

A Critique of Teaching Profession and Teacher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Teaching is one of the oldest professions in modern Nigeria. The advent of the Christian missionaries who introduced western education culminated into the evolution of teaching profession. For ease of communication, educating the Africans had to go along with evangelistic activities. This put teachers in elite position in the society and possessed good positive image. With the rise of other professions, the honor accorded teachers drastically wane down, and so their commitments to teachings were negatively affected. The paper focuses on the roles of teacher with specific illustration from Nigerian experience. Teacher training programmes in Nigeria were reviewed and arguments for and against the relevance of teacher in emerging world were critically analyzed

Key Word: Teacher programme – Teaching profession - Training

Who is a teacher?

Chambers Universal Learner Dictionary explains a teacher as “person who teaches, especially in a school”. We wish to kick-start discussion from this simple and clear explanation by Chambers Dictionary. For the purpose of clarity, I will break the sentence into two viz (i) a person who teaches and (ii) especially in a school.

As someone who teaches by implication she is someone who gives “knowledge, skill or wisdom to a person or group of persons. For example, various gurus, philosophers and religious leaders who have lived over time and have shaped man history such as Plato, Aristotle, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Ghandi, e.t.c. are inferentially teachers. In fact, the reputation, effectiveness and competence of Jesus teaching was unequalled in this generation to the extent that His critics asserted that He taught better than the trained teachers of his time – the Sadducees and Pharisees. He taught like somebody with authority.

The second part of the short definition limits the idea of who a teacher is i.e. someone who teaches in a school. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that a teacher is someone who is endowed or trained in some specific tasks, skills, knowledge, attitude and passes or instructs the learners in such area of competence within confinement of a classroom either physical or virtual. This leads us to whether a teacher is trained or naturally talented.

The debate continues on whether teachers are born or are trained, whether teaching is a science or art. However, the seemingly consensus is that teachers are both born and made. A teacher may be naturally talented or may be trained, if a talented teacher is trained; she becomes more refined and more productive.

If an individual is not talented and desire to teach, exposure to training as teacher will enhance the latent competence. A functional teacher education programme is statutorily expected to inculcate a system of quality teaching in the trained teachers. The philosophy of teacher education is aimed at producing competent teacher who are well grounded in the methodology of teaching.

The paramount focus is not limited to possessing adequate knowledge of what is to be taught, but also how it should be taught. Teaching is like every other profession, whether it is medicine, law or religion, training as well as aptitude is necessary. It is not unlikely to have individuals who are talented but such talents are enhanced through training and those who are not born teachers can cultivate teaching skills through training (Banjo, 1953; Oyekan, 2000).

Teacher Training Programme in Nigeria

To assert that teaching is the oldest profession in the modern Nigeria should attract little or no controversy both in non-formal and formal setting. Against the modernist theorists depicting westernization of Africans as the mark of real development, an average African trained her wards ever before the advent of colonialism. From a personal point of view, colonialism process was tinkering with the normal course of African development process. Failure of democratic institutions in Africa couple with the fact that most states were created out of imperial conquest is currently best described as failed states, Nigeria inclusive. Rise of modern teaching profession in Nigeria coincides with the coming of Christian missionaries who held tenaciously to the belief that proper Christianization of African hinges on impartation of western education. The colonialists' intervention in Education was regulatory in nature through the issuance of ordinance, and progressively establishment of government schools. The springing up of schools, both by the missionaries and the colonial government necessitated the establishment of training schools where prospective teachers would be taught the science of teaching and learning (Osuji, 2009)

In retrospect, the majority of teachers employed by the missionaries and colonial government were untrained. The issue was a prominent focus of Ashby Commission report on 'Investment in Higher Education' in 1960. Lord Ashby – an educator per excellence and one time Vice Chancellor of Cambridge observed that; 'the quality of teachers at the primary and secondary level is poor' and 'great majority of teachers have neither enough general education to qualify them to teach, nor adequate professional training'. The situation was very critical during the missionary era. Pupils in higher classes were used to train pupils in lower classes in the same school. The senior ones were taught in the morning while the senior turned to junior ones from noon till closing hours (Adeyinka, 1971; Fajana, 1978; Akinkungbe, 2011).

With more commitment from the government, and pursuant to implementation of Ashby report, the country witnessed a substantial improvement in training and focus on professionalism. According to National Policy on Education (2004), the goals of teacher education in Nigeria are to;

- produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations;
- enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Training of teachers takes place in specialized training schools, where focus is on teacher training programme alone, and faculty of education in Nigerian universities. The modes of training are in four major components and are highlighted below.

1. A general broad education programme to bring out depth in the intellectual knowledge of teachers. This aspect constitutes a core aspect of teacher education programme designed for all trainees. Some of the courses include basic knowledge of humanities, citizenship education, use of English, language and communication, computer appreciation, general mathematics, etc.
2. The second component is the subject area specialization. In many training centers and universities, a trainer is expected to specialize in maximum of two subjects' combination.

3. The third component focuses on professional courses designed to ensure trainers are grounded in science of teaching and learning. They include courses on philosophy of education, educational psychology, sociology of education, curriculum and instruction, guidance and counseling, educational administration, etc.
4. The last component is practical intercom designed in two modes. The first mode is micro teaching. Micro teaching is experimental in nature aimed at inculcating required confidence in a classroom setting. The duration of teachings and number of students per class is scaled down to a considerable size a non-experienced teacher can easily manage. The actual teaching practice may take duration of two semesters. Student-teachers are posted to schools to teach under the supervision of experienced teachers in the schools of their posting, and their college or university lecturers (Komolafe, et al, 2009)

Roles of Teacher in Nigeria

Three variables are indispensable in teaching – learning process. They are the teachers, learners and of course, the learning experiences or put in another way the content. The focus of this chapter is to consider the roles a teacher performs within and outside the four walls of a school.

The discussion will be limited in a sense to roles of a teacher in the school and community. The roles of teacher are not limited to these two areas alone. These are several areas where teacher performs one role or the other. Teachers have roles to perform in nation- building, curriculum planning and implementation, policy formulation (especially those concerned with the school system), conflict resolution, electoral process, e.t.c.

A teacher is a role model in and outside the school. Pupils look up to her and naturally imitate her mannerism, values and disposition. Banjo (1953) noted that “the teacher’s example is an important, if not more important than what he teaches. Day et al (2003) in Makinde (2005) wrote that teachers’ leadership consist of living as a role model, giving the school direction, having an overview of school activities, setting standards and making “tough” decisions. A teacher is a parapsychologist. In a sense his/her occupational demands require it so. He/she needs to understand some basic learners’ nature, feelings, individual differences, maturation level, needs and expectation. His/her training imbibes in her those basic psychological skills in understanding human nature.

A teacher is not only parapsychologist; he is also a counselor of sort. The counselling services a teacher provides in the school centres on choice of subjects, behavioral adjustment, social interaction among classmates, juvenile delinquents traits, reading habits and styles, health and sexual behaviour, e.t.c. However, care must be taken while offering counselling services. Undue intimacy and unholy affection should be discouraged especially between teacher and students of the opposite sex. In a situation where the issue at stake is beyond the ability or knowledge of the teacher, adequate referral is made to a professional counselor.

Everybody responds positively to motivation. The situation is less different among learners. Motivation is even more required in teaching – learning situation than normal day interaction among people. Rate of understanding differs among learners. Some are eager to perform tasks without inducement, while some will require some measure of petting and encouragement. As a motivator, Makinde (2005) wrote that the potential involvement of the teacher in the school is not limited to academic (cognitive) development alone but embrace the affective, which is the emotional feelings and psychomotor – physical development of the students.

Motivation serves as positive reinforcement which manifests in various ways such as mere clapping of hands where task is successfully completed or right answer is given; giving of gifts such as textbooks, biro or any other educational materials, award such as the “cleanest student in J.S. School”, e.t.c.

A teacher is father/mother figure- a surrogate parent to the students under his/her tutelage. The role is more pronounced in schools with boarding facilities. Teacher–students relationship should be intimate to ensure productivity. Udo (2003) stressed that “learning will be enthusiastic if pupils see the relationship between them and their teachers as non–threatening, warm and loving. In this regard, it is required of a teacher to be compassionate, loving and caring. A teacher instills disciplines in the pupils in the school. In a school where there is little or no discipline, teaching – learning will degenerate. Banjo explained that school discipline facilitates intellectual training. To maintain discipline, teacher employs the use of punishment though need not be used as a vengeful instrument or based on personal grudge or aggrandizement. In Nigeria, corporal punishment is allowed in schools.

It is the duty of the teacher to supervise pupils work. He/She ensures that notes are written correctly and up to date, assignment are done and marked, e.t.c.

Furthermore, supervision is not limited to academic work alone, he/she supervises the general cleanliness of the pupils, classrooms and the overall environment of the school.

A teacher can perform some support services in administration of the school. He/she lends a helping hand to the school headmaster or principal in administering the school. This encourages harmonious and healthy relationship among all the stakeholders in the school system. The primary role of a teacher is to impart knowledge, skills and aptitudes to the learners. This is achieved through instruction during teaching – learning process in the classroom.

Koleoso (2003) observed that teachers should be well trained to “be academically and professionally qualified”. Quoting from the work of Adesina (1990) a teacher should possess a high sense of “scholarship, professional training and knowledge of pupils or students”. Makinde and Adesina (2003) noted that teachers work toward mastery of knowledge and skills by systematically monitoring progress and providing feedback.

In the community, teachers often perform religious functions. This is more prevalent at the earliest stage of introducing western education in Nigeria. The dominating factor responsible for this is owing to the fact that Christian Missionaries introduced western education into Nigeria. Quite a number of teachers doubled as Catechists, Reverend Gentlemen, Church Clerk, Church Secretaries, e.t.c.

Teacher often acts as the spokesman of his immediate community. This may be due to the fact that teachers constitute the earliest set of elites in our society or possibly by virtue of their training. Community members look up to them in discharge of this duty. In most cases, they present their communities needs to the government or other appropriate agencies.

Teachers are the harbinger of the community values. Societies look up to them to perpetuate societal values by transmitting them to successive generations.

It is the duty of teachers to educate the public especially non-educated ones in the rural areas. He reads and interprets notices or letters from the government to the community members. He enlightens the people on the project government is to embark upon and the corresponding community responsibilities.

The services teachers provide in their locality put them into a leadership position. He serves as the local association secretary, official village letter writers, e.t.c. Sometimes he is put forward by the community to represent them in the parliament. Fafunwa (1967) wrote about teachers as community leaders, and innovator or an enlightened parent, and village representatives among others. Oyekan (2000) noted that “teachers could severally perform the functions of an instructor, medical officer, lawyer and judge, and foreman, farmer, public health officer, literary and laboratory assistant, gardeners, father/mother and guidance counselor”.

Assessing Teachers and Teaching Profession

Gap between Theory and Practice

Application of educational theories and training constitute a major bottleneck in the educational enterprise. A casual observation in the school system clearly shows this deficiency. Many pertinent questions come to mind as far as this issue is concerned.

1. Does the training itself justify the resources since the paramount ingredient needed by teachers are knowledge of content and less of theory?
2. Do our systems give room to the application of teaching theory and principles?
3. To what extent does the nature or structure of knowledge accommodate practicability of theory in the classroom situation?
4. Do the organization structures of the school system hinder or stimulate application of theory? If our answer is in affirmative, to what extent?
5. Lastly, are theories /principles meant for application or they are just for intellectual exercise for its own sake?

In providing answers to these questions, many factors come into play. First, the teacher personality and initial experience play a lot of role in teaching -learning situation.

As rightly expressed by Peters (1977) "the effect of training programmes on the practice of teachers in the classroom is nugatory compared with the influence of models in their past with whom they identify and of demands springing from their own personalities.

The previous paradigm seems to have a stronghold in teachers' belief system, regardless of current exposure to new set of values.

Peters (1977) argued further that application of theory is not an easy or immediate task. Teaching is not a "technology in which theoretical findings can be immediately fed in to practice and applied in any simple straight forward way". If the resources are made available, teachers and all the faculty members are presumably well-trained, the structure of the school among other factors are favourable, then the depth of internalizing principles learnt in the training school by Nigerian teachers are questionable.

Faulty or Inappropriate Methods

Another criticism against teachers is their method of teaching. Teachers influence on curriculum and schools system is enormous. They control "not only the rate at which any changes might take place but also largely determine the nature of the curriculum. Teaching should be done in such a way that learners cultivate the ability to think creatively and be self-reliant. Education should not be limited to acquisition of a body of knowledge which is to be remembered and regurgitated for examinations (Howard and Nicholls, 1975). Teachers seem not to have demonstrated competence in instilling this creative ability in the learners at any educational level in Nigeria. Some faculty members may even be responsible for stifling innovation. Man generally opposes changes and view changes as a threat to established comfortable position. Creativity is very germane to achieving educational goals. One major objective of tertiary education in Nigeria is to "acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society" (NPE, 2004). Self-reliance predicates on ability to be innovative and creative. In other words creativity and innovation is if not explicit, it is implied in our national objectives for tertiary institutions. If the demand is placed on our institutions to produce creative citizens, teachers must be creative. Expatriating on this aspect of education, Bourner and Flowers (1999) wrote that higher education is not limited to developing critical faculties, education is balanced when creative faculties is also developed. It is doubtful if teachers in our higher institution demonstrate this important trait.

Recruitment Policy

Recruitment policy of some higher institutions negatively affects the quality of teaching staff. One cardinal principle of the university autonomy is freedom to recruit faculty members. In recent times, this autonomy has been subjected to gross abuse. Cases where ministries of education send names of newly recruited staff to college abounds. Even where institution recruits, favoritism plays significant roles. The negative trends from my point of view hinder qualitative learning. *The* propensities that the recruited teachers are of desire quality necessary for attainment of educational objectives raise some doubts. The debate on the quality and quantity in educational discussion continues.

The recent phenomenon in Nigeria is for politicians to apportion prospective faculty members on slot basis. Each politician has preferred candidate regardless of competence. The initial qualification may be considered, but quality borne out competition and experience are sacrificed. Another trend is for intuitional regulatory body to adopt a recruitment policy limiting faculty members to the indigenes of the state owning the institution. In the similar case, federal institutions use a subtle discriminatory process 'forgetting that parochialism has no place in the world of learning' It is often rumored that senior faculty members favour recruiting their spouse in a manipulated interview among qualified applicants.

Are Teachers Relevant?

Another issue about teacher is their relevance. The new thinking is contentious or controversial relevance of lecturers especially with the advent and prosperity of information and communication Technology. Carter (1999) quotes of Dr. Johnson speak volumes of this new thinking. The saying goes thus: "Lecturers were once useful, but now when all can read and books are so numerous, lecturers are no longer necessary" Carter stressed that, "most college lecture courses lack the intimacy and personal relationship necessary for a real learning experience and many do not even have the advantage of organization that a good book has". This calls for serious attention.

Carter assertion important as it is, regardless of countless number of good books with good organization, effective teaching is subject to the quality of the students. Are all students capable of independent study? How are we sure that their level of intellectual development match ability to discern what is necessary, relevant to their career development? Moreover, quality teaching is not just for instruction; it impacts teaching, research and the quality culture (IMHE 2009).

Closely related is the "doomsday vision" where Information Technology displaces teachers. The work of Bourner and Flowers (1999) as quoted below put it in clear terms

.... its work becomes vulnerable to replacement by open learning... .via the Internet. Many universities will not survive this competition..... We conclude that Internet developments (including its much greater use) mean that increased reliance on mass lecturer and impersonal seminars are likely to be a disaster for many universities.

Inadequate Reward System and Poor Funding

Reward system is a key motivating factor in labour market. It is right to argue that teaching in higher institution is borne out of scholarship and commitment to teachings, the aspect of adequate reward cannot be put aside. To think otherwise will amount to simple naivety.

Teachers seek to pursue career in teaching, hence they need to be commensurately rewarded. This has been a serious issue in Nigeria. Teachers are believed to be comparatively under paid. Agitations for better remuneration with its associated problems such as industrial action, strike, become constant events. Distorted academic school calendar has become the norm and not an exception to the rule.

For efficiency and effectiveness, teachers at any level must be adequately remunerated.

Closely related to remuneration factor is various survival strategies unexpectedly university lecturers have adopted just like their counterpart at the lower level of institutions, though it occurs at a different level and magnitude. With the springing up of private universities, lecturers now engage in teachings in more than one university. This attitude of neither-there-nor-here distorts focus and quality (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007).

Dwindling Image Status of Teaching Profession and Teachers

The trends of dwindling image status of teaching profession and teachers in Nigeria are worrisome. The malaise is not unrelated to poor remuneration compare to other professions and the country economic downturn. Generally, the standard of living in Nigeria is abysmally low, with absolute poverty staring a large percentage of the populace. Given the high rate of inflation, fixed income earners are grossly affected. The woe is compounded with biting effect on low income earners of which a vast majority of teachers falls victim. The resultant economic adversity impacts negate the image status of teachers. It affects not only their access to basic amenities such as decent housing, use of modern facilities, but also their self perception and corporate image. In a research carried out on the image of teachers across historical period of Nigeria existence as an independent state, it was discovered that, teachers within 1960-1985 enjoyed a higher status than the contemporary one – 1985-2011 group. The situation has so degenerated as choice of teaching as a profession has become the last resort for job seekers. Various measures have been suggested on how to improve teachers' image and ego, some of which include improved salary structure, given incentives such as soft loan to teachers by the government, complete professionalization of teaching, among others (Aluko, K. O., 2011).

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