

TEACHING IN NIGERIA: A PROFESSION OR AN OCCUPATION?

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**A PAPER PRESENTED AT ST. ANDREW'S COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION OYO, DURING THEIR CENTENARY CELEBRATION
(1896-1996) AT THE NATIONAL
ACADEMIC CONFERENCE ON 10TH -13TH MARCH, 1996**

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, teaching has remained a trade union rather than a professional organization. No doubt, the need for better professionalization of teaching has always been stressed by educators. In assessing the professional status of teaching in Nigeria, this paper examines the concept and the characteristics of a true profession. It is upon this that the analysis of the characteristics of teaching in Nigeria is based. The paper also highlights some identified factors that are militating against the achievement of professional status for the Nigerian teachers. Some gallant steps that would make teaching a true profession in Nigerian are also proffered.

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 individual is capable of reading and writing it wouldn't be difficult for him to pass across the relevant body of knowledge needed by the recipients of education. Nothing special is seen in the exercise, hence the watering down of the position of teaching and teachers in our society.

The prestige and power conceded to professions such as law and medicine are never tasted' by teachers in Nigeria Society. The issue to be considered therefore is to analyse what teaching is, define the concepts of occupation and profession and examine the basic features of a profession which are present in professions like law, medicine, engineering, so much so that practitioners in the professions are seen as little gods in our society. This analysis will throw some light on the position of teaching in Nigeria.

Nwanch (1991) defined teaching as "the imparting of knowledge from one person to another or the guiding of someone 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 adult members that surrounds the child are vested with the

responsibility of inculcating the societal values and aspiration in to the younger members of the society.

Teaching in the formal sense goes beyond this that is the reason why a lot of credit ought to be given to teachers for the uniqueness of their activities. Frankena (1965) defined teaching as "the conscious and deliberate effort by a matured or experienced person to immatured or less experience person with the intention that the latter will learn or come to believe that he is taught on good grounds."

Indeed, this type of activity cannot be done by all and sundry because it involves the following:-

- (i) A person who is consciously and deliberately teaching.
- (ii) Another person that is being taught
- (iii) Some content or material, information knowledge etc. being imparted
- (iv) An intention on the part of the person teaching that the recipient should learn.

Teaching in the formal sense is therefore not as easy as people think. Teaching has been defined as an occupation. What then is an occupation? Collins West minister dictionary defines an occupation "as a business or a 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. This is because, it is taken up as a job from which teachers earn their living. Services are rendered for the monthly salaries just as businesses and trading activities are embarked upon in order to make some gain. But is teaching a 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 a true profession.

The word profession has been defined by different authors to project the standard of any occupation mostly to be tagged a profession. A profession according to the dictionary definition is "an occupation that claims the exclusive technical competence and also adheres to the service ideals and avowed ethics of professional conduct.

Oyeleye, Shoremi (1985) defined profession as an occupation that asserts an exclusive monopoly of knowledge, having definite standards and possesses the ability to convince the generality of the public that its services are unique.

In the same vein, Hoyle (1980) defined a profession as "an occupation founded on specialized training and intellectual study, the purpose of what is to supply skilled services or advices 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 in the society.

As Salami (1995) puts it, it is based on the idea of emergence of number of persons who have a common knowledge and practice in a skilled job which is usually based on specialized training and whose service is considered essential in the society." Profession thus represents the privileges and rights being desired by an occupation and the uniqueness of the social services the practitioners renders.

Characteristics of a Profession

Based on the definitions of a true profession given above, the analysis of the features or characteristics of a profession which makes it to be a bit different from an occupation is our next consideration. These characteristic are:

- (1) Any true profession in the process of professional practice, the professionals should acquire absolute knowledge needed to practice the occupation.**

This knowledge is acquired through specialized intellectual study and training after a specifics training needed to practice the occupation.

- (2) Entry into the occupation is strictly controlled.** The prerequisite for entry into the occupation such as acquisition of needed skills and knowledge, the duration of training the minimum terminal qualification must of necessity be met before one can be allowed to practice. Hence, entry into the occupation is guided by setting and enforcing standards for selection, training, licensing or certification.

- (3) There is a code of conduct to guide the behaviour of the members of the profession**

It includes ethical principles, customs, standard of practice identified as good enough for the profession which practitioners are expect to rigidly imbibe. For instance professionals are to be good in their areas of specialization they are to display good character and be ready to 'pour out' themselves for the benefit of their clients. They should never venture to exploit the ignorance of their clients. Hence a profession is a service occupation where public interest superceeds that of the professionals. Sometimes oaths are taken to ensure strict

adherent to the ethics e.g Lawyers oath of devotion to the secrecy of clients and the Hypocratic taken by doctors.

(4) There is absolute and Complete freedom to practice the Profession

A practitioner derives psychological satisfaction, and personal pride and display excellence and quality job as a result of high degree of autonomy granted him to make decision 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 governing body or bodies

Vested with the power to monitor the interests and professionals behaviours of its members. The functions of such bodies according to Chudi, (1991) includes the following:

- (a) Provision of the frame work that guides the operations of practitioners
- (b) The control of 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 regulations
- (d) The withdrawals of the right to practice from erring practitioners.

A professional organization is quite different from a trade union, who act basically for the betterment of its members. Instead, a professional body focuses on the furtherance of the profession and the provision of good to mankind. Quality and excellent output rather than personal gains are aimed at. A profession is therefore a vocation having work as its priority. Group dignity and absence of commercialism are the predominant motivational power.

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 basic characteristics of a 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 analyzed

(a) Acquisition of relevant knowledge and Training

Since teaching involves activities that are predominantly intellectual, teachers are exposed to specialized knowledge and skills and all other relevant tools that ease the practice of the trade. Teachers are exposed to the knowledge of the subject matter and the various methods and teaching techniques.

While it is true that provisions are made for the training of teachers in Nigeria, there yet exist differential levels of training and qualifications for teachers. For instance we have Grade II Certificate, National Certificate in Education (N.C.E) B.A (ED) B (ED). M. ED. Etc. qualification for teaching at the different levels of Education. While in training, student-teachers undergo months*of practice in schools (Teaching Practice) under the supervision of experts, for the following reasons:

- (i) For the trainees to have the opportunity of interacting with learners (his clients) and put into practice the teaching methods and facts already acquired
- (ii) For the trainee to be competent and fit for the job he is being prepared for.
- (iii) For effective performance of his role as an agent of socialization and transmitter of society's cultural values.

To keep abreast of time, the education of teachers is expected to be continuous. However, it is sad to note that prior to this times, several teachers in Nigerian schools did not have the required professional qualifications, and indeed a few cases are still very much with us. Some through trained, were/are still not certificated.

Also the situation where Grade II teachers were are to sit as many times as possible for papers failed is very disheartning. This puts a big question mark on the quality of knowledge acquired by Nigerian teachers. In other professions there is usually a time for the acquisition of relevant knowledge and whoever fails to meet the demand at the expiration of the time scheduled for the training is bound to withdraw.

For the teaching practice, quite often student-teachers pay lip-service to this. Preparations for teaching are often haphazard and crude while laize fair attention is paid to teaching itself. The monitoring of students activities by the co-operating schools is sometimes not thorough.

Added to this is the fact that teachers and lecturers of the trainees are no longer committed to their job. The approach is rather lukewarm probably because they have to write papers and carry out researches for their personal development and

promotion. Government non-challant attitudes to the needs of those lecturers and lack of provisions of relevant materials for effective teaching aggravates this problem. These flaws tend to cast doubts on the intensity and quality of knowledge acquire by teachers before practicing. To declare teaching as a profession under such deplorable situation is very difficult.

Control of entry into Teaching

As far as teaching in Nigeria is concerned, entry is yet to be controlled. Qualifications for entrance into the occupation is not fully enforced. This is responsible for several 'unbaked' and 'half baked' caliber of teachers teaching in Nigerian Schools.

Teachers don't really have a say in the minimum or basic qualifications for entry. Rather, the type of training, its duration and other requirements needed before practicing the occupation are dictated by the government.

Indeed, the porous way of entering into teaching and the caliber of people who enter into it have contributed to retard the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria.

Code of Ethics

Teachers don't really have code of conduct guiding the behaviour of the practitioners. Presently, the teaching service at the primary and secondary school levels as well as a few tertiary institutions are guided by the civil service rules. It is the government that dictates the tenure and functions of teachers serving in these institutions.

Although the ethical code drawn up by the Nigerian union of Teachers (U.N.T) in 1969 is made available to teachers, it has not been rigidly observed. The fact remains that since the government is the employer, teachers are strictly bound by government code of conducts of service for teachers which includes the Qualification for entry, into the occupation, teacher salaries and remunerations, their duties and responsibilities etc. Teachers have no option but to abide with rules imposed on them by the fingers that feed them.

The rules and regulations from the government end, often read more like the other version of school rules for students but merely adapted to guide teachers performance in schools.

As Salami (1994) puts it, "even when teachers are to be disciplined, measures taken are usually attached to the civil service rules which are rules to guide the behaviour of any worker regardless of the professional conduct or function." Freedom

to practice the Profession Freedom to practice in teaching is very slim this is because every trained teacher in Nigeria is either under the employment of the state or the Federal Government. Hence teachers are controlled by lay administrators rather than members of the profession. As earlier stated, they are duty bound to adhere to government rules and regulations.

Within the school, there is a limit to the power enjoyed by the heads of schools as a result of the visitation carried out by inspectors and supervisors under the cover of monitoring and correcting teachers' work and the entire school

From the home front, teachers ability and competencies are also challenged. Quite often, they receive provocative moves and insults from illiterate and even literate parents who challenge their authority and water down most of their viable actions.

Thus, teachers in Nigeria are yet to exercise any appreciable freedom as a professional group. The freedom of relationship with clients enjoyed by professions like medicine and law is yet to be attained in teaching. The relationship between the teachers and his pupils has always been modified by parents and other government officials whether State or Federal.

Professional Organization

Teachers in Nigeria are yet to have professional body that is similar to the legal practitioners' disciplinary committee, the Nigerian Medical council or the Nursing and Midwifery council of Nigeria etc. They only have trade unions of which the Nigerian Union of Teaching (N.U.T) is the most prominent. The union came into existence in 1931, to cater for the welfare of teachers, and to carry out other matters that are of importance to teachers and to serve as the mouth-piece of teachers before the government.

Through its activities, teachers had embarked on strike actions which had yielded bountiful fruits in the past.

However the union has not succeeded at maintaining high standard of qualification among teachers, hence, the union can only be regarded as a pressure group made up of teachers of different categories. It has never been able to occupy the position of a true professional body.

Moreover, the existence of multiplicity of teachers organizations or sectional interest groups such as Headmasters Union, conference of principals, post-primary school teachers association, Science Teachers Association etc. does not allow for

oneness and harmony among teachers. This hinders the possibility of having an effective sound organization for the co-ordination of the entire members of teaching force. Their existence further escalates teacher's problems as they struggle to pursue their demands from the government.

Other factors militating against the professional status of teaching in Nigeria include the following:

- (a) The outrageous population of teachers makes it grossly impossible or rather difficult to control and communicate with all the member of the body whenever the need arises. Teachers in Nigeria constitute the largest single working force, this has persistently crippled the possibility of mobilizing them for actions.
- (b) Several teachers only see teaching as a stepping stone towards other more lucrative jobs. Teaching is not perceived by many teachers as a life career. Several reasons are however responsible for this.

Presently, the prestige teachers had in the colonial era is already gone. Before independence, teachers were highly respected by all and sundry because they were recognized as possessors of societal values even though they were poorly paid. In those years they were consoled by the missionaries by turning their faces towards heaven from where their rewards would eventually come. This was the inspiration that kept them going. The meager salaries paid, had to be bargained for between the teachers and the school manager. During those periods teachers were respected because they were:

- i. Morally upright
- ii. few in number
- iii. very diligent
- iv. serving as society encyclopedia
- v. strong disciplinaries
- vi. other lucrative professions were rather few.

However, with time, teachers status and image began to degenerate as other more lucrative professions emerged. Teachers therefore became a laughing stock in our society. Hence, teaching became full of frustrations, humiliation, conflict and stressful towards the end and even after the colonial era.

Presently, teachers image seems to have fallen completely as the government decided to harden its heart against teachers demands. There has been an incessant & protracted strike action all to no avail. (Dec. 1st 1992-Feb. 1st 1993)

It is therefore out of frustration that may teachers use teaching as mere stepping stone towards other greener pastures that are accorded befitting prestige in our society.

- (c) Lack of professional training and shallow preparation of teachers compared with what operates in other professions like engineering, law etc.
- (d) Lack of self esteem and dignity of labour by many teachers.
- (e) The socio-economic background of teachers have shown that many comes from low-class families. There is therefore the tendency for those in the upper class to look down on them. (Shoremi 1981).
- (f) Lack of immediate impact of teacher's work on the society. The masses value doctors work because it involves life, people want to win their cases in the court therefore lawyer, duties are seen as vital but it will take some years before teachers efforts materializes. Hence, the ingratitude posture they receive from the society.

Steps towards Professionalization of teaching in Nigeria

The analyses of teaching in Nigeria vis-a-vis the characteristic of a true profession shows that teaching is yet to enjoy a professional status in Nigeria. For the professionalisation to become a reality the following steps *will* have to be taken. The occupation will have to wrestle power with the government who exercise control over it over the years. These include the Federal and state ministries of education, education boards and Teaching service commission. A clean and permanent break away from the domination of the government will enhance teachers image. Teaching will also enjoy the power and prestige conceded to other occupations such as medicine and law. Government should therefore be ready to support teachers professional organization and consult them more frequently before new policies are formulated.

- (2) There should be the formation of a strong professional body to co-ordinate teachers activities in Nigeria, such a body should provide a positive code of ethics to guide the behaviour of the practitioners and this has to be strictly adhered to.

The body should also introduced a classification systems within the group as we have it in medicine and other professions.

- (3) Teachers' status should to be elevated by paying them reasonable salaries and remuneration very promptly. Although teaching is the largest profession in Nigeria, it is the least remunerated compared with other professions. For instance, the lowest paid teacher earns less than some head, laboures drivers, clerks etc. If teachers are better treated the question of using teaching as a stepping stone to other lucrative jobs will become a forgotten issue.
- (4) Teachers should be adequately trained to ensure teaching effectiveness. Also there should be room for recurrent and in-service traning. Teachers should acquired relevant knowledge teaching techniques and innovations that will make them more functional in their teaching career.
- (5) Entry into the profession should be strictly controlled. Uncerificated and untrained teacher should never be allowed to teach. This wills zeal up the mouths of the masses who feels that teaching is for all and sundry. The professional body showed therefore establish profession standard with a minimum requirement for qualification before the rights and the privileges attached to the profession are claimed.
- (6) Both the government and parents should give teachings the autonomy to function as professionals.
- (7) Students-Teachers should be given through supervisors by the supervisors and the senior teachers of the cooperating schools during the practical teaching exercise.
- (8) Government should improve teachers conditions of service this will give teaching profession a standard and prestige in the eye of the public and make it attractive to high caliber students and personnel in our society.
- (9) Teachers should have self esteem and be proud of their occupation.
- (10) Nigerian Union of teachers should metamorphsis into a stronger body that will speak with one voice. The body should also refuse to compromise their decisions when government responses are unfavourable.
- (11) As it is in the National Policy on Education, N.C.E should remain as the minimum qualification for teaching.

- (12) Since teachers output can either make or mar the development of any nation, government should make teacher education completely free all over the federation and pay some -out - of - pocket allowances to students as it was done in the seventies (NERC, 1969).
- (13) All the recommendations made towards attaining professional status for teaching as stated in the National Policy on Education (1981) rev. ed section 9 subsection 72 should be implemented immediately.

Conclusion

Teaching is indeed a noble job that ought to be highly valued in our society. But the points so far examined have shown that close to nill attention is paid to it in Nigeria. It is yet to attain a profession status because it has always remained tied to the apron-string of the government who employs the teachers. The characteristics of a profession earlier examined have revealed this. If Nigeria is to occupy its position in the committee of nations there is the need to take all needed steps suggested in this paper. It is only when this is done that teaching will enjoy the position accorded professions like medicine, law etc. Undoubtedly, when teaching become a true profession teachers will put up their best, they will not run out of the career prematurely and as such teaching will become more effective and attractive.

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