

PROFESSIONALISING TEACHING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The status of teaching as a profession in Nigeria has remained a contested issue. This paper thus looked into the issue of professionalizing teaching for the development of the education sector in the country. The concept of professionalism was viewed from the functionalist, interactionist, division of labour and foucaldian approaches with a view of determining the professional standing of teaching in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper critically analysed teaching as a profession in Nigeria and it was discovered that several attempts had been made by the government and other stakeholders in the education sector, to professionalize teaching. However, their efforts were being truncated by the problem of influx of different kinds of unqualified people in the profession, among others. It was therefore recommended that a body 'Institute of Teachers' which would lead the profession in developing standards of professional practice in teaching, with the three stages of individual teacher accreditation, should be set up.

Introduction

Professionalism has been defined differently by people and agreement has not been reached on what a profession is. This is because; professionalism is an essentially contested concept which has been described by many people from variety of orientations and disciplines. According to Hoyle and John (1995), despite the widespread use of professionalism in the every day discourse of those who would be readily regarded as professionals and despite the best effort of sociologists, philosophers and historians, it defies common agreement. This is due

to the fact that the term can be viewed from generic, symbolic, ideological, specialist or pragmatic sense

The differences stem from the fact that occupations differ as to the degree to which they are professional, and the degree to which they meet criteria for professionalism. Also, the definition of profession is often determined by assessing the occupation on certain characteristics. According to Okunloye (2005), a profession is a symbol for a desired conception of one's work and by extension of one's self (the worker).

The concept of Professionalism

The meaning of 'profession' can be traced to those in religion. Ukpo (2005) noted that to Priest, Pastors, Reverend Brothers and Sisters, it means the act of professing and a declaration of loyalty. The Oxford English Dictionary (1998) defines profession as: "a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification" (p.1480). To Encyclopaedia of Education (1971), a profession in the generic sense is described as a field of economic activity requiring academic preparation above the high school level while Halmos (1971) opines that, from ideological sense, the term profession is used as a bargaining position in an occupation's efforts to improve its status, rewards, and conditions. According to Halliday (1999), attempts have been made to solve the problem of definition using different approaches such as functionalist approach, interactionist approach, Foucauldian approach and division of labour approach.

The functionalist approach is premised on the professional knowledge base. The focus of this approach according to Eraut (1994) is the social control of expertise. This approach was developed by Marshall (1963) and Goode (1969). The criteria such as collectivity orientation, and altruism were emphasized. The functionalists view a profession in terms of its central social function, its length of training, a body of knowledge, high level of skills, a code of ethical conduct, client centeredness, autonomy, independent decision making, adaptability, and self governance.

In this approach, what is paramount is on how a profession needs to be like and how members need to act like. People who define a profession from a functionalist approach stated that the approach spells out the privileges and position in terms of a rational solution to the society's needs. Eraut (1994) observes that providing a list of professional traits and assuming their integrative function has not removed or solved the problem of definition. This is because most of these criteria in the functionalist approach to the definition are culture bound with greater significance in some countries, especially the developed countries, than others, the less developed countries. For instance, the approach assumes that there is a well defined set of needs within the society without working question about the nature of the society. This means that, the approach provides an understanding of the nature of the profession in terms of current practices arising from the needs of societies without considering the variations existing within the societies.

The interactionist approach is concerned with everyday actions and interactions of professionals and how they make their social world as participants and constructed their career. This approach views professionalization as a social and political project or mission designed to enhance the interest of an occupational group (Hargreaves & Goodson; 1996). This is why, interactionist approach is also called social constructivist approach. To the interactionist, profession is a relative concept which can be subjected to different constructions according to the discursive disposition of its advocates and critics. In this approach, the driving force of professionalization is concerned with striving for upward mobility while the main strategy is social closure which enables the groups with common interest to act in a collective manner to protect their interest and membership.

The emphasis in this approach is on employment rewards for those who achieve professional status. Ukpo (2005) maintains that the materially and symbolically privilege position of professional workers is achieved by virtue of the protection and patronage of some elite segment of the society. The problem in

this approach to the definition of profession is that the group may willingly or unwillingly erect barriers that could in turn promote inequality in an attempt to close access to its occupation.

Foucauldian approach, on the other hand, establishes relationship between knowledge and power. It is observed that knowledge is a key component in the competition for power. To Foucauldians knowledge and power are two sides of the same question. Who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided. The power and legitimacy of professions is acquired, in part, from their status as organisation defined by their control over knowledge. If control over knowledge is lost, what happens to power? McDonald (1995) observes that this approach rejects any idea that the state is a purposeful actor instead the state is considered as a collection of institutions; procedures, knowledge which together form the particular direction that the state has chosen. Foucauldian approach is of the opinion that both the state and the professions are, in part, the emergent effects of the interplay between changing government policies and occupational strategies.

The concern of division of labour approach is the inter-professional competition between professions. Its focus is on the content of professional work among professions and dispute over their work areas which McDonald (1995) referred to as the jurisdictional dispute. This approach was made popular by Abbott (1988).

The different approaches have provided useful understanding of the profession and their professional activities which has brought out agreement on the criteria and characteristics of a profession. There is a widespread agreement, according to Hoyle and John (1995), in terms of the criteria of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. The approaches have provided benchmark with which the status and conduct of a profession or its erosion might be measured and also draw attention to the changing nature of professional status, definition, work and behaviour.

Protagonists and antagonists of professional standing of teaching have made references to the possession or absence of the characteristics which a profession can be distinguished. The following definition of a profession can be used as a benchmark to compare the policy statements that define teachers as professionals in Nigeria and the actual state of the teaching profession. According to Halliday (1999), a profession is an occupation with a set of competency based on knowledge acquired through many years of academic training, the goal of its members being a commitment to service guided by a code of ethics. The profession is granted autonomy and public recognition to provide a service considered essential by the society through a regulatory body, responsible for establishing and maintaining standards through mechanisms such as credentialing, standard of practice and competences.

Professions which possess most or all of these characteristics enumerated in the definition can offer its members real good life or prospects or benefits. Such benefits include prospect of job opportunity, job security, high rewards, societal recognition, psychological self esteem, high status and dignity, professional excellence, and job satisfaction.

The Teaching Profession in Nigeria

It is generally believed that teaching the young children and adolescents cannot qualify as a profession, but rather as a craft in which any untrained person can engage. But unfolding events in the teaching profession prove that teaching as a profession in the modern day goes beyond “talk and chalk”. It involves moulding young lives, guiding youths, motivating students and general character training. Similarly, classroom teaching does not succeed alone by itself without discipline and adequate guidance which then move it convincingly into the professional realm.

Teaching profession in Nigeria has been recognized by all stakeholders. The government, through the National Policy on Education has clearly stated that “teacher education will continue to be given major emphasis in all our educational

planning” because “no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher.” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 p.39). In addition, the government has recognized teaching as a profession by stating that; “Teaching, like other professions in Nigeria, will be legally and publicly recognized as a profession.

To achieve this, government has set up the Teacher Registration Council among whose functions are registration, accreditations, certification, discipline and regulation of professional practices. The government has given a period of time within which, those untrained teachers and those teachers without the requisite qualification, to qualify for membership or leave teaching profession.

The government has also asserted the desirability and intention to professionalize teaching. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (1990) states clearly in the Nigeria Teachers Manual that professionalization of teaching should be given adequate attention in order to enhance the role of teachers in the formulation and implementation of educational policies in the country. In order to achieve this, Ciwar (2000) identified a number of factors as criteria that enhance the degree of professionalism of teaching namely; the theoretical and practical knowledge mastered exclusively by the practitioners, fairly long time of training in the field, continuous practice in the field, ethical codes of conduct for practitioners, regulatory body that licences and disciplines, as well as promotes professional growth of practitioners, continuous in-service development, rendering of essential and qualitative services to society by the practitioners, exalting service above self, and membership of practitioners in the professional or regulatory body.

To Ciwar (2000), these are the criteria that other professions, which are by far younger than the teaching profession, enjoy. The professionals in Pharmacy, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Architecture, and others have been able to organize themselves in such a way that they have now become the epitome and symbol of genuine professionalism. The professionals proudly wear their identities and in whatever job they find themselves, they still prefer to be identified by their respective professions. Application of the conventional criteria (requirements)

required of a profession as earlier enumerated to teaching, indicate clearly that the vocation is not yet a profession in Nigeria. The teaching career in Nigeria lacks ethical code of conduct, certificate of registration and licence, mandatory continuing education, exalting service above self, and a membership Register.

Probably that is why, a professional teacher has been defined in the Nigerian Teachers' Manual as "A person who has the registerable professional qualifications which enable him or her to be appointed to teach at any appropriate level of recognized education in Nigeria and who is of sound mind and is mentally alert." (p.3)

To achieve professionalization, the government enacted a teaching profession act and established the National Teachers' Council. However, it is the responsibility of the Teachers to adhere to the ethics of the profession by belonging to a Professional Association and at the same time avail themselves of the opportunities for professional growth through in-service training, attendance of learned conferences and membership of subject associations.

Professionalizing Teaching in Nigeria

All teachers should not consider themselves finished products upon graduation. Abimbola (2005) asserted that 'they must continually update their knowledge within their discipline especially now in the era of scientific and technological advancement' (p. 419). Teachers must also be informed of new methods and materials that will make their teaching more effective. 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) opines that teachers' professional development consist of activities a teacher can engage 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. It is observed by Leace (1996), 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 Resources Centres, and National Teachers Institutes among others, provide training programme for teachers. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004), in the National Policy on Education (NPE) outlines the objectives of teacher education are 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 (p.39).

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 on 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 that also set standards are met.

It is observed that, teachers in Nigeria are being provided with both discipline and pedagogical knowledge to 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 for the effective performance of their duties and at the same time allow for professional growth

A survey study of other professions was undertaken by the presenter to examine at how they are organised: specifically, how they go about fulfilling their obligations to those they serve and more generally to the wider society. There are clear implications for teaching. Findings showed that teachers receive academically at least the equivalent level of training as do most other professions. They perform one of the noblest jobs in the community, the preparation and education of the next generations. The level of skill required to teach effectively is very high. In other words, teachers could compete favourably with other professions. However, it was observed that teacher trainees do not have a period of internship after training as do most other professions. In addition, teachers lack self confidence and display inferiority complex in the mist of other professions. This needs to be changed.

Recommendation

A single body, Institute of Teachers to represent the teaching profession, governed by a council of experienced teachers, should be established. This body should have responsibility to set standards of professional practice. It would enable the profession to address an important question: What are the knowledge and skills teachers need to be effective in the important work they do?

In answering that question, the body should lead the profession in developing standards of professional practice in teaching. Once professional teaching standards are established, teachers will be able to seek accreditation against these standards. The body will need to establish processes for dealing with complaints of professional incompetence or malpractice, leading to deaccreditation, consistent with the practices in other professions. The awards of honour by the Institute of Teachers should be well deserved and of high status: a badge worn with pride.

The Institute should work with Universities to develop standards for initial teacher education, including the standards for the professional experience component of courses. Standards for initial teacher education programs will enable the colleges of education and universities to certify that graduates have the essential knowledge and skills to join the profession. The Institute should also attest to the quality of professional development programs for experienced teachers. This will assist teachers make well informed choices about learning how to be better teachers.

It is apparent that business and industry have much to gain from enhancing the quality of teaching. High standard teaching prepares a better skilled and more knowledgeable workforce. It was private sector support which made possible initiatives in the United States to improve teacher quality. The most important of the professional bodies set up in the United States is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The National Board has done major work on setting standards and accrediting teachers for the quality of output.

A focus on high standards that support and extend teacher development is needed rather than basic requirements which simply give a person the right to teach. Voluntary system similar to the one proposed can be found in other professions. A voluntary system which accredits standards of professional practice will mean that the individual teacher has a choice about the standards they aspire to reach. It will enable our very best teachers to be recognised and rewarded for the excellent work they do. Three stages of individual teacher accreditation are proposed:

- 1). initial competence with one year internship to obtain licence to teach;
- 2). expertise in specialised areas; and
- 3). ability in educational leadership.

In the contemporary society, it is unacceptable that teachers be paid more, simply by accumulating years of experience. Teachers need also to be able to demonstrate that they have continued to develop towards higher standards of teaching. It is also unacceptable that employers of teachers require them to undertake further development without recognising their achievements.

The position which employers take in relation to a voluntary system of teacher accreditation will be critical to professionalizing teaching. Employers, in salary negotiations with unions, should align teacher remuneration with the proposed system of professional recognition. An alternative for teachers already at or near the top of the salary scale could be the payment of a bonus for meeting accreditation standards. These practices are becoming common overseas. In the United States, teachers accredited by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards receive either additional salary increments or a bonus. In England, teachers can only progress to the upper level of the salary scales if they demonstrate high standards of professional practice. All employers in Nigeria need to recognise and reward higher standards of professional performance by teachers.

Any credible system of teacher accreditation must include a capacity to deaccredit those whoever fail to maintain professional standards and ethics.

However, deaccreditation by the Institute needs not necessarily mean loss of employment but could, for instance, involve more active supervision of, demotion, and denial of leadership position and provision of supportive service for the teacher. Teachers who seek leadership positions in schools should be expected by employers to have the highest level of professional accreditation offered by the proposed *Institute of Teachers*.

The scrapping of the Grade II certificate, establishment of the Teacher's Registration Council (TRC) is a right step in professionalizing teaching. Since we now have a higher minimum qualification of National Certificate of Education (NCE), the much needed recognition has been bestowed on the profession. Like other professions, teachers can now come together with membership of their profession and also be able to enforce the ethics of the profession. TRC is already working with sister agencies on a proposal for Teachers' Salary Scale (TSS) for all teachers, which may carry some unique benefits. Only licensed teachers will benefit from this. The council will also pursue other allowances for professional teachers in certain specialities.

Conclusion

The need for practicing teachers to develop professionally can not be over-emphasised. It is the surest way of professionalizing teaching. There is the need to establish a pedagogical college that all fresh graduate teachers will attend for one year where they will go through the basics of teaching after they become licence professional teachers.

There is the need for teachers to go through promotion examinations to be able to distinguish between those that are and are not for the mastery of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge.

For those who are not qualified to teach, time is running out for them. They need to acquire the necessary qualifications or be shown the way out.

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