# 23

# Teacher Education and the Challenges of Professionalism in Nigeria

By

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**Abstract**

*This paper attempted a discussion on Teacher education and the issue of professionalism. Up till today, the Nigerian government has not taken any logical action to effect the professionalization of teacher education resulting from the numerous challenges facing the teaching profession. The challenges ranges from the short fall of qualified teachers to handle the ever increasing number of school age children to lack of societal respect and recognition, lack of continuity in policy and implementation, motivation etc. The paper suggested "**SMART OPTION"** strategy to improve teacher's qualification and position them to face challenges of professionalism.*

There is no one here today who had not been taught one thing or another by someone and who had not in turn taught someone else. Whether within a religious or family environment or indeed the general society, person has witnessed and experienced some teaching. As parents or older members of the family each one of us has taught or continues to teach others. Most of these teaching situations are for socialization.

However, there are other situations in which most people experience in teaching. Since the time of philosophers and teachers such as Aristotle, Dewey, and Socrates and when schooling was institutionalized, organized formal teaching emerged. It needs to be mentioned here too that organized teaching also occurs in traditional societies in the form of apprenticeship. The emergence of such forms of educational activities gave rise to the teaching profession. (Jegede, 2002).

What is interesting is that because everyone has often had the opportunity to engage in one form of teaching or another which in most cases, are not of the professional type, everyone thinks that teaching is an all-comers' activity. This appears to be the place from where the problems of the teaching profession emanate. A good analogy of this is football. Every spectator is often of the misguided opinion that he/she has the best answer to how a team should play. In Nigeria therefore, except the 22 people in our team, the rest of the 120 million people constitute themselves into armchair coaches, and everyone has got the answer to how our team should perform. We all know that football like teaching is as technical as it can be and requires professionals who are knowledgeable in it to coach or instruct the players. Perhaps it would be informative to discuss why teaching is a profession and requires technically prepared people to carry out the function of instruction in an organized setting. (Jegede, 2002)

With the introduction and launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1976, it was realized that the success of the UPE depended on the mass production of teachers. This led to the establishment, by a decree, of the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) whose main objective was the training and re-training of competent teachers for the primary schools in Nigeria. We must therefore pay tribute to those whose idea it was to identify this particular need as a solution to the problem of mass-production of teachers to service the UPE. We must also recognize that it is the ingenuity of the human mind that has directed the management of the NTI both past and present for the excellent way in which they steered the ship of the NTI. Alhaji Hafiz Wali, the founding Director of this institute must be singled out for recognition.
It suddenly dawned on the stakeholders in 1976 that no educational system can be implemented with the teachers and no teacher can be produced except through a professionally developed and recognized partner and procedure. From the discussion above teacher education is the type of education specially designed and dispensed by educational institutes or other institution. This is where teachers are given basic skills, techniques, knowledge, and crafts and attitude in classroom efficiency. In the words of Lassa (1996), education is the key to national development. It is therefore evident that the products of teacher education (teacher) play immense role towards the attainment of the desired level of growth and development in the society.

Ukeje (2000) was of the opinion that education is so powerful that "it can heal or kill; build up or tear apart, lift up or impoverish; much depends on the type provided and particularly on the teacher who is the hub of the education process. If teacher education is the pivot on which educational and national development hang, much and necessary attention should be given to it to ensure its vibrancy and continued relevance. Since national development has a direct link with education and the teacher translates educational policies, it follows that the education of the teacher should be the

priority of any country wishing to develop in all branches of human Endeavour (Madueke, 1997). According to the National policy on Education (2004), the goals of Teacher Education shall be:

i. to produce highly motivated, conscious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system;
ii. to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
iii. to help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and enhance their commitment to national goals;
iv. to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing times;
v. to enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Two related issues, which must be confronted, rear their heads. First, although the NCE is set as the minimum qualification, I know that there are still thousands of people in the teaching profession today with less than the stipulated minimum qualification. Let us use the primary school level to illustrate the point the writer wishes to make here. With 44,000 primary schools in Nigeria, let it be assumed that each school has seven classes with a maximum of 30 students per class and at the minimum each class has two arms. It will require a minimum of 616,000 NCE teachers for primary level, which currently has only about 123,934 NCE holders. The situation becomes unimaginable if we understand that classes often have more than 40 children each and many schools especially in the urban areas have up to four streams of each class and/or operate two shifts!

Indeed, some states cannot even get enough qualified grade II teachers let alone hope to have NCE holders in the number required. The UBE/ World Bank study indicated that only 21% of all the teachers currently employed at the primary level in Nigeria have NCE and above. This means that at least about 78% all the primary school teachers require upgrading or and retraining at the NCE level.

**Concept of Teacher Education**

Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the school and classroom (Kumar, 2010).

Teacher education is also the component of any educational system charged with the education and training of teacher's in order to acquire competencies and skills of teaching for the improvement of teachers for the school system. All over the world, teacher education is widely identified as the foundation of quality and relevance of education at all levels. Judging by all the information and documentation available, Nigeria has never doubted the pivotal role teachers play in the quality of its education.

Indeed the NPE clearly articulated this, that 'no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers' and therefore acknowledged that 'teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development' (p. 33,3rd edition, 1998 in Jegede 2002)

According to FRN (2004) teachers are the main determinant of quality in education. If they are apathetic, uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, unmotivated, immoral, anti social, the whole nation is doomed. If they are ignorant in their disciplines and impart wrong information, they are not only useless but dangerous. The kind of teacher trained and posted to the schools may well determine what the next generation will be. The curricular content of any teacher education programme is resultantly evident in what Okebukoia (1996) asserted as the three components of the mould of teachers; the content knowledge bothering on what the teacher should teach the learners in the class. It can also be said to be subject-Content studies. The pedagogic knowledge lays emphasis on the general method, techniques and attitudes required to teach and teach well. However, the pedagogic content knowledge emphasizes on the epistemological measures in acquiring a set of crafts for teaching specific content areas. The teacher education curriculum therefore is apparent in the following offerings: General studies, subject-Content studies, profession programme and teaching practice programme. Afe (1995) argued vehemently against the completeness of this curriculum. To him, for the future, the curriculum of teacher education at the NCE and university levels must move away from the general professional preparation to a variety of specialization. Junaid, (Executive secretary, NCCE) (2012) could not disagree with the need to make teacher education more qualitative and relevant when he said "with the restricted division and contents of NCE programme, when juxtaposed against the broadly defined scope and content of EFA,UBE and MDGS to which Nigeria is committed, has become increasingly irrelevant". In his words, Fafunwa (1992) opined that, for Nigeria to make the leap from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century scientific age, it is imperative that a revolution in scientific/ technical education should take place in Nigeria (Abraham & Isaiah 2013).

**The Federal Government and Professionalization of Teachers**: The FGN (2004) stated that:

(a) Teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria: in this regard, government has set up the Teachers' Registration Council to control and regulate the practice of the profession.

(b) 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."

The implications of the above are that the Nigerian teacher must

(i) be a professional educator who should by aptitude, education, training, comportment and social status be able to display expertise, knowledge and skills in his teaching;
(ii) assist learners in the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge through the use of choices and a variety of teaching methods.
(iii) should be comfortable with wages, conditions of service and work environment; and
(iv) should be scientifically literate and technologically up-to-date.

In comparison with other developing countries, one of the things Nigeria does with excellence is articulating either as part of policy or regular government pronouncements, its intent and goals. However, the down side about this is how short the country measures when the intent is compared with the scope and depth of fulfillment. The case of the teaching profession is a good example. There is a wide gulf between intention and actual practice. Let me consider two issues associated with government pronouncement about the teaching profession as stated above.

One implication of recognizing the teaching profession is that full legal weight will be brought to bear on any erring teacher and also that government would entertain being challenged legally by any teacher or any other related person or organization. The NPE says that the goals of teacher education shall be to: help teachers fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals…and…enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (section 57p.33). The question is, have we really addressed these issues to the fullest?

The answer is not far-fetched. We know that teachers are not paid regularly, their training is haphazard and their moral is at the lowest ebb. The 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria outlaws private practice by a professional. Since teaching as a profession is recognized and teachers are seen as professionals, this must of course apply to them too. However, according to the Structural Adjustment Programme Annual (SAPA) report (1993), 'in order to supplement salaries,69.2% of the teachers provide extra lessons for children after school hours while 51.3% engage in trading and 48.6% in farming (notably in rural areas). Other jobs that teachers engage in include contracting /supplies, catering and dress-making' (p.80).The general feeling is that the report was rather conservative about the private practice of teachers. If this was the view in 1993, one can imagine what the situation might be in 2014 when the problems facing teachers have more than escalated. Legally therefore, has government any moral justification to prosecute erring teachers apart from risking prosecuting more than 70 per cent of those in its teaching force?

The second implication of government recognizing teaching as a profession concerns qualification. The NPE says that teachers in the system who are not professionally qualified shall be given a period of time within which to qualify for registration or leave the profession. Is Government really in a position to enforce this when there is huge flight from teaching and the shortfall in the teacher population becomes alarming by the day? It would appear, therefore, that the issue of professionalizing teaching still remains a mirage, and teaching may remain an all comers affair for some considerable length of time to come, unless urgent remedies are applied (Jegede 2002). He further said that teaching profession in Nigeria has suffered a number of debilitating blows in recent past. Some of these include lack of motivation, serious aversion to teaching, lack of societal respect and recognition, none or late payment of salaries, lack of continuity in policy and its implementation.

According to an Editorial of Technological of November/ December, 2000, Teaching is undoubtedly the most challenging and critical grass-root based profession in the world. While teaching affects every member of the society, many other professions including medicine affects only a segment. While the chain which links education and development is learning, the foundation and building block of learning is provided by the teacher. So whether online or offline, whether teacher-centred or student-centred, whether activity-based or collaborative, whether to facilitate or directly impact knowledge, no system both now and in the future can afford to dispense with teachers.

If the above convinces the stakeholders that the teacher, and by extension the teaching profession, is indispensable in a learning or knowledge-based society, it goes without saying that support for teachers must be the single most important ingredient for good, effective and efficient teaching (Fontaine,2000). Aside from adequate remuneration, which frankly no society can ever provide, the support envisaged ranges from quality pre-service, in-service and continuous-service training with consistent access to information, knowledge, resources and sufficient opportunities for broader professional development in both content areas and pedagogy.

**Challenges**

As mentioned earlier, the pivot for the successful implementation of any nation's educational plans is the quantity and quality of its teaching force. If as argued above there is need for teachers to be trained at all levels and for all teachers at all levels to hold professional teacher qualification from the primary to the tertiary level, it becomes necessary that a holistic and integrated model for teacher education which will take advantage of the open and distance learning mode must be developed. From what we have on ground it does appear that a number of parastatals will be involved. These include the NTI, NCCE, NUC,

UBE and the open and the Distance Learning Programmes. This is even more urgent as there is a noticeable under-enrolment and under-utilization of facilities in the colleges of education as contained in the otsu Nape report. Perhaps the time has come for these and other interested bodies to begin a regular network of discussions to take a deeper x-ray of the teacher education issues in Nigeria. This will also afford the nation a common voice and a prioritized shopping list for International Development Partners.

Nigeria must massively invest in the professional development of teachers in order to retrain and properly prepare all those teachers in the system for the challenges of the next few years. As reported in the 1993 Master plan for the Basic education for all in Nigeria by the year 2000, one of the major setbacks that the UBPE suffered was inaccurate projections. While preparation was made for only 3 million to begin the UPE, 4.5 million showed up. Added to the fact that the system had not produced enough teachers to cope with the projected 3 million children, it needed to find a quick fix method to cope with 1.5million extra.

According to the National Teachers Institute's submission to the Presidential panel on the review, harmonization of Federal parastatals, institutions and agencies in 1999, Nigeria required 250,000 teachers to cope with the quantum student population' in 1976. However, all it had was a large 'army of untrained and under-qualified teaching force recruited to teach in the primary schools' [p.9] in order to urgently meet the acute shortfall of teachers for the UPE.

The data available show that Nigeria has 420,000 primary school teachers with an average teacher - pupils ratio of 1;45, the highest ratio of 1;94 was found in Yobe State, While the lowest ratio of 1;20 was found in Anambra State. Apart from the fact that the number of teachers are grossly inadequate over 60% of them have been found to be professionally untrained, academically unqualified or/and under-qualified teachers.

The projections for registration and teacher requirement for the primary school system showed conservatively that by the year 2006 Nigeria will had about 27.5 million pupils in the primary schools. These pupils will require about 916,000 teachers. One can imagine what these figures can be now by 2014.

For a country as big, populous and diverse as Nigeria, there should be a national framework to coordinate and regulate the Teacher Professional Development (TDP). This is even more necessary given the death of teachers and the large number of

unqualified teachers in the system. Such a framework should use the ideal TPD above as sign post while reflecting on the following:

i. Equal opportunities for all teachers (beginning or long in the system) and in whatever location (rural or urban) and type of school (state, private, special, or nomadic) and form of employment.
ii. Seek avenues for TPD that are educationally effective and economically justifiable to all teachers especially those in the rural areas.
iii. Promote the use of distance learning methods and the efficient use of all available resources
iv. Integrate as a matter of policy, the use of telecommunications and the emerging information communications technologies in TPD.

**The Way Forward**

Having seen all the problems above Jegede's (2002) smart option for Nigeria is the only answer. An unusual problem requires an unusual answer. Relying on the additional methods of teacher production and teacher professional development will not suffice for Nigeria. Something drastic must have to be done. Nigeria needs to consider the use of the SMART strategy which involves the country to (re) Skill, (re) Motivate, (re) Activate, Retain and re (Train) its teaching force beginning with the primary level. There are five groups of people from which Nigeria should apply the SMART option.

This involves the upgrading of unqualified and under-qualified teachers currently in the primary schools. Assuming the country still wishes to maintain NCE as the minimum professional teaching qualification, they will all have to be retrained. This group will require training in three major areas of content knowledge (knowledge of the subject matter to be taught in primary school), pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of how to teach), and pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of how to teach, that is specific to what is being taught in the primary school).

Secondly the Colleges of Education and the National Teachers Institute should produce combined annual average NCE graduates of about 25,000. The projection for teachers at the primary level shows that Nigeria will need to inject into its educational system at least 143,000 NCE graduates each year to alleviate the shortfall Jegede (2010). Given the current facilities, structures and dwindling enrolment at the COE's it is impossible to realize the target even in seven years. This focus therefore at this cohort is to aim at producing annually about 40,000 (or if possible twice the current NCE) graduates through the use of both the conventional teacher education and distance learning methods of NCCE and NTI. May be these will be fresh intakes every year who will require training in three major areas of content to be taught in the primary school, pedagogy, and pedagogical content knowledge in primary teaching.

Thirdly, according to the results of survey on unemployed qualified primary and secondary school teachers carried out in 1990/1991 by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), there are about 24,430 qualified primary school teachers in Nigeria who are unemployed. Majority, if not all, of these are Grade II certificate holders. If the NERDC's definition of 'qualified' includes Grade II teachers, then they all would also require to be trained like the first two cohorts. However, their own professional training might vary to include refreshing them about the tenets of teaching and foundation of primary education.

Fourthly, the National Youth service corps (NYSC) members can be given short training and used as teachers, and finally provision should be made for adult training

**Conclusion**

Teacher education up till date is still having a lot of challenges and not until these challenges are tackled, the quality of education in Nigeria cannot be anything better. These challenges range from professionalism, to retraining, motivation and unemployment.

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