

TOWARDS PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY; PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Professionalism as it related to teacher education is considered amidst qualities that make a profession. Teaching in Nigeria is more or less the profession with no formal or well-defined entry point. Teaching has been opened to anybody and is no longer regarded as a profession for the trained practitioners. The abuse of teaching as a profession should be seen as a perpetual war that must be confronted in its entire ramification. The national policy on education emphasized the need for teachers to be professionally trained. It further asserted that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. By influence the quality and caliber of the teachers who hold trust for the implemented curriculum of a country's education, can easily serve as a mirror of the country's socio-economic development and progress. On basis of the above exposition, this paper examines concept such as teaching teacher education and objectives and professionalism. In addition, the paper examines the problems facing teaching as a profession and proffers solutions to such identified problems.

Introduction

It is always easy to defend the assertion that the standard role of teachers is educating the society. The dire need for professionalization arose as a result of the sensitivity enshrined in the national policy on education that education could become an instrument par excellence of national education development (FRN 2004). If it is accepted that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers, then it is imperative to create standards and professionalism in teachers. (1975), opined that the quality and caliber of teachers that service the educational system or a country could serve as an index of development and progress for that country. In this words, "as is the school, so is the society, and as is the teacher, so is the school¹".

In Addition, expressing the same view, Ukeje (1991), stated that; if the child is the center of the educational system, the teacher is the pivot of the educational process. This is because in any educative process, there always stands the teacher in front or at the back, at the center or at the side, what he knows and does can makes a great difference, and what he does not know, cannot do or fails to do can cause an irreparable loss to child for it is the teacher in the final analysis who translates policies into practices and programmes into action.

The mass movement of trained teachers from the teaching profession into other fields at the various levels of the educational system has created a vacuum and hampered the development of education in the country; this vacuum is now being constantly filled by untrained teachers. This has made critics to use this to cast aspersion on teaching as a profession. Lasser (1997), asserted that the mass movement of professional teachers to other, lucrative professions could be associated with the poor conditions of service of teachers, and other related problems. Also Adesina (1981), buttressed the fact that education is the gateway for any meaningful national development and the teacher holds the key to the door. On the basis of this, he stressed further attention, so that the desired objectives and envisaged benefits of teacher Education can be realized in full.

The teacher is an indispensable element in education, and he occupies this enviable position because he, is the pivot upon which all educational activities rotate. Any nation's educational endeavourer will be an exercise in futility if there are no qualified teachers to man the system, Hanson (1964), pointed out that an important sign of long-range health of a nation is the spirit and quality of its teachers. There can be no substitute of teachers who are committed to their student and to the nation. A situation whereby non- professional are allowed in without undergoing adequate teacher education does not augur well for educational development of the nation. If a nation builds schools, provide all the basic textbooks, with well quipped laboratories and classroom, we can be sure there will be no effective teaching and learning if the operators (teachers), are not found in the system Abenga (1997),

maintains that if well qualified and dedicated teachers are in the system, even with inadequate facilities, they are likely to produce better result for, it is not actually the guns that fight but the men behind them. The extent to which the objectives of education can be achieved is dependent on the professional efficiency of the teacher. Ukeje (1991), rightly noted that:

It is amazing to observe that. When our Children or any beloved one is sick, we look for that best doctor; when we need to build our homes, we look for the need to architect; when we have a brush with the law look for the best lawyer; but we are often quite willing to entrust the education of our children in the hands of quacks.

The above quotation is an x-ray of the status of teaching in our society. Therefore importance of professionalization of teaching cannot be over emphasized because the destiny of our children and generation unborn will depend on how well the teacher is adequately trained and does his job.

Conceptual Framework

Dare (2006), sees teaching as the arts of passing information by someone who knows to a learner. In other words, teacher education in Nigeria is tailored towards the making of a skilled individual capable of passing knowledge, skill and modes of conduct to the learner for self-reliance. Also Olaitan (1981), defined teaching as an attempt to bring about desirable changes in human learning abilities and behaviors. Based on the above definitions, Dare (2006), deduced that aim of teaching is to influence learners to acquire those desirable changes and behaviors that contribute to better living. Ogunsaju (1990), also, defined teaching as a process of imparting knowledge using acceptable techniques. From the above definitions, teaching method and teaching can only be effective if the teacher employs an appropriate teaching method and teaching aids for better understanding of what is taught. The preparation of the teacher through effective teacher Education programme is therefore, very essential for his success in maintaining a changed behaviour in the students.

Teacher Education

A good teacher education programme must seek to assist the individual teacher to grow and develop as a person, provide him with the necessary skills and professional competence that will assist him to become not only effective teacher to be educated, it involves being exposed to academic and professional knowledge, which will better place him to impart such knowledge in the area of skills, attitude and cognition.

Also, Ukeje (1995), for a would-be teacher or the type of education a would-be teacher has to acquire. On the above premise, teacher education programme is expected to produce teachers well equipped with necessary skills for the effective performance of their duties. In order, to achieve qualitative teacher education in Nigeria, the federal government set the following objectives:-

- a. To produce highly motivated, consciences and efficient classroom teacher for all levels of our educational system;
- b. To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- c. To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives;
- d. To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to any changing situation; and
- e. To enhance teachers¹ commitment to the teaching profession. The above objectives of teacher education can be seen to be lofty and laudable in terms of policy statement. The achievement of the objectives is saddled with numerous national problems that militate against the potentials of teacher education in meeting the challenges of the 21st century in Nigeria.

Professionalism in Teacher Education

Hansen (1975), defined profession as a body of knowledge that requires advanced education and training. For example, architecture, law, medicine, engineering etc. the characteristic of a

profession as outlined by Uche (1984), include:-

- a. A unique, definite and essential service;
- b. An emphasis on intellectual techniques in performing this service;
- c. A long period of specialized training;
- d. A broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitioner and for the occupational group as a whole;
- e. Emphasis upon the service rendered than the economic gain to practitioners;
- f. A comprehensive self-governing organization of practitioners;

Professionalism can be seen as the state of specialization in a profession. The Oxford English Dictionary, defines professionalism as professional quality, character, method or conduct. According to Ukoha (1999), professionalism in teacher education relates to the acquisition of specialized body of professional competencies and behaviors resulting from prolonged education in a teachers college and which distinguishes professional teacher from members of other profession. The above definition implies that the acquisition of professionalisms in teacher education demands that one spends lengthy period of time in the course of pursuing teacher education. Who score as low as one hundred and fifty or even less are given¹¹ reserved seat in education".

Teacher education is also faced with the problem of satisfying the criterion of a profession requiring an extended lime for intensive academic preparation. According to Fagbemiye (1981), A would-be physician to be registered as a doctor in Nigeria. Must have spent a minimum total number of nineteen years of meaningful academic work including one-year internship. But the contrast is the case of a teacher, hi Nigeria, secondary school leaver could become a teacher with only few weeks¹ orientation. At the post secondary school level one could qualify as a teacher after one year of post-graduate diploma in education. Also, graduate teachers spend two, three or four years to become professional teachers depending on the subject studied as well as the University of Study. This lack of uniformity in the duration and in the course combination or content also serves as serious constraints against teaching as a profession.

The lack of control of the teaching profession by teachers in Nigeria is another obstacle to full professionalization of leaching. Teachers have no say as lo who should be employed into the registration [certification of members, discipline and training. The government is the major employer of teacher and it determines the quantity and quality of teachers needed ITEDJERE (1992), says this lack of control has made it difficult and impossible for the professional teachers to eliminate from its members the non-qualified people in the profession. The Nigeria union of teachers and other recognized bodies are unable to control teachers in the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, who are generally not professional teachers. There is no centralized union embracing all teachers, rather segmented bodies at the various levels e.g. ASUU, COEASU, STAN, ATEN, etc according to Onwuka (1989), these obstacles militate against the emergence of a powerful and determined professional organization, armed with a positive policy to check and if possible remove the rough ends of the selfish interest group.

In addition to the above is the issue of poor working condition. The poor financial reward or salary of teachers is another obstacle to full professionalization of teaching. The working condition of teachers is poor when compared to their counterpart in other professions. According to the outcome of his study Ukeje (1995), stated that the conditions of service of teachers are not proportional to the task of imparting knowledge to the learner. He also, identified poor motivation as another problem.

Dare (2006), in a study also identified inadequate educational facilities as a problem facing professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. He observed, that most teachers do not have access to educational facilities such as contemporary textbooks laboratory equipments, computers [laptops and even a fairly comfortable office accommodation necessary for effective performance of their duties in the areas of teaching and research. This could frustrate professionally trained teachers to top for where they could derive minimum satisfaction.

Prospects for Professionalization

According to majasan (1996;!), teaching is one of the noblest of all professions and should be the most highly regarded, but its practitioners have allowed its control to slip out of their hands during the middle ages. This control according to him is not likely to be regained and the status of teachers enhanced until they come together to put up a very hard fight. Its members should form a united and self-governing body capable of assuming a measure of responsibility for establishing and implementing appropriate standard of education. This can be done according to Lassa (1993), with particular reference to its planning, curriculum development, external examination moderation, models for industrial democracy, commitment of student training and supervision, preparation of teachers, accreditation of certificates, in-service training and the welfare of teachers.

In Addition, the conditions or service of teachers should be made attractive in order to attract more qualified and those already on the job to remain in teaching profession for life. According to Ali (1992), this would improve the public image of teaching profession as well as the enhancement of the economic status of teachers and their autonomy will be guaranteed.

Teachers should be encouraged to emphasized standard of behavior that are in consonant with teachers professional code of conduct because they are models of behavior for students whom they can exert monumental educational influence on whether or not they are performing obvious teaching roles in the class (lassa 1996; 169).

Uncertificated teachers should not be employed to teach, and those already on the job should be compelled to obtain teaching qualification within a given period of time or be made to relinquish their job

The newly introduced teacher registration council should be empowered to make everything possible to professionalism teaching specially by enforcing all the necessary variables of teaching profession through accreditation, certification and registration.

Conclusion

Teaching as a profession in Nigeria did not meet all the criteria of a profession. There was obstacles identified militating against the full professionalization of teaching in Nigeria. If appropriate measures and the above solution implemented such as better preparation, long duration of training, better conditions of service, adequate motivation, strong professional body that will carry out its function of registering teachers as well as enforcing the code of ethics, than the government can legally and publicly declare teaching as a profession in Nigeria.

The professionalization of teaching in Nigeria should be a challenge or a matter of urgent concern to the government if she recognizes the importance of teaching in the overall national development process and attainment of national goals.

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