

Professionalising Teaching in Nigeria Through Quality Teacher Education

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Abstract

The concern of this paper is how sound and quality teacher education can serve as a catalyst to professionalising teaching and boosting educational achievement in Nigeria. The paper discusses teacher education curriculum as the bedrock of the profession and therefore needs proper planning and execution by competent hands, and professionalising teaching starts from here. The imperativeness of making teacher training process a specialised one is stressed and, the situation of employing “cheaters” as teachers and admitting the ‘dregs’ into training institutions must be stopped. The Teachers’ Registration Council is therefore challenged to be up and doing in her task of registering qualified teachers through qualifying examinations like other professions.

Keywords: Teacher education, professionalise, teaching, curriculum

1. Introduction

Expectations and roles in different forms from various people in the society, from the teacher, make teaching an important profession. In the conceptual frameworks of no nation can rise above the quality of its teacher and, the better the teacher quality the less the incidence of low achievement, therefore, effective training through robust and specialised curriculum content must be given to the teachers, or better still, the best education available in the society. In other words, a good teacher education programme is the key to the accomplishment of such roles. Whatever the profession, according to Awoniyi (1979), there is always a need for training to create an awareness of the problems which arise in a particular profession, and to improve the level of competence for dealing with such problems. This makes the supply and education of teachers lie at the very heart of the educational process in Nigeria. In the opinion of Ajibade (2005: xi) “in whatever capacity or angle he’s viewed, the teacher seems the most important human character in the life of a child, apart from the mother”, taken that the statement is correct therefore, quality education for teachers cannot be overemphasised to make him a professional. The purpose of his education should seek to help him to grow and develop as a person, provide him with the skills and professional abilities to motivate children to learn and help him in acquiring the right types of understanding, concept, values and attitudes necessary not only to survive in the school room, but also in the society in which he lives. Unfortunately, several attempts at professionalising have failed because of public perception of teaching and the insinuation that anybody can teach without differentiating ‘teachers’ from ‘cheaters’ as it was also observed by Obanya (1982: 8) and Ajibade (2005: 53) This public opinion was succinctly put in this box below by Obanya (2009: 185) and Obanya (2011: 62)

Box 1: Get Out of Teaching and Look for a Job

- **Suitor’s family spokesman:** A-salam-leikum, my people. May I introduce my young man, Ahmadu Tijani. Stand and be seen, Tijani.
- **Tijani** (Standing): A-salama-leikum, my elders.
- **Spokesman:** As you are well aware, we have come to ask for the hands of your daughter, Amina, in marriage.
- **Amina,s Father:** La-kuli-lai! Tijani has grown so big! Looks every inch like his grandfather. What does he do for a living?
- **Tijani** (timidly): I teach at Government Secondary School, Azare.
- **Amina’s Father:** Huum! Well, you are from a good family. I’ll give you my daughter, but...LISTEN CAREFULLY. Promise me that you’ll look for a job!

The debate on how to professionalise teaching is not peculiar to Nigeria alone; it seems to be a global issue that has been on for a while even in developing countries. Ajibade (2005: 54), quoting Stigler and Hiebert (2002), stated that in the United States of America, for instance, it had long been suggested that ‘increase pay’, increased certification requirement, more accountability, career ladders, peer review, training teachers as researchers, and encouraging teachers themselves to set standard for entrance into the profession, would turn teachers into high professionals.

But in her view, the Nigerian teachers would need all of these because the goal of the nation is to make the education system an effective tool for meeting national needs. The above demands however, are nothing extra-ordinary but they are mere characteristics common to other professions and professionals. An arbitrary

exercise of mere assigning title without actual authority and functions to go along with it would never be effective. This paper, will therefore:

- Define profession.
- Examine what teaching entails
- Look into the purposes of teacher education
- Teacher education - Curriculum and training issues.
- Discuss how to ensure best practices in teacher education and teaching towards making it an acceptable profession.

2. What is a Profession?

A profession is that occupation or career in which one has specialised expertise after a continuous training and acquisition of skills for a specified period. It also entails passing prescribed examinations by the recognised body for such a profession. Becoming a professional however, does not stop at that; training and retraining is a feature of any profession so as to be able to keep pace with current developments in such fields. It involves monopoly of knowledge at times, especially for people who are not part of the profession.

3. What is teaching all about?

The question of what teaching is all about may not be fully addressed in this little presentation as there are divergent opinions on what teaching entails, most especially with the issue of different kinds of people who may be referred to as ‘cheaters’ finding their ways into the profession. All the same, we shall see teaching through a professional eye of Obanya (1982: 1) who sees teaching as a continuous, cyclic process involving three main phases viz:

- pre-teaching*, during which the teacher plans what to teach and prepares (and/or collects) the materials to be used for teaching;
- classroom interaction*, during which there should be purposeful interaction between the materials, the subject-matter, the learner and the teacher; and
- post-teaching*, during which the teacher reflects on the task just completed and feeds back his observations into the planning of the next lesson.

Anyone with a proper understanding of what teaching is, will therefore agree that teaching is not only the business of going to the class to impart knowledge alone but it involves, adequate preparation, presentation and evaluation of the whole process.

Another very simple but loaded definition of teaching by a mobile dictionary is “teaching is work that a teacher does in **helping** students to learn”. It is a work of helping in so many dimensions of life and, whosoever will help must be capable in all ramifications himself, well equipped for the help and enjoying helping. From these two definitions we can then proceed to examine why the teacher has to get properly educated.

4. Purposes of Teacher Education

At the 1969 curriculum conference, purposes of teacher education were identified and discussed extensively and were later included in the National Policy on Education (1977) as follows:

- Production of a highly motivated, conscientious and successful classroom teacher for all levels of our educational system.
- Encouraging further the spirit of inquiry, creativity, nationalism and sense of belonging.
- Helping the prospective teachers to fit into the social life of his home, his immediate and non-immediate communities.
- Providing the teacher with intellectual and professional background adequate for his assignment and adaptable to any changing situation in the life of his country.
- Production of knowledgeable, progressive and effective teachers who can inspire children to learn.

In addition there must be a kind of monopoly of knowledge which is the crux. These purposes must have been born out of the fact that the teacher is the key man in the entire educational programme. The quality of his education makes or mars the end-result of his job as a teacher. But unfortunately, the opposite of these purposes is what is happening to teacher education at present in Nigeria. Level of conscientiousness and motivation is low; spirit of enquiry, creativity and nationalism is almost dead, teachers, because of low esteem, are not properly fitted into the social life of the community, they have no special intellectual and professional background fit for any serious profession and, most teachers are not inspiring their students in any form. All these and other issues are making the process of professionalising teaching a slow one.

5. Teacher Education – Curriculum and Training Issues

In the words of Fafunwa, in Adaralegbe (1969: 83), a curriculum is generally conceived as a group of prescribed

courses or sequence of subjects required for certification. However, he said, a good curriculum is the total environment in which education takes place, that is, the child, the teacher, the subject, the content, the method, the physical and psychological environment and must have the following characteristics, which must now be emphasised than ever before:

- Definite and dynamic objectives based on the values of the society, and the need of the child as a citizen and a skilled individual.
- It must be flexible and must provide for the growth that is essential in order to meet the stated or implied objectives.
- Built into it a process of constant evaluation to which the educational process is meeting the goals as stated in terms of the end product.

Addressing the wider issues and considerations in re-engineering teacher education, Obanya (2009: 181), observed that most discussions on teacher education tend to focus on five set of issues:

1. Policy issues (guidelines for the development and implementation of teacher education programmes).
2. Programme and curricular issues (what should go into the content and processes of teacher education).
3. Skills and competencies issues (discussions and prescriptions on the constellation of demonstrable, practical 'learner-help' behaviours expected of the effective teacher).
4. Teacher education pedagogy issues (discussions and prescriptions on the most effective methods of teacher education).
5. Teachers' personal trait issues (the personal – and particularly ethical – requirements of the ideal teacher).

It may not be possible to discuss the issues raised above in a single paper like this, but it is an eye opener to the fact that we have a long way to go in the process of professionalising teaching. Can we as a nation, boast that we have addressed the above issues, and, it is worthy of note that without this, hardly can teaching become an esteem profession.

Before we can ensure quality in teacher education in Nigeria, certain areas need attention. First among such is inadequate curriculum planning. Teacher education must as of necessity be adequately planned as an integral part of a national development and must be based on manpower assessment. We need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions.

- Who plans for teacher education in Nigeria?
- Is the teacher/student environment taken into consideration?
- Is consideration given to the changing needs of the society at large and the students in particular?
- How often is the purpose of teacher education taken into account in planning?
- Is the teacher education curriculum flexible to give room for changes and keep pace with social, economic and technological advancement?
- Are there specialised courses towards professionalising teaching?

Teacher education planners must be sure of the type of education they want for the teachers and how such education will lead to making teaching a profession indeed. The Teacher Education Programme should therefore be re-planned to focus on both preparation for teaching and the acquisition of significant knowledge of the subject matter. Such subjects should be those which would serve the demands of this scientific and technological age in which the country finds herself.

A one year internship for prospecting teacher as suggested by Ema (1972: 115) is also now becoming glaringly necessary in order to determine whether teaching will be the profession of the individual or not, just as it is done in other professions like law, medicals and engineering. In his opinion also, there must be continuous and refresher courses in teacher education for practising teachers of all categories – headmasters, all teachers, subject teachers, untrained teachers and inspectorate staff of Ministry of Education.

6. Towards Professionalising Teaching: Ensuring Best Practices in Teacher Education and Teaching

Quality and quantity constitute a basic issue. Does teaching have basic entry qualification? Are there specialised content in teacher education to make a teacher have the 'monopoly' of knowledge? At what stage should a person be referred to as a teacher? Is there parity of esteem with other trainees in other professions? Often, people tend to lay much emphasis on the very large number of teachers in training, thereby affecting the quality of education they get. The issue however, is how are they given appropriate instructions as regards their future roles as teachers and what is the content of the curriculum?

According to UNESCO (2014: 236), "Good quality education depends on giving teachers the best possible training, not only before they start teaching but also throughout their careers". Addressing further the issue of content in teacher education, UNESCO believes that initial teacher education;

- should prepare teachers to help students from a wide range of backgrounds and with different needs.
- should include classroom experience.

- must promote equitable learning
- should make up for weak subject knowledge
- should place emphasis on the quality and variety of teaching methods
- should include mentoring process.

One other area needing monitoring to ensure quality in teacher education is improving the quality of the existing teaching force primarily through extensive in-service training and to ensure that there is an incentive system built into such a programme. As new knowledge arises there is the need for the teacher to update himself just as he requires to availing himself to the most modern techniques of interacting with children to make them want to learn. In the same vein, a teacher who attends education courses in order to improve his efficiency deserves encouragement. There are institutions that will not give study leave and yet will not accept certificates obtained by a teacher who struggled on his own, especially for promotion and placement. This attitude should be corrected and instead kudos should be given to such teachers.

We cannot hope to develop a better curriculum and provide a more satisfying experience for our children until the general level of admission to teacher training colleges is appreciably improved. Blakemore, et al (1981) quoting Bernard Shaw put it that “Those who can, do, while those who can’t, teach”. Student teachers often add another remark “Those who can’t teach, teach teachers”. Both remarks indicate the idea that teachers and college lecturers would be unlikely to succeed in any other occupation, and that the only success they can attain is in the world of children or students. The implication of these statements is that education of teachers and teacher education is meant for the failures.

The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board that took over selection of students into training colleges have helped educators to be exposed to the reality of the above statement. Most students with very good results will go for other courses other than education in the university and will choose Polytechnic as their second choice and college of education as their last choice. Eventually, if they are not admitted they now resort to colleges of education as dumping ground, you may then wonder the level of enthusiasm on the part of such students. A close watch of these events however reveals the structural weaknesses of teaching

as a profession as the source of the problem. How can one improve the quality of education given when both students and teachers are not proud of the profession? They are ready to leave anytime they get a better job. Even brilliant teacher educators are frustrated out of the job for lack of incentives. What is important now is that, students with good results should be admitted into teacher’s training colleges and this should be matched with commensurate remuneration. Unless the remuneration is attractive, students of good quality will hardly be attracted into teaching.

Quality can be injected into teacher education through pre-service education of teachers by careful selection and training. We are all familiar with law, medicine and engineering to mention a few, where prospective candidates will do a year course in the professional institution set aside for qualifying purposes after university education. This is to ensure that they are providing quality in the various fields. One may pause here to ask whether this is not possible in teacher education. Therefore, as earlier mentioned, a prospective student teacher should undergo at least a one year apprenticeship in teaching.

In teacher education, focus should be on helping students to learn, not on teaching the subject matter. The development of the correct attitude to teaching should be emphasised. Such attitude involves the desire to find out, to understand, to adopt and adapt, and to revolutionize if need be. Child study has to be done more from direct observation of children and less from books. Students have to be trained to develop ability for providing rich, meaningful experience for the pupils.

Teacher educators should not be like a farmer who cultivates his farm sometimes with bare hands, sometimes with an antiquated hoe or with any other crude instrument that is available. Such a farmer cannot expect a bumper harvest like a farmer who made use of modern mechanized tools. What we are saying is that qualitative teacher education cannot be obtained without necessary instructional materials. Most training colleges lack facilities for courses they are offering, various governments concerned should provide fund for purchasing necessary teaching materials or made these materials available. This will afford student teachers to be exposed to real situation in their courses.

The issue of rural areas should not be taken with levity. We should note that teacher education is a kind of cycle. Teachers are the products of schools, but good teachers cannot be produced without good schools, and good schools cannot function without good teachers. If pupils in the rural areas are neglected, with little or no attention, these set of students, after managing to survive in the rural schools, will one day come to training colleges especially with poor results. And when the foundation is not well laid, the chance of a building surviving on it is very minimal. Our teachers will continue to avoid going to rural areas to teach unless they are conscripted or attracted by salary incentives. Most western nations practice this, and it has proved its worth.

There is the need for continuous assessment of teacher education, especially the content of the curriculum to ensure its relevance to the present needs of the individual and the society at large. The recent introduction of population and family life education, HIV/AIDS education and, civics, is a laudable effort,

however, other areas relating to national life should be developed and built into the curriculum such as issues relating to politics, constitution, co-curricular activities, etc. All these will need constant revision and evaluation.

Standard libraries are important in any educational institution training professionals. Where library is available and fully equipped with relevant texts, students are exposed to ideas that are new, useful and challenging. They will develop the skill of independent reading. I will therefore implore the government at various levels to play their parts very well as regards this issue. Students cannot be offering library education without having a standard library around. In the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), E-Learning, E-Library, E-Book and mobile deployment of learning resources are now the in-thing, but, how many teachers are familiar with this like lawyers and medical doctors; who even attend to patients on-line.

A man is like a seed, full of great potentialities which can be realised, stunted or thwarted depending upon the soil it grows in and the nurture it receives. Thus in education, there are three elements that must be integrated: the capabilities of the learner which existed for everybody even if in different qualities and quantities; the content of the curriculum, which corresponds to the soil; and the teacher and his teaching method, which corresponds to nurture. A good and qualitative education is one that is organised in accordance with these three factors.

The natural endowment is a gift from God, but the curriculum and pedagogy are within the power of man to design. Therefore, teacher of student teachers should devote his time fashioning the right teaching method that will make the students learn and acquire real knowledge. A teacher should change his methods often as the situation demands. There should be precision and order in presenting learning material. The teacher should take cognisance of the fact that whatever the subject, the most important point is the method of teaching.

7. Conclusion

The role of the teachers has evident significance. Apparently, in the words of Bua, F. T.; Olatunde, H. O. and Amough, C. K. "neither school syllabus nor method nor instructional aids will make a good school without the quality of the teacher at the heart of it." Good curriculum, teaching method, provision of relevant instructional materials, and provision of standard libraries, improving the admission policies as regards the qualification of entrants in training colleges, giving incentives to both students and teachers as regards performance as in other recognised profession, are all relevant if we want quality education for teachers.

In the opinion of Babangida (1989), Teacher education must come at the top of every list of priorities concerned with education and training because the services of the teacher are indispensable to any nation and he, more than any other professional, influences the lives of the nation's youth and the nation's future. Finally, Babalola's (2013) observation on teaching should be noted by the Teachers' Registration Council; "teaching is a vocation. It is a noble profession like Medicine and Law. It ought and should be engaged in only by those with a special call, who want to impart knowledge to others on the sole ground that they are happy doing so and because they think that they have a special interest or ability to do so.

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