as people who could not find anything better for themselves in their society. They declared that teaching profession in Nigeria has been regarded as a dumping ground for people who desire to have a temporary job while they seek other jobs of their dreams.

Teaching in Nigeria has been patronized by the people who could not succeed in their chosen vocations and the people who believe that teaching is a “spare time job” that allows them to simultaneously engage in other profit making businesses which they considered more lucrative than teaching. In the olden days, teachers were given due honour and respect in various society in Nigeria. Today, they are being looked down upon as people who could not find anything better for themselves in their society. Teaching is a noble and respectable profession and it is often described as the mother of all professions. Teaching has to do with the systematic presentation of facts, ideas, skills and techniques to students.

Concept of Professionalism

Yusuf, Afolabi, & Oyetayo (2014) defined a profession as an occupation or vocation that requires special skills, knowledge of some department of learning and qualification to especially one with high social status. It is a job that requires special skills or knowledge through special training with a high level of education; and it utilizes functional education and mental ability rather than manual or physical labour. According to Dada & Fadokun (2010), a profession entails an occupation that is dependent upon specialized intellectual study and training for the provision of skilled service to other member of society; government, non governmental agencies for a definite fee or salary. Orubite (2010) posits that a profession is a paid job that requires prolonged training and liberal or formal educational qualification. The term profession as defined by Carr Saunders cited by Mishra (2008) is an occupation based upon specialized intellectual study and having the purpose of which is to supply skilled service or advice to other for definite fee or salary.

NTI (2007) defined profession as any occupation which demands of all who work in it a prolonged and specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary for providing a particular service in the community. Adesina (2005) viewed that professionalization refers to building into teaching career some control device to ensure that the practitioners are worthy members of the profession. Okunloye (2005) defined a profession as a symbol for a desired conception of one’s work and by extension of one’s self (the worker). Oyekan (2000), defined professionalization as a process involving improvement in the status and practice of the occupation as the practitioner continually upgrades the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective and efficient professional practice.

Traits of Professionalism

The search for a set of criteria by which a profession can be recognized has been on for at least a century now. Yet, there are no universal lists of characteristics of professionalization that are universally acceptable. However, in literature, there are works of Okeke (2004), Ajayi (2007); Dada & Fadokun (2010); Adeyemi & Okewole (2012); and Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo (2014). Among these people, there are also wide variations. However, there are areas of widespread consensus, to include:

Performing an Essential Social Services

Teaching meets this criterion. The service which education performs is essential to the individual child who cannot be fully socialized into our modern society if he does not receive a full time formal education. To the society, it prepares individuals for various occupational roles.

Possessing a Body of Specialized Knowledge

There are some differences of opinion as to whether teaching meets this requirement. In teaching, both the subject matter knowledge and knowledge of education theory are essential to the preparation of teachers'. What is not appreciated is the fact that education differs from other professions in having the subject matter component, but in many ways the theoretical knowledge needed by the teacher is the same as that needed by the doctor. It could therefore be said that teaching meets this particular criterion.

Having a High Degree of Autonomy

A profession must be self-regulating and self-governing. The autonomy to practice the profession relates to two main factors that are inter-dependent. The autonomy of the individual professional to perceive his role and responsibilities the way he feels best in the interest of the profession and the autonomy of the profession as a whole. Teaching has not met this criterion.

A Code of Ethics

Professions usually have well defined code of ethics to regulate the conduct of their accredited practitioners. The NUT has a code of ethics guiding its relationship with students, parents, community, employer, and the profession. Unfortunately, it has little or no influence in matters of policies for auditing and registering professionally qualified persons into the profession. In addition, it lacks the control and the legal backing to enforce the standards set by it.

Organization into Professional Groups

Every profession institutes and operates a professional association or organization to which it ascribes certain functions and powers such as the advancement of the professional competence and maintenance of prescribed standards. Every professional association has a self-concept that transcends that of a mere trade union. Unfortunately, the major obstacle preventing the NUT from becoming a professional body has, however, been the lack of extended educational training for all members of the union. The implication is that NUT has no control over its members as compared to other professions such as medicine, law and engineering amongst others.

Exalting Service above Personal Gains

Members of any profession are expected to regard their services to the public as altruistic, with public interest put over and above financial and other gains.

Recognition by the Public

Recognition by the public is closely linked to the nature of the service which the profession renders. It must be such that is very essential to humanity. Further still, the practitioners or the profession must have a high self-esteem coupled with this is the question of self-satisfaction demonstrated by members of the profession. This is not true of the teaching profession.

Setting its Own Standards

Standards are set and it is only when the new entrant satisfies the stipulated requirements that he or she can be registered as a member of the profession. The medical and legal professions for example, have laid down standards which new entrants must meet before they are admitted into the professions. This is not true of the teaching profession, where the NUT lacks the control and the legal backing to enforce standards set by it.

The Teaching Profession in Nigeria

From inception, to teach in primary school in Nigeria, a person needed a Teacher Certificate Grade II (TC GD II) from four years of secondary school as a Grade II Teacher - Training College. These were phased out after 1998, when the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) became the required diploma for all primary and junior secondary school teachers. In 1996, out of about 420,000 primary school teachers in the country about 80 percent had either NCE or TC GD II. In 1978, the Government created the National Teachers Institute (NTI) to conduct programmes that would upgrade teacher qualifications to the NCE level, with most of this training carried out by distance learning. Between 1993 and 1996, the NTI graduated 34,486 in their NCE distance learning programme. In 2000, it trained 20,000 teachers; A Bachelor of Education programme with NTI received approval by the government at the end of 2000. NTI also conducts workshops and conferences on curriculum development and other areas of teacher training (Ozano, 2013).

According to Atipioko et al (1997), to teach in senior secondary schools in Nigeria, a person must have either a bachelor's degree in education or a bachelor's degree in a subject field combined with a post graduate diploma in education. At the senior secondary level, all staff is qualified as all possess the bachelor's degree. The bachelor's degrees in education are offered at major universities. Of the 63 colleges of education in the country offering the three year NCE programme, about a third are owned by the Federal Government and about half by State Government. The remaining are privately owned, all of them are under the supervision of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), which sets and maintain standards and approves of courses and programme for all in Nigeria.

Strategies towards Full Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria

To effectively complete the process of professionalizing teaching in Nigeria, some strategies have to be adopted by the Government, Teachers Organizations and the teachers themselves should take a number of steps (Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo, 2014).

Government Strategies of full Professionalism

The government must ensure immediate commencement of work by the recently established Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria. As the National Teachers Registration Council has been established through the enactment of Act No 31 of 1993, this national body should be assisted by the State Teachers' Registration Council in every State of the Federation, to be charged with the responsibility of teachers' registration, accreditation, certification, promotion, development, discipline and making regulations to control the practice of teaching as a profession. The government should make provision for the professional growth of the teachers through periodic in-service education and this should be sponsored by the government. The teaching profession is such that requires a teacher to continue to improve and increase knowledge in his subject throughout his lifetime.

The government should introduce unified service conditions for all categories of teachers throughout the country. This includes a unified salary such as the much agitated Teachers Salary Structure (TSS), specially designed for teachers to enhance their remuneration and welfare package. Provision should be made for enhanced opportunities for advancement and other fringe benefits in teachers' career structure. Career opportunity and progression for teachers would undoubtedly make teaching more attractive, rewarding and satisfactory. The minimum teaching qualification of NCE should be enforced by the Government. The government should categorize teachers into three distinct groups as suggested by Igwe (1992). These categories are:

- (a) The full professional teachers to be made up of all graduates with teaching qualifications not lower than the NCE, Post- Graduate Diploma in Education or a Bachelor's degree in education.
- (b) Intermediate professional teachers to be made up of all NCE holders; holders of Grade I and II Teacher's certificate.
- (c) Auxiliary teachers to be made up of all graduates without teaching qualification and non-graduates without teaching qualification.

Government should make concerted efforts towards modernizing teacher education programme. Computer science, instructional technology, classroom management, media and other communications courses should feature prominently in the teacher education programme to enhance capacity building and identification, improvisation and utilization of resources for effective teaching and learning in the classrooms. Like other professions such as medicine, law, engineering, pharmacy and accountancy that are highly valued in Nigeria, it becomes highly imperative to review the duration of the teaching practice exercise from a minimum of 12 weeks to 12 months. This will enhance professional development and proper orientation and adjustment of the teachers to school setting. However, the teacher education programme should be more effective and efficient for the trainees. They

(trainees) should undergo a professional training in the colleges of education, university and other teacher education programmes (Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo, 2014).

Strategies by Teachers' Organization for full Professionalism

The teachers' organizations must be fully represented and actively involved and must work relentlessly to safeguard the autonomy inherent in the status of teaching as profession. They must strictly enforce members' compliance with professional codes of ethics. The nature, contents and activities clearly spelt out in their constitutions must be professional in all ramifications. The teachers' organizations must inspire their members to develop and maintain professional culture and refrain from unethical values. They should work cooperatively with the government in the provision of staff development programmes such as in-service education, on-the-job training schemes, workshops, seminars, conferences and vacation programmes for teachers. The organization should also restrict the entry and exit of members. To this end, the organization should make sure that anybody that has not undergone proper training should not be allowed into the job (Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo, 2014).

Prospects of Teaching Profession

Teaching is a noble profession. No society can advance and excel without an effective and virile teaching profession. Teaching is widely accepted as a public service that requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study and demands for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the learners under their custody. Thus, teachers are potential liberators of humanity from conservatism, ignorance, fear, misunderstanding, conflicts, wars and famine and contribute significantly to national development. According to Aggarwal (1981), the role of teachers in national development is that the destiny of a nation is shaped in its classroom and it is the teacher who is very important instrument in molding that destiny.

Fafunwa (1972) affirmed that the services of the teachers are to a nation, for them, more than any other professional group influences the lives of the Nigerian youths, and therefore the nation's future. Contributing to the indispensable role of teachers in national development, Oyekan (2000) declared that, industrial harmony, peace and progress will be elusive in the schools and the nation unless the teachers, are fully integrated into the social, economic and political framework of the society with proportionate benefits for their multilateral contributions to nation building. It is observed that, teachers in Nigeria are being provided with both discipline and pedagogical knowledge to enable them perform their duties effectively.

In addition, teacher trainees go on internship to acquire classroom skills that enable them to perform their duties effectively. In line with the National Policy on Education, the curriculum of teacher education is structured to equip for the effective performance of their duties and at the same time allow for professional growth. They perform one of the noblest jobs in the community, the preparation and education of the next generations. The level of skill required to teach effectively is very high. In other words, teachers could compete favourably with other professions.

Challenges of Teaching Profession in Nigeria

Researchers John (2006) and Akinduyo (2014) posited that teaching profession has been faced with various categories of challenges. They include:

- Low wages, bad motivation and poor welfares
- Irregular self esteem in the society
- Absence of education professional academy
- Negative re-enforcement which is doing the profession no good.
- Lack of professional and in-service trainings
- Low professional status
- High teacher –pupil ratio
- Ineffective machinery to enforce the code of conduct in the teaching profession.
- Politicizing education
- Lack of autonomy by Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT)
- Poor budgetary allocation to teaching profession
- Poor work environment (e.g. infrastructures amenities etc)
- Government's inability to register NUT as a profession organization
- Massive unqualified staff.
- Porous entry qualification
- Lack of standards

- Non-involvement of teachers in decision-making process
- The State control of staff personnel services for teachers
- Fragmentation of teachers into many different associations like Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Conference of Primary School Head-Teachers, the All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS), Committee of Provosts of Colleges of Education, Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, Association of Classroom Teachers, Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (STAN) Social Studies Teachers Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) and other teacher organizations.

Conclusions

The professionalization of teaching in Nigeria is not a mirage but a reality, due to a lot of positive efforts the Teachers Registration Council on Nigeria (TRCN) and Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) have made towards teachers' registration, accreditation, certification, promotion, development, discipline and making regulations to control the practice of teaching as a profession. The council has also directed those who want to take up career in teaching and any uncertified teaching in the school system to obtain professional certificates and licenses from TRCN as a condition for either being employed or retained as professional teachers.

Recommendations

- There is a great need to put teachers on the same footing with other highly valued professionals in Nigeria, and make teaching profession more attractive like other professions.
- The government should look into the problem of general dissatisfaction with the teaching profession such as poor teacher education programme, poor salaries and allowances, poor public image of the profession, and the desire of most teachers to enter another type of work with attractive remunerations
- Recruiting candidates of high potentials will make possible the production of effective and adaptive teachers.
- Teachers' organizations such as NUT, TRCN should be more focused and functional as regards all round educational development.
- If teaching is to be really professionalized, it must not only become a full time job for all professional teachers, the conditions of service must be attractive and opportunities must be provided for the professional growth of the teachers.
- Seminars and conferences should be organized to reorient leaders and members of teachers' unions at all levels to stop discriminating against themselves. It is imperative that teachers should put on a common front to professionalize teaching in Nigeria.

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