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## Teacher Education in Nigeria: The Politics, Problems and Prospects

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### Abstract

*In recent times, there has been heated debate on teachers' unity and education for all in Nigeria. This is basically to improve the quality of education delivery and guarantee education for all in the nation. This paper looks at the unity of teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria, the politics, problems and prospects, its importance to national education development, and the benefits of individual teachers in the system. It recommends among others that teachers at all levels of education should see the need to unite under one union and professional body.*

**Key words:** Teachers, unity and professionalism

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Educational activities in Nigeria are governed by the policies in the National Policy on Education (FME, 2004) guide lines. Any matter concerning education in Nigeria that does not reflect the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria is not authentic. FME, (2004) states that the Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. This statement is in line with the theme of this conference and also in agreement with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The big question bothers on the practicability of this policy in Nigeria's education system which this paper addresses.

It should be noted that the federal government of Nigeria passed the TRCN Act 31 of 1993 to regulate and control the teaching profession "in all aspects and ramifications". This act was to make the teachers and the profession one body (FRN, 1993; TRCN, 2007). The question still remain, are the teachers in Nigeria education system practically one? In Nigeria there exist the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics and Academic Staff Union of Universities in the same education sector. Outside education we have one body for each profession such as Nigerian Bar Association for lawyers, National Association for Nigerian Nurses and Midwives for nurses and Nigerian Medical Association for medical doctors (FRN, 2000). These bodies set up standards for their members and mediate on internal and external issues concerning them. The issue of who speaks for the Nigerian teacher is the main concern of this paper.

### **The Politics of Nigerian Teachers**

The bible says that any house divided against itself cannot stand. Division is the main problem of the Nigerian teacher, the primary school teachers are discriminated by the secondary school teachers, the colleges of education teachers/lecturers see themselves as a more superior teachers to the secondary school teachers while the university teachers/lecturers do not even want to be called a teacher but lecturers. How then do the university teachers/lecturers see teachers at other levels of education (primary, secondary, colleges of education and polytechnics)?

The university lecturers see themselves as the lords and kings in the education system. The question here is what do all these people (primary school teacher, secondary school teacher and post secondary school teachers/lecturers) do for a living? Simply put they are all teaching. Why the division amongst them? How can this division help in the realization of the philosophy of education in Nigeria, MDGs and NEEDS? The sooner the teachers realized that they are one and should be controlled by one body the better and best for teachers. The table below shows summary of other service professional bodies in Nigeria and their regulatory unions.

**Table of Summary of Service Providing Professional Bodies in Nigeria and Regulatory Unions**

<b>Profession</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Professional body</b>	<b>Movement within the system</b>
Medical Doctors	Primary(Health centers), secondary(Cottage hospitals), Tertiary(General/specialist hospitals)	NMA	By simple transfer as the need arises
Nurses	Primary(Health centers), secondary(Cottage hospitals), Tertiary(General/specialist hospitals)	NANNM	By simple transfer as the need arises
Lawyers	Primary(District courts), Secondary(Magistrate courts), Tertiary(High/Special courts)	NBA	By simple transfer as the need arises
Teachers	Primary Schools Secondary schools  Tertiary: COE Polytechnics University	NUT Some NUT and others ASUSS  COEASU ASUP ASUU	By seeking fresh appointment into the new school level

The summary in the table above shows the Nigerian education system as being atomistic, dividing against itself and complex to manage. Comparing education to a building, Onwioduokit (2006) pointed out that no education system can survive without a solid foundation. The foundation given to a structure decides how solid and reliable the structure is. Who laid the foundation of the Nigerian education system? Is it the poorly equipped grade II and NCE teachers? How best can they go? The truth is that in the building industry as in any other system the best is needed at the formative/foundation stage (FME, 2009). We need the best hands at this level of the national education; we need teachers with higher qualifications, experience and other competences which can only be guaranteed by the level of educational attainment

coupled with a sound research background which the grade II and NCE teachers can hardly boast of (Nnebe, 2006; Ontario College of Teachers, 2006).

### **The Problems of Nigerian Teachers**

The FGN, 2004 stated the goals of teacher education as follows to:

1. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations
2. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession

These two goals guide this study in terms of teachers' unity in the job at all levels of education in Nigeria. Since there is no free flow of teachers across the levels or a need redeployment of teachers across the levels as in other professions cited on the table above, the national education system suffers from insufficient staff and need of staff, a problem that is not common in other sectors (health, judiciary and nursing). These bodies (health, judiciary and nursing) have free staff movement to areas of need through transfer and the transferred staff loses nothing in terms of remunerations and other benefits (FRN, 2000; Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, 2001).

The Nigerian teachers have no common voice to speak for them as in other sectors (health, judiciary and nursing). The primary school teachers who are the foundational teachers are always looked down, they have no academic doctors or professors to speak for them in their negotiation team with the government (FME, 2009; Palmer, 2010). The other factional sectors, teachers of the Nigerian education system (secondary school teachers, COE teachers/lecturers, polytechnics teachers/lecturers and university teachers/lecturers) at different times argue for their selfish interest neglecting their foundation (the feeder school/primary school teachers).

How do you best argue for what you would not benefit from? They all see the problem of the primary school teachers as not concerning them. They all claim they have passed that level of education system. The higher pay and conditions are what they want for themselves (General Teaching Council for England, 2005; Onwioduokit, 2006; FRN, 2009).

The remuneration of the teachers across the levels varies to a great extent, a graduate teacher in the primary school earns far less than his counterparts in the COE, Polytechnics and the university (FRN, 2000). The question is what does the teachers at other levels of education do that the primary school teachers do not do, is it not the same teaching? Comparing the teaching profession with the medical or nursing profession, a doctor/nurse at the health center with the same qualification earns the same salary with his colleagues at other levels be it cottage or general hospitals (FRN, 2000). This happens because they are one and see themselves as one (the power of

unity). Why the division among the teachers, when shall the Nigerian teachers' correct this injustices?

The Nigerian government recognized two important levels of administration. These are the states and federal levels. This is why there exist states and federal ministries. This levels cut across all the systems as there exist states ministries and federal ministry of health, states ministries and federal ministry of justices, states ministries and federal ministry of education among others (FRN, 2000 and 2009).

By the above arrangement, it implies that schools should be run along these levels and staff freely move across as need arises without necessarily losing their remunerations and statuses. They should be so moved to solve specific needs of the Nigerian education system as done in other sectors such as the health, judiciary and nursing sub-sectors.

Professionalization and registration would be possible and effective too. Every member of the Nigerian education system would see themselves as one body and rise to defend it too knowing that at any point in time he may be sent to any level to serve and would enjoy proceed there as it is obtained in other professions (FRN, 1993; General Teaching Council for England, 2000; FME, 2009). The teachers across board would see themselves as teachers and not lecturer/teacher or simply lecturer who has little or nothing to do with the TRCN which is an umbrellera body for practicing teachers.

### **Prospects for Nigerian Teachers**

The sooner the Nigerian teachers unite as one body the better for the system and the sooner the nation would realize the national vision for education for all, MDGs and NEEDs. Administration of teachers matters would be simple faster and real. When government make policies concerning Nigerian teachers (FGN, 2004), they would make such policies for one Nigerian teachers and not separate for primary school teachers through the NUT, secondary school teachers through Academic Staff Union of Secondary schools or NUT in some states, COE teachers/lecturers through COEASU, polytechnics teachers/lecturers through ASUP and the almighty university teachers/lecturers through ASUU.

The negotiation time would be shorter too (General Teaching Council for England, 2005; Onwioduokit, 2006; Palmer, 2010) as all the bodies would zero into one body with a name they would fashion for themselves, as for the researchers NUT would suffice for all Nigerian teachers (compare NBA for lawyers, NMA for medical doctors and NANNM for nurses).

The movement of teachers across the levels (primary, secondary and post secondary) to solve a particular national educational need (pedagogical and research needs) would be possible and cheaper (FME, 2009; General Teaching Council for Wales, 2010) since it would involve simple transfer. This movement would offer the Nigerian teachers opportunity to learn as they move freely from one level to the other (the members of other professions learn more as they move across board: NMA, NBA and NANNM).

Industrial unrest would come to a manageable minimum as conclusion reached with the parent union (Mother union of Nigerian teachers) would be binding across board. The teachers would enjoy the profession and there would be no agitation to move to any higher level which is mostly predicated on higher pay obtained at that level (FRN, 2000).

Internal efficiency of the teachers would be enhanced as teachers across levels would interrelate constructively to promote their contents and materials. It should be noted that when teachers stay together in one school level, they would easily partner for the purpose of research and development than when they stay in different school levels and administration. This collaboration would promote performances among the teachers (General Teaching Council for England, 2005; FME, 2009).

Teachers would put in their best at any level they find themselves knowing quite well that their relevance is a function of optimum performance (FRN, 2000). The benefits and prospects for the unification of Nigerian teachers are innumerable both to the teachers and the government for the primary purpose of promoting education for all.

## **Conclusion**

It is therefore, concluded that there is no unity among Nigerian teachers and this absence of unity has a negative impact on the system. The benefits of unity among Nigerian teachers are also highlighted to include collaboration for learning, development and research. It is recommended that government should henceforth negotiate with only one Nigerian teachers union and not factional union representing various levels of school system.

## **Recommendations**

Haven highlighted the benefits derivable from Nigerian teachers' unification, the researchers made the following recommendations. All Nigerian teachers should come together and operate as a body. The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria should compel all teachers to operate as teachers and not lecturer/teachers as all are involved in the business of teaching. The federal government as a matter of uniformity should stop the division among the Nigerian teachers by only negotiating with a

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common body of Nigerian teachers and not factional bodies (NUT, ASUSS, COEASU, ASUP or ASUU). The leaders of the various unions in Nigerian school system should come together and fashion out a common union for Nigerian teachers.

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