

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is an occupation dating from the time of human existence. However, despite its age it has consistently lacked the command of prestige and power accorded the classical professions such as law and Medicine.

In Nigeria, the need for better professionalization of teaching has always been stressed by educators. The paper is assessing the professional status of teaching in Nigeria based on a thorough examination and analysis of the concept and the characteristics of a true profession. The paper also highlights some factors that militate against the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria and suggests some workable steps that can make teaching a true profession in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

It is the belief of some uninformed members of the society that teaching is as easy as ABC. The notion is that teaching can be carried out by all and sundry. In the formal sense, as long as an individual is capable of reading and writing, people think that it will not be difficult for him to pass across the relevant body of knowledge needed by the recipients of education. Nothing spectacular is seen in the exercise hence the relegated treatment accorded teaching and teachers in Nigerian society.

The prestige and power conceded to professions such as law and medicine etc are never 'tasted' by teachers in Nigeria, there is therefore the need to analyse the concepts of teaching and occupation and also examine the basic features of a profession which are present in other professions like Engineering, Banking Law, etc. So much that practitioners in the professions are seen as 'little gods' in our society. This analysis will throw some lights on the true position of teaching in Nigeria.

Teaching

Nwanchi (1991) defined Teaching as "the imparting of knowledge from one person to another or the guiding of some to behave in a particular manner".

Teaching in this sense implies that anybody can be regarded as a teacher as long as he is able to inculcate identified knowledge to another individual and guides him to behave in a manner that others approve of. For instance, traditionally at the family level, parents and adults, members of the society inculcate the societal values and inspirations into the younger ones Fafunwa. (1974)

Teaching in the formal sense goes beyond this, Frankena (1965) defined teaching as "the conscious and deliberate efforts by a mature and experienced person to immature or less experienced person with the intention that the latter will learn or come to believe that he is taught on good grounds". He further expressed the fact that teaching cannot be done just by anybody because it involves the following:

- i. Conscious and deliberate activities

- ii. Less experience or immatured person to be taught.
- iii. Information or a body of knowledge to be imparted and
- iv. An intention on the part of the person teaching that recipients should learn.

The analysis shows that, teaching is a unique exercise; it is an occupation that needs to be given adequate recognition in any society. What then is an occupation?

Collins Westminster's dictionary defines an *Occupation* as a business or trade, that which occupies one's; time either permanently or as a hobby. Based on this definition, it is true to refer to teaching everywhere, Nigeria inclusive as an occupation since it is taken up as a job just as business and trading activities are embarked upon in order to make some gains. But is teaching a true profession? To give a meaningful answer to this question, there is the need to consider the concept of a profession and the major characteristics of true profession.

Profession:

The word profession has been defined by different authors to project the standard of any occupation mostly to be tagged a profession. Obidi (1975) defined a profession as an occupation that claims the exclusive technical competence and also adheres to the service ideals and avowed ethics of professional conduct". It is an occupation that asserts exclusive monopoly or knowledge, having definite standards and possesses the ability to convince the generality of the public that its services are unique (Oyeleye and Soremi 1985)

In the same vein, Hoyle and Megarry (1980) defined a profession as "an occupation founded on specialised training and intellectual study the purpose of what is to supply skilled service or advice others for a definite fee or salary".

A profession is therefore an evaluative concept which has to do with the desire of an occupation to attain a status, a standard and recognition of the uniqueness of social service the practitioners render

CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSION

Having defined what a profession is, the analysis of the features or characteristics of a true profession which makes it to be a bit different from an occupation is our next consideration. These characteristics have been well described by Leberman (1956) Ukeje (1976), Hoyle and Megarry (1980) and Salami (1995). They are:

(1) Any true profession in the process of professional practice, the professional should acquire absolute knowledge needed to practice the occupation. This knowledge is acquired through specialised intellectual study and training following a specific training needed to practice the occupation.

(2) Entry into the occupation is strictly Controlled. This is guided by setting and enforcing standards for selection, training, licensure and certification.

(3) There is a code of conduct to guide the behavior of the members of the profession. The code includes ethical principles, customs and standards of practice identified as good enough for the profession which practitioners are expected to rigidly adhere to. For instance professionals should be good in their areas of specialization, they should not exploit the ignorance of their clients but be ready to 'pour out" themselves for their benefits. Sometimes oaths are taken to ensure strict adherence to the ethics. Hence a

profession is a service occupation where public interest superceeds that of the professional.

(4) There is absolute and complete Freedom to Practice the Professions. A practitioner derives psychological satisfaction and personal pride and display excellent and quality job as a result of high degree of autonomy granted him to make decisions on his clients as he think fit and the freedom enjoyed by the profession to decide its *modus operandi*.

(5) A true profession has a government body or bodies vested with the power to monitor the interests and professional behaviour of its members. The functions of such bodies accessing to Nwanchi (1991) includes the followings:

- a. Provision of the frame work that guides the operations of practitioners.
- b. the control or registration of practitioners and elimination of quack and undesirable elements from the field.
- c. giving guidance to its members in their obligations and responsibilities to their clients and the public through the provision of relevant rules and regulation and
- d. the withdrawal of the right to practice from erring practitioners.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHING IN NIGERIA

The professional status of teaching in Nigeria has been a major concern to educational agencies, educationists and teachers themselves. Having identified the basic characteristic of profession, the background upon which the professional status of teaching will be based is already created An affirmative conclusion as to whether teaching is a profession in Nigeria or not will therefore be reached as the main features of teaching in Nigeria are analysed

(a) Acquisition of relevant knowledge and Training. Since teaching involves activities that are predominantly intellectual, teachers are exposed to specialized knowledge, skills and other relevant tools that ease the practice of the trade. Student teachers also undergo months of practice in schools (Teaching practice) under the supervision of experts.

However, in teaching, there are differentials levels of training and qualifications. For instance we have Grade Two (G. II) certificate, Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E.), Bachelor of Arts in Education (B.A.)(Ed); Master of Education(M.Ed) etc, qualifications for teaching at the different levels of education.

often student teachers pay lip-service to this vital preparation. Teaching are often haphazard and crude white lassies- faire attention is paid to teaching itself The monitoring of students activities by the cooperating school is sometimes not thorough For sake of effectiveness, teachers are expected to be abreast of time by attending workshops and seminars (National Policy on Education 1981 ed). Studies carried out by Jimoh (1995) on "The attitude of Primary School teachers towards Teaching Profession in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State" shows that only few teachers especially at the primary and secondary schools levels do attend such programmes.

For instance, out of the 217 teachers he interviewed only 22, 10. 14% claimed to have attended a workshop. The implication of this can be best imagined because education is suppose to change as the society changes. Teachers who play the the major

role in the development of the individual members of the society need to be fully aware of the changes that are being experienced within the society.

In teaching. Grade Two (G II) teachers were and are still allowed to sit as many times as possible for papers failed. The N.U.T. Secretary for Kwara State revealed that over 2,000 teachers are still struggling to pass their Grade Two Papers.

(b) Control of entry into Teaching

Nigeria teachers have no control over entry into teaching profession. The type of training, its duration and other requirements needed before practicing the occupation are dictated by the government. A minimum of NCE is required as the basic qualification for entry into teaching. Yet, there are many untrained and less qualified teachers teaching in Nigerian Schools. This has contributed to the retardation of the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria (Salami 1995:92).

(c) Code of Ethics

The ethical code drawn up by Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1969 has not been strictly-observed by Nigerian teachers. This code is based on five basic principles dealing with the functional responsibility of the teachers in any nation. The principles are; (i) Commitment to students (ii) commitment to the parents; (iii) Commitment to the community; (iv) Commitment to the employer, and (v) commitment to the profession (Falade. *et al* (eds) 1990).

There is no strict observance of the code because the fact remains that since the government employs the teachers and since there is no legally established Teacher's Council to enforce such codes teachers are bound by government code of conduct for teachers. Unfortunately government code often reads more like the school rules for students but merely adapted to guide teachers' performance in schools. When teachers are to face disciplinary measures taken are usually attached to the civil service rules to guide the behaviour of any workers regardless of the professional function (Salami. 1995/96).

(d) Freedom to Practice

Nigerian teachers are yet to exercise any appreciable freedom as a professional group. Freedom to practice is very slim because every trained teacher in Nigeria is either under the State or the Federal Government Teacher's relationship with his pupils has always been modified by parents and other government officials. Thus, the freedom of relationship with clients enjoyed by professionals in other recognised professions is yet to be attained in Nigeria.

(e) Professional Organization

Teachers in Nigeria are yet to have a professional body that is similar to the legal practitioners Disciplinary Committee, the Nigerian Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria etc. There are trade Unions of which the Nigeria Union of Teachers (N.U.T.) is the most prominent. The union caters for the welfare of teachers and serves as its mouth-piece before the government. Through its activities, teachers have embarked on strike actions which have yielded "bountiful fruits" in the past. For instance, Decree 31 of 1993 on the professionalization of teaching came as a result of the struggle organized by the N.U.T. from December 1992 to February, 1993. The decree according to the Secretary, Kwara State branch is still a toothless one since the government has not

made any concrete effort to establish Teachers Council to take up the affairs of teachers in the country.

However, the Union has not succeeded at maintaining high standard of qualification among teachers. The code of ethics passed by the Union is not fully embraced by teachers while the body is seen by the Many members of the body still deny the Union the much desired moral support by not participating in programmes of the Union. (Falade, etjgl 1990). The Union can therefore be regarded as a pressure group, a trade union that is made up of teachers of different categories. The Union has not been able to discipline erring teachers but only act for the betterment of its members." Apart from this, the existence of multiplicity of teachers organizations of sectional interests such as Headmaster! Union, Conferences of Principals, Science Teachers Association etc. Seems to be working against the attainment of oneness and harmony among teachers. The existence of such associations can further aggravate teachers' problems as they struggle for the realization of their demands from the government.

Other Factors that are militating against the professional status of teaching in Nigeria:

(a) The outrageous population of teachers sometimes makes it difficult to control and communicate with them whenever the need arises. Presently, teachers constitute the largest single working force in Nigeria. (Nwanchi 1991:187).

(b) Some Teachers only see teaching as *a* stepping stone towards other lucrative jobs.

(c) Poor image of teachers in Nigerian Society. The prestige teachers had in the colonial era seems to have gone. Before 1960, teachers were highly respected because they were seen as possessors of societal values. Although they were poorly paid; they took consolation in the fact that their rewards were in heaven. As stated by Fafunwa (1974), teachers enjoyed much respect because they were:

- i. morally upright
- ii. few in number
- iii. serving as society's encyclopedia
- iv. very diligent
- v. strong disciplinarians and
- vi. other lucrative professions were very few.

With time, teachers' status and image gradually degenerated as other more lucrative professions emerged. As government delayed the payment of teachers' salaries and denied them of their allowances, teaching becomes full of frustration, humiliations, and conflict and very stressful. The denial of teachers' benefits has led to incessant strike actions in the past. An example of such strike action is the protracted one that took place between December 1992 and February 1993. Hence, unbearable frustration can be seen as a major factor which causes some teachers to seek for other greener pastures that are accorded befitting prestige in our society.

- (d) Lack of professional training and variations *in die* type and duration in training of teachers.
- (e) Lack of self esteem and dignity of labour by many teachers.
- (f) The socio-economic background of teachers has shown that many conies form low-class families. There is therefore the tendency for these in the upper class to look down on them, (Oyeieye & Shoremi, 1991).
- (g) Lack of immediate impact of teachers work or, the society Nurses and Doctors work's are appreciated because it involves life, people want their cases won in court therefore lawyers duties are seen as vital. But it takes time (years) for teachers efforts to materialise, hence the ingratitude posture accorded teachers in Nigeria.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALISING TEACHING IN NIGERIA

The analysis of teaching *in* Nigeria vis-a-vis-the characteristics of a true profession given *above*, shows that teaching is yet to enjoy *a* professional status in Nigeria despite the fact that it was entrenched in the National Policy on Education. (NPE 1981) that teaching like other professions would be legally and publicly recognised as a profession, the implementation of this policy has been a mirage. The promulgation of decree 31 of 1993 on the professionalization of teachers has not been followed up by the government. Up till now the council to oversee teachers' affairs has not been put in place. The following steps are suggested for the realization of a true professional status for teaching in Nigeria.

- (1) A clean and permanent break away from government domination and parents interference is needed to allow for autonomy to practice and standardise teaching profession.
- (2) Teaching should be given a legal and public recognition. Nigeria Teachers Council should be inaugurated immediately, to co-ordinate teachers activities in Nigeria. This body should: (i) provides a positive code of ethics to guide the behaviour of the practitioners, (ii) introduce a classification system within the group as we have it in other professions.
- (3) Teachers' status will be elevated if they are paid higher salaries and if their benefits and allowances are paid promptly. This will likely reduce the possibility of using teaching as a stepping stone towards other lucrative jobs.
- (4) Teachers should be adequately trained to ensure teaching effectiveness. There should be room for recurrent and in-service training to make teacher more functional in their teaching career.
- (5) Entry into teaching should be strictly controlled Uncertificated and be allowed to teach. This will zeal up the months of the masses who feels that teaching is for all and sundry.
- (6) Student-teachers should be given thorough supervision by the supervisors and the senior teachers of the co-operating schools during the practical teaching exercise
- (7) Teachers should have self esteem and be proud of their occupation.
- (8) Nigerian Union of Teachers should metamorphosis into a stronger body that will speak with one voice and try to raise its status through the professionalisation of teaching

and more positive work in the area of educational research (NERC1969327) The body should refuse to compromise its decision when government responses are unfavorable.

(9) As it is in the National Policy on Education, Nigeria certificate of Education (N.C. E.) should remain as the minimum qualification for teaching.

(10) Since teachers' output can either make or mar the development of any nation, government should

Make teacher education completely free and pay some-out of pocket allowances to the students as it was done in the seventies. (NERC, 1969).

(11) All the recommendations made towards the attainment of professional status of teaching as stated in the National Policy on Education section 9, subsection 72 to 82 should be implemented immediately.

CONCLUSION

Teaching is indeed a noble job that ought to be highly valued in Nigeria But the analysis of the characteristics of teaching in Nigeria based on the main features of a true profession already examined *shows* that teaching is yet to attain a professional status because it has always remained tied to the apron string of the government who employs the teachers; most of the practitioners *only* use teaching as means to other greener field, the code of ethics supplied by the N.U.T is not act fully embraced, untrained teachers are still found in many classroom etc. *It* is to be noted therefore that since no education can rise above the *quality* of its teachers and since education is the backbone of all developments, for Nigeria to occupy a position to be emulated in this era of technological advancement, *teaching will have to be legally* professionalized by taken the steps suggested above.

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