

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AND ITS PROBLEMS

by

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Abstract

This paper was designed to critically examine the professionalization of teaching in contemporary Nigeria and its problems. Scholarly publications in the past have shown that teaching profession in Nigeria is largely overcrowded by unqualified, quacks and charlatan teachers. As such, this has seriously affected the quality of educational output and national development. Several attempts to disengage them have been largely abortive because of fragmentation of teachers into many associations, low professional status, non-involvement of teachers in key educational issues, state control of staff personnel services for teachers and attitudes of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) as depicted by this paper. However, since professionalization of teaching enhance adequate professionalism, effective and efficient teaching for sustainable development of the nation, it is therefore undoubtful, that educational institutions should be staffed with properly trained, well qualified and competent teachers to teach the trainees. This paper therefore recommended that unified body beyond personal interest should be urgently established in order to oversee all the activities of teachers at all levels of educational institutions and other matters of concern.

Keywords: Professionalization, teacher education, teaching, contemporary Nigeria,

Introduction

An education system that aims to offer quality education for all young people should be able to count on teachers who are professionally trained. Hence, teaching is a noble and respectable profession in the developed countries of the world. It is often described as the mother of all professions such as law, engineering, pharmacy, nursing, medicine and so on, because all these are products of teaching profession. Of all the problems facing teaching profession in the contemporary Nigeria, none is as persistent as the one relating to the problem of professionalization of the profession. This has manifested in seminars, public

lectures, workshops and conferences on teacher education. It is of great concern that teaching in Nigeria has not really assumed professional status like other professions such as legal, medical and others. It appears 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. In the 70ths, teachers were given due honour and respect in various societies in Nigeria. Today, they are being looked down upon as people who could not find anything better for themselves in their society.

The belief that teaching should be professionalized in Nigeria has been recognized as a collective desire in the national policy on education (NPE) (2014), where it is clearly stipulated that teaching, like other professional bodies, will be recognized as a profession. The Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was established by Act No31 of 1993 to regulate and control the teaching profession. The national policy on education (NPE) (2014), asserts that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Hence, national policy on education (FGN, 2014), stated that the goals of teacher education shall be the following:

- i. Production of highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of education system.
- ii. Encouraging the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- iii. Helping teachers fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and to enhance their commitment to national goals.
- iv. Providing teachers with the intellectual and profession background adequate for their assignment and to have them adaptable to changing conditions.
- v. Enhancing teachers' commitment to the teaching profession. Teacher education in Nigeria may either be pre-service or in-service training. Pre-service teacher education is the teacher education given to people to make them qualify to teach at any level of education after their training programme. Pre-service teacher education is provided by Universities' Faculties of Education, School of Education and Colleges of Education.

In-service teacher education is the teacher training programmes given to people that are not professionally qualified to teach in the schools. The in service teacher

education is provided by University's Institutes of Education, Sandwich programme in the Universities and Colleges of Education and the National Teachers' Institute. They mount programmes of teacher education in form of postgraduate Diploma in Education, Sandwich and part-time degree in Education for serving teachers and various skill improvement workshops. It is against this background that this paper examines the professionalization of teaching in the contemporary Nigeria and its problem.

The Concept of Profession

Profession entails an occupation that is dependent upon specialized intellectual study and training, the purpose of which is to supply skilled service or advice to others for a definite fee or salary (Igwe, 1989). MacDonald (1995), argued that a profession is an occupation with enviable remuneration and high social status. Interestingly, a profession is an occupation whose basic responsibility public status and expertise are continually strengthened by specialized education and training within a specific period of time. It is a body of experts that provides a special service and exemplary leadership of harmonious survival of their community based on their accumulated knowledge, skills and wisdom. To this end, a profession is an occupation whose basic responsibility, public status and expertise are continually strengthened by specified education and training with specific period of time.

Professionalizing Teaching in Nigeria

All teachers should not consider themselves finished products upon graduation until after due registration. More so, Abimbola (2005), asserted that 'they must continually update their knowledge within their discipline especially in this era of scientific and technological advancement. In order to professionalize teaching, the construct of

teachers' professional development must be discussed. Teachers' professional development is a construct currently being used to describe teachers' in-service training, continuing education, workshop, seminar or on-the-job training. These are the training requirements which include teacher education initiated by the employer.

Jekayinfa (2005), describes the construct as all forms of in-service, continuing education, training and professional development, whether formal or informal, whether teacher initiated or system initiated and whether accredited or otherwise. Abimbola (2005), said that teachers' professional development consists of activities a teacher can engage in to keep abreast of new development, evaluate and improve his classroom performance. Such activities according to him include participating in in-service courses, and workshops, continuing graduate study, participating in and attending professional meetings and reading professional journals.

The emphasis in the observation raised is on the institutional and the professional needs of the individual teacher. This means that a career-long professional development programme for teachers, which can be realized through a combination of various approaches involving initial training, regular inductions and in-service training programmes designed to cater for the needs of prospective as well serving teachers. In support of this, Leace (1996), said that professionalizing teaching is a continuum, a creative journey from the earliest stages of initial teacher education through to the latest stages of being an educational professional. Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education in the Universities, Education Resource Centres, and National Teachers Institutes among others, provide training programme for

teachers. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2014), in the National Policy on Education (NPE) outlines the objectives of teacher education as to:

1. Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system.
2. Encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
3. Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
4. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional (a liberal education policy) background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation.
5. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

The curriculum of teacher education puts emphasis on subject mastery and pedagogy. In most cases, in teacher education, a teacher training must offer courses in education, methodology of teaching, project writing, general studies, teaching practice and a teaching subject. In teacher education, assessment is by means of continuous assessment and end of semester examinations. The teacher is expected to be a specialist in one or two subjects while the education courses are to prepare him for competent classroom work. The National Commission for Colleges of Education and the Nigeria Universities Commission prepare the benchmark to ensure that the Colleges of Education and the Faculties of Education in the Universities follow the curriculum and ensure that set standards are met. It is observed that, teachers in Nigeria are being provided with both discipline and pedagogical knowledge that will 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 them for the effective performance of their duties and at the same time allow for professional growth.

Strategies towards Professionalize Teaching in Nigeria

It is necessary to play politics with the professionalization of the teaching profession. By professionalization, the code of ethics will be respected and the profession will not be open to every Tom, Dick and Harry. In making a professional teaching qualification mandatory, government should make it compulsory for all in the teaching jobs, at all levels, to acquire teaching qualifications.

However, some of the strategies as suggested by Oyaziwo (2009) are as follow:

1. Reviewing the Existing Teacher Education Programmes: Urevbu (2006), reviewing Nwagwu's (1998) text on teacher and teaching in Nigeria, presented a dismal picture of the challenges and inconsistencies facing teacher education programmes in Nigeria. He further noted that most of the teacher education programmes in Nigeria are academically inadequate in the ability to prepare teachers for the classrooms. For instance, although students are usually taught how to plan a lesson and manage a classroom, how to arouse interests, how to ask right questions and how to react to students' response, how to give homework, etc, enough effort have not been made to ensure that they learn under the professionally trained teacher during their teaching practice.

On this note, we suggest that if teachers are to be more relevant and held in high esteem, teacher education programmes plans in Nigeria must think of reviewing their programmes to emphasize that student teacher should be place under

professionally trained teachers during his/her teaching practice. In this regard the teaching practice exercise has to be strengthened. One way is replacing it with internship of one-year duration which will afford trainee teachers ample opportunity to learn under the tutelage of professional teachers for a longer time.

2. Revision of the Curricula of Teacher Education Programmes: Interestingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014), holds that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession in Nigeria shall be the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE). Unfortunately, the teacher education programmes of our Colleges in Education, outside that of Colleges of Education (primary) are at sharp variance with the curriculum of our primary schools throughout the country. Consider someone who majored in French or someone who had a double major in Business Education (Accounting) and seeks employment as a primary school teacher, ask yourself what relevance has this training to imparting on our primary school pupils who may be expected to be taught English language, Mathematics, Social studies, Health science, Computer appreciation, French. Etc. This horrible situation also runs in our junior secondary schools. We therefore suggest that if teachers are to be more relevant, the curricula of our NCE programmes and the contents of our primary schools and secondary schools curricular should be reviewed.

3. Establishment of Licensure and Credentialing Board: As it has been, anybody can seek employment as a teacher. More so, majority of the teachers even though, hold degrees in education consider themselves to be in the teaching profession as a last resort. Also there is growing evidence that some people in education originally planned a career in other fields of endeavour. These categories of teachers get admitted into Faculties of Education out of frustration

with a desire to transfer to other programmes at the end of the first academic session. Most times this desire is not achieved because of the existing regulations relating to inter- faculty transfers. Therefore, majority of them end up pursuing a degree in education, which they have the least interest for. Teachers in this category would certainly have the least motivation. Additionally, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria has not helped matters by their requirement for registration as a teacher. I have this because of the different registration conditions it has imposed on prospective applicants. One question needs to be asked- Does possession of a P.hD in education and payment of the stated registration fee to TRCN make one a teacher? Sequel to this, we therefore suggest that NUT should partner with TRCN bearing in mind the professional ethic with a view to establish the Licensure and Credential Board that shall conduct professional examinations for all prospective teachers. It is only through this process that we can begin to appreciate the uniqueness and relevance of teachers in our school system.

4. The Need for Continuing Education Programmes: It is common knowledge that most of us graduated from teacher education programmes over two to three decades' years ago. In spite of the fact that the teaching profession is the most dynamic of all professions in the world, our techniques of teaching and the contents of what we teach have never changed; thereby continuously imparting those old and stale ideas on our students. Maybe it is in recognition of the dynamism of the teaching profession that the national policy on education (NPE, 2014), stipulated that teachers shall continue to take cognizance of change in methodology and in the curriculum of taught subjects in our schools. It further added that teachers shall be regularly exposed to innovations in their profession

and also in- service training teacher education and shall also take care of all inadequacies. A mandatory continuous professional development (MCPD) programmes for registration of teachers in Nigeria (2008), that is produced by TRCN, a look at the focus of MCPD especially the core course and even the emerging issues, one would conclude that this is a novel idea. We like to suggest that TRCN must take a step further to provide adequate information about the contents, each of the core courses and emerging issues in the manual, as the document in its present state is too brief and narrow in contents. Also, TRCN and NUT must partner together with a view to ensuring that any teacher that does not avail himself of the opportunity of continuing education faces disciplinary actions that may include blacklisting, denial of promotion and withdrawal of registration.

5. Proposing a Bill to Regulate the Practice of Teaching Profession: Though the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014), in its National Policy on Education Section 70, sub section B stipulates that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the National Certificate in Education (NCE). what you find in most private schools is a sharp variation of this provision. Many of them even lack communication skills with very horrible oral and written expression in English Language skills; yet such persons are employed to teach in our school system. In this regard, the author challenges the NUT and TRCN to seek legislation at the National Assembly that must regulate the practice of teaching. By such legislation unqualified teachers in our system would have been flushed out, which will lead to the closing down of all mushroom private schools that have now flooded our streets.

Problem of Professionalization Teaching in Nigeria

In a bid to achieve full professionalization of teaching status in the contemporary Nigeria, there are many setbacks to the realization of the well-orchestrated professionalism. Some of these set back include the difficulty in getting rid of the unqualified, the quacks and the charlatans from teaching in Nigerian schools. Invariably, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) indirectly encourages the practice of teaching by quacks by admitting them into its membership and collecting dues from them.

More so, there are numerous obstacles that frequently challenge the presence of well-trained, competent teachers in classrooms, for example, low wages, precarious social status, heavy workload, large class sizes, limited prospects for professional advancement, etc. in Nigeria. This can be attributed to the erroneous belief of many Nigerians that anyone can teach and that teaching is meant for those who are already failures in their life endeavours or those who have nothing better to do.

Non-involvement of teachers in policy and decision-making process in key educational matters related to their jobs constitutes a serious hindrance to professionalization of teaching in Nigeria.

The State government control of staff personnel services for teachers has been an impediment against professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. More so, the training, recruitment, selection, remuneration, conditions of service and the number to be employed at any given time and place and qualifications of teachers, discipline and deployment of teachers are controlled by the state government. It is no gainsaying that the survival of teaching depends greatly on the professional unity among its practitioners.

The fragmentation of teachers into many different associations constitutes a serious setback to professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. There has been division of teachers into various associations representing different interest groups. Sequel to this, teaching profession can no longer come out with one voice. In Nigeria today, there are the 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, Association of Classroom Teachers, Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (STAN) Social Studies Teachers Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) and other teacher organizations. In support of this, Igwe (1992), said that arising from this problem of over fragmentation; teaching lacks effective and united organization in the face of an increasingly powerful and monopolistic modern state. Teachers have been receiving unattractive and very humiliating remuneration from government unlike other practitioners like medical doctors, nurses, accountants, estate agents, lawyers, architects, surveyors and so on. This shows that the service rendered by teachers is not as much as valued as those of other professionals. The control of teacher education programme including examination is vested in the institutions running teacher education programmes. There is no established central body to regulate the conduct of its examinations as it is in other professions like medicine, survey, nursing, law, pharmacy; architecture, theology, engineering and accountancy. The National Policy on Education stipulating that the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria should be NCE is yet to be fully implemented in some states. This has been a serious challenge to professionalization of teaching in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) appears like a toothless bulldog. It is a trade union (body) that is not as organized and vibrant as the associations of other professions like Medical Council of Nigeria, Council of Registered Engineers in Nigeria (COREN) and Legal Counsel of Nigeria. The weakness of NUT is apparent in its inability to take a firm stand on issues like unified salary structure, National Negotiating Council for Teachers Welfare. All these matters negate teachers' claim to professionalism. It has been an onerous task for the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) to enforce the professional code of Ethics on teachers because of the non-charlatan attitude exhibited by members. In view of this, the efforts of the union to professionalize teaching in Nigeria could not be effectively realized.

Conclusion

If teaching is to be really professionalized, it must not be for all comers. It must be a full time job for only professionally trained teachers. Teachers should always keep abreast in the teaching profession by attending conferences, seminars, workshops and exhibitions which relate to their area of interest. Such staff development programme would enable a teacher to be abreast of the latest development in the teaching profession. Such development may include important information about teaching techniques, instructional materials and equipment, psychology, curriculum and classroom management. Since professionalization of teaching ensures adequate professionalism, effective teaching and creative manpower resources for sustainable development of the nation, it therefore implies that teacher education programme and educational institutions should be staffed continuously with properly trained, well qualified, highly satisfied and competent teachers to teach the trainees. The government should look

into the problem of general dissatisfaction with the teaching profession.

Recommendations

In the bid to achieve professionalization of teaching, it should not be for all comers;

1. It must become a full time job for all professionally trained teachers.
2. Teachers should always keep fit in attending all professional conferences, seminars, workshops and exhibitions that relate to their area of interest. Hence, this would enable a teacher to be abreast of the latest development in the teaching profession.
3. Furthermore, a unified body should be urgently established in order to oversee all the activities of teachers at all levels of educational institutions and other matters of concern.
4. Hence, fragmentation of teachers into many associations should be stopped in order to have one collective voice.

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