THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF TEACHERS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Abstract
This paper reviews the declining prospects and the poor public image of teachers in Nigeria. The poor public image has serious consequences for teacher effectiveness. Further, a poor self-image and lack of confidence in their abilities are not unrelated to the abandonment of the profession by many.

Introduction
To be a teacher is like living a life dedicated to mission impossible. To begin to satisfy the complex demands loaded on teachers by governments, parents, employers, children and society at large is unthinkable. Even if the demand were compatible and feasible it would take several lifetimes of schooling to achieve them and social change would make some aspects of the task obsolete even before they were attempted (John, 1999).

In the 1940s - 1950s, especially, in the rural areas, the teacher was looked upon, with awe by all and sundry. Many pupils in elementary schools did not know whether teachers ate or did other things or in fact did many of the mundane things done by the average human beings.

In the 1940s, the village teacher often owned the only Raleigh or Rudge bicycle to be seen. He was regarded as a magician since he owned the only music box (His masters voice Gramophone). Any letter from out of town in 1940s and 1950s could only be deciphered by him. In general, he served as an interpreter, to the Irish priest or British District Officer. He was usually dressed, in Khaki shorts, white shirts, tie, stockings and knocking shoes and he lived in one of the better houses in town. During the school holidays, he traveled to bigger towns and was full of stories of “civilized experiences” on his return. The teacher enjoyed prestige far in excess of his education and salary, but commensurate with his role as teacher, catechist, oracle of the white man’s world, adviser, news bearer and many unexpressed appellations conceived for his apparently complex functions.

Today, the teacher is an embittered person who no longer wants to wait for his reward in heaven, but prefers it right here in this world, since he/she may not believe in heaven. Even if he believes in heaven, he probably wants to ensure that “as it is on earth, so it is in heaven”, so that his chances of shining like a star for all eternity in heaven may be an illusion unless he can scintillate right here in this world. Today, “teacher is an important manager in a team that is generating a product, helping to market it, and jointly responsible for the success and failure of the enterprise (John, 1999).

The Teacher
Teacher can be defined in various ways. The term teacher mean a person with the required knowledge that can be given the responsibility of imparting knowledge to someone. The teacher sometimes is referred to as the father of knowledge. Cooper, (Ed) (1997).

As stated by Udom (2003), a teacher is a decision maker; the teacher, he notes, helps to facilitate the intellectual, personal and social development of members of the society who attends school. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998), affirms the importance of teachers and notes, that ‘no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers’ realizing the prominent role teachers play in an educational system.

The Social Class Origin of Teachers
Even though, not much attention has been focused on the socio-economic class origin of teachers in Nigeria; and educated guess is that the vast majority of teachers are of lower class origin. This conjecture is not without some logical bases. In Nigeria, a large majority of teachers are non-graduates, in the 1994/1995, (Statistics of Education, 1994) school year. For instance, 55 percent of all teachers in Nigeria schools either possessed no teaching qualifications or had a qualification lower than then N.C.E. certificate. In 1992, (Statistics of Education, 1992) for instance, of the 145,095
teachers in both primary and secondary institutions, 41.04 percent had the Grade II Teachers’ certificate or less, while 33.01 percent had the N.C.E. only 25.05% of all teachers had university degrees undoubtedly, a large majority of teaches are ill-qualified and cannot possibly be classified as professionals.

Furthermore, many people who became teachers entered teaching because it was perhaps perceived as the cheapest means of upward mobility. Fees are either very small or are non-existent. Poor students thus, see teacher training institutions as a means of improving themselves. Educationally and materially at little or no cost to themselves. They enter teaching, not because they want to be teachers but because it can serve as a stepping stone to the “good life”.

A study by Ebonoyi (1978), cited by Fagbemiye (1981), showed that students in the faculty of Education were generally older, where as more than 60% of the students in the other faculties were younger of about 26 (twenty-six years or younger). The parental occupation and type of accommodation also showed education students at the bottom of the ladder in terms of socioeconomic origins. More than 80 percent of the students in education claimed that their parents were small time farmers, petty traders or contractors and junior civil servants. One could thus assume, in the absence of contrary evidence, that most teachers in the country are drawn from the lower classes of the society.

Is Teaching a Profession Without Professionals?

Brown, R. et al. (1982), assumption is that, teaching is a profession. Advanced learner’s dictionary of current English defines profession as a paid occupation, one that requires advanced education and training e.g. law, medicine, dentist and in another vein, it means all the people working in a particular profession. Brown, R. et al. (1982), states that a profession is generally considered to have certain characteristics:

1) It deals with a special field of knowledge or information.
2) It’s practitioners must have had special training in the field and have demonstrated their ability by some sort of examination that tested their qualifications to serve the public in the profession and hence work for the improvement of society.
3) It’s members belong to an organization that makes provision for the licensing and certification of its members and sets up machinery for their professional growth by organizing regular courses and seminars and by publishing journals.

Doctors, Dentists, Lawyers, Pharmacists, Physicians and engineers, to mention but a few, are considered professionals by most people. The question arises as to whether teaching is also a profession? There is no doubt that teaching as well as other occupations listed above can be classified as professions. Teaching, however, seems to be the odd one out as far as Nigeria is concerned. Even though teaching requires specialized knowledge. If it is to be effectively carried out, few people who are styled teachers in this country have such specialized knowledge whereas most lawyers, physicians, pharmacists, doctors, dentists and engineers, etc, have specialized knowledge of their field, otherwise they cannot be registered with their professional association. Any teacher can join the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), and this body has no control over entrants into the profession nor can it regulate the length of training required for registration as a Teacher, nor bar even those who can barely read and write from entering the profession. The school authorities assume these responsibilities.

In many countries there are national or state bodies to which all teachers belong. In Nigeria, as earlier mentioned, there exist professional organizations like the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), the Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (STAN), the Home Economics Teachers Association of Nigeria (HETAN), and the Mathematics Teachers Association of Nigeria (MTAN). For a would-be-physician to be registered as a medical doctor in Nigeria, he must have attended primary school for at least six years, secondary school for 6 years and medical school for at least another five years plus one more year of internship, making a total of nineteen years of study. This total is the minimum required of general practitioners. Specialists usually have to put in between four to seven more years to qualify. Other professions such as law, pharmacy and architecture require between seventeen years of schooling as the basic minimum and anybody with fewer years would be unable to operate effectively, even if he were permitted within the profession. Teaching seems to be the odd man out once again. A primary school leaver, can become a teacher with only one-week orientation. Worse still, such poorly educated and semi-literate
teachers are placed in the elementary grades where teaching expertise, which they lack, is most needed.

Brown, Oke and Brown (1982), gave reasons why Nigerian teachers are not universally regarded as professionals in the real sense of the word?
(a) The employment of untrained teachers in Schools and Colleges, to counter the current shortage of qualified teachers.
(b) The lack of respect and low status accorded teachers in present day society.
(c) Some teachers failing to regard themselves as professionals and as a result not taking sufficient pride in their work.

Undoubtedly some people enter teaching because they really want to do so. Nevertheless, such genuinely committed teachers are in the minority. Some of those who seem genuinely interested in teaching are in that profession because it is convenient and because of shorter working hours, more holidays and retirement benefits associated with it. Teachers are leaving the teaching profession to take up jobs which are more financially rewarding. If those remaining in teaching are going to improve their status and professional lineage they will have to concentrate on being more dedicated and discipline.

In the new millennium teachers, there’s the establishment of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. Established by Act 31 of 1993. The council is charged with the general duty, among which is Regulating and controlling the teaching profession (in this Act referred to as “the profession”) in all its aspects of ramification.

The Status of Teachers and there Effectiveness

Wattendberg (1987), have noted however that it is inevitable that teachers who have grown up in a lower-class neighbourhood would find themselves in a school whose population is made up of children of a higher class. Undoubtedly, many teachers make excellent adjustments to the children who have privileges beyond those enjoyed by the teachers, but others seem to complicate their relations with the children because of this fact. According to the writer; while the middle-class, teachers in the lower class neighbourhood school feels superior to his wards, the upward-mobile teachers in an upper class school feels inferior to, and one might and sometimes envious of his students. He may feel uncomfortable and uneasy with their parents because of their apparent confident poise and seeming finesse in their behaviour. While direct relationships between socio-economic class variables and teacher effectiveness are lack inconclusive, indirect relationships seem to hold more promise.

According to Charter Jr. (1988), pointed a major mode of reasoning regarding the consequences of the teacher’s position in the social structure is that the social environment is seen to shape the generalized value orientation by which a person lives and works. Since a teacher certainly transmits value orientations, which value will be transmitted would depend on the teachers’ own value orientation which is, in turn, determined by his position in the society and sub-culture of the social structure.

Spindlier (1955, 1989), has carried Eggleston’s and Khuchdin’s work a step further by identifying two competing value orientation: tradition values and emergent values. The traditional values of work, success ethnic, individualism, achievement, orientation, and future time orientation are being supplanted by such emergent values as sociability, a relativistic moral attitude, consideration of others, conformity to other group, and a hedonistic present-time orientation. Socio-economic class, position in the community, power structure and age are three societal statuses which, according to Spindlier (1989), determine a persons value orientation older, middle class citizen are thus, more likely to be traditional in value orientation than younger ones. (Prince 1988 and Mcphee, 1989), age may also be related to other underlying differences. Older people because of when they went to school may be much less educated than their younger colleagues. In this country, a large number of N.C.E teachers are much older than the young graduates in education. The younger graduates also tend to be more militant and emergent in value orientation that the relatively older, less educated and almost certainly underprivileged and deprived N.C.E. teachers who are less militant, undoubtedly because they are more ignorant about their rights and possibilities. As a middle class institution, the lower-class child is at a disadvantage when competing with children from the middle classes. One could thus
assume that teachers who originated from the lower class and who tend to be upward mobile may have more in common with their middle class students than with the lower class children who remind them of their lower class origins. If this assumption is correct, and there is much to recommend it, Davis and Dollard (1991), say it could have far reaching consequences for the effectiveness of teachers. According to Davis and Dollard (1991), middle class children seem to know how to do those things which please teachers, while lower class children have a knock for doing those things which brings the wrath of teachers on their heads.

As Cagan has pointed out, the greatest single factor in the teaching process is the teacher. No technique, no method, no device, no gadget can guarantee success only the teacher can do this.

The effectiveness of teachers could be looked at in two different ways: from the point of view of teachers and from their positive influence and effects on their students. In the Nigerian situation, an attempt has been made to show that most teachers have their origin in the lower classes. While many teachers are upward mobile whole are trying to acquire the dramaturgical paraphernalia of the middle classes, they are, nevertheless, handicapped by the fact that they are yet to acquire the poise and confidence which are by products of successful attainment of higher status. The self-concept of teachers could thus be highly related to their efficacy. A poor self-image of teachers is certainly not conducive to their effectiveness.

Teachers’ effectiveness could be achieved according to Brown et al (1992),

a) A mastery of the subject to be taught.
b) An understanding of the basic principles of children’s growth and development.
c) A good general knowledge.
d) A knowledge of methods of techniques.
e) A positive attitude to the work.
f) A willingness to adapt his or her teaching to local needs taking into account the materials available.
g) Courage to struggle for better standards and conditions in the school.

Teachers, one might say, would thus be considered ineffective since they are at least partially responsible for the accomplishment of their students.

The Public Image of Teachers in the New Millennium

Back in the early 1960’s, a Morris-minor car was advertised in a British newspaper as the ideal car for a teacher. Even though such an advertisement has not appeared in any Nigeria newspaper; still back in the 1960s, there were similar comment about teachers from time to time. Majority of the teachers in this country do not join any of the prestigious clubs in the country, they cannot afford it. Some times, when teachers find themselves in the company of friends who are in business and other professions such as law or medicine, it is not unusual for them to be patronized, even if in a very pleasant way. “Oh that drink is on me!” Oh, you teach our children, and we will do the spending” Generally speaking, teachers are not highly regarded in the country. According to Cogan (1987), there is no need to document the low esteem in which the general public holds teacher and schooling has a dominant influence upon what the teachers learn in the course of their training and later on how they teach. Cogan was of course, writing about the American society. However, there is no reason to believe that teachers have a better image in Nigeria, where they are even less educated than their counterparts in United State (U.S).

Certainly, the poor image of teachers has some dysfunctions for their teaching roles. Charter .(1988), has identified four of such dysfunctions:

The teacher’s motivation for fulfilling the functions of teachers in the classroom and school is depressed by low prestige. Independent of thought and freedom of action in the teaching situation is lower for those without esteem. Where prestige of teaching is low, the teachers lack the influence of authority which presumably, is essential to the success of the teaching – learning process. Persons realizing low prestige and reward from their occupation divert their energies and interests away from fulfillment of their occupational functions towards, for example activities designed to enhance their economic subsistence. The last point above is a current problem in the country, since some teachers have in fact been retired for divided interests. The low public valuation of the teachers and his work, according to Cogan (1987), may actually set low self-fulfilling prophesies in motion. The teachers themselves, may internalize a low opinion of their teaching role and this undoubtedly, would hamper the effectiveness of their work. The students could also share the elder’s disparagement of teachers and this has happened where students have
felt superior by virtue of their socio economics’ backgrounds. Such teachers could hardly serve as models or sources of motivation for their students.

Gersher (1973, 1983), cited by Fagbamiye (1981), when he reported that, “to succeed as a teacher one must fall as a man or a woman”. Never the less, many educators must feel uneasy to note the rate at which teachers drop out of teaching and opt for other jobs. Many also use the teaching profession as a stepping-stone to other professions. Many graduates without teaching qualifications are guilty of this offence, though the blame, if any, belongs to those who employ them rather than to the employed. There is also a general though unexpressed notion that those non-professional teachers who stay in teaching only do so because they are wary about the risk of entering the private sector where job security is much less than in schools. In any case, one cannot entirely trust those who use teaching as a last resort. Had they seen teaching as worthwhile, would they not have chosen it initially?

Poor public image of teachers must wreak untold havoc on the self-image and confidence of teachers who remain in the classroom and must be a major contributor to why others drop out of the profession. Any mention of falling standard of education is attributed to teachers, it would seem facile, therefore, without tackling the root cause.

**How to Improve Teachers’ Image**

There is no doubt that if teaching is recognized and accorded its rightful status as other profession, it would enhance teachers’ performance. This goes to confirm what Dansarai (1995), stated that, teaching unlike law and medicine for instance, has not been able to achieve the status of an exclusive profession in Nigeria. It is presently “a stop-over job” which many people engage in before they could get a better one.

The image of the teacher is very important in the improvement of education standard in the present millennium. Therefore, it is very vital that the image of teachers be improve. This would be done in these following ways:

- **Training and retraining** - Teachers should be adequately trained to improve their professional standard so that they can meet up with the changing technology.
- **Upgrading their social status** by increased in allowances and other pay structure to enable them measure up to standard in the society and recover some lost ego due to poverty.
- **Recognition in public opinions.**
- **Controlling entry into the job.**
- **Improving their academic qualification** so that high standards could be maintained (Dansarai, 1995).
- **Developing a code of conduct and professional ethics** for teachers to help check the misconduct of those who are not really committed to the job and also infuse a sense of pride into the teaching job.

The teacher of the new millennium is to be successful. But how does the teacher of the new millennium become successful with his pupils? The teacher becomes successful through the following:

- Need to be tolerant with pupils who are poorly motivated and have poor attitude to their work.
- Ready to share new information and skills with his fellow teachers.
- Need to be knowledgeable and initiative should be flexible and willing to experiment.

In order to cope with the present time task, in the new millennium teachers should be prepared and trained and retraining to meet the challenges of the century. This will continue to give the teacher of the millennium necessary tonic for the enhancement of his jobs.

**Suggestions**

1. Teachers should be armed with what constitute an ideal teacher and applies it appropriately at all times. There’s the need for training and retraining of teachers.
2. Qualified teachers should be employed to teach in all level of institution.
3. All level of institution should be provided with adequate instructional and learning materials.
4. The training of teachers should be handled by colleges of education as it is meant to train teachers.
5. There should be better incentives for teachers to make teaching profession attractive.
6. A teacher Registration Council be constituted so that all professionally qualified teachers can duly be registered in order to protect and check habit of anybody assuming to be a teacher, as it is done in other professions.
7. Entry qualification in teaching should be defined for all teachers.
8. Teaching should be professionalized.
9. All teachers have to belong to the same trade union.
Conclusion

The usual practice in this country is for well-placed Nigerians especially, policy makers to blame teachers for the falling standards in our institutions. One cannot assume that such Nigerians are unaware of the problems of the teaching profession. Policy-makers certainly, have an important role to play. If the purported falling standards are to be arrested. The poor public images of teachers can be corrected by our policy makers, if they fail to do so, they would be unjustified in blaming teachers for falling standards of education in the country. One gets the impression that, policy makers of our dear country are unwilling to find lasting solutions, in spite of very many commission of inquiry that recommended various ways and means of improving the lots of teacher.

Teaching professions is taken as a stepping-stone for other gainful employment. With more emphasis on professionalism, it will curtail the influx of quacks into the profession.

References


