

## Enhancing the Teaching Profession in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

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### Abstract

*Teaching is a special profession that should be given every encouragement if a society must grow in every ramification. The worth of society's citizens makes that society important in comity of nations. The teaching profession in Nigeria has gone through many stages and even today there are disagreements as to whether it should be called a profession. The change in status actually came after the founding of its umbrella body The Nigeria Union of Teachers (N.U.T.). The formation of this body helped to radicalize the status of teachers in Nigeria as it fought many battles with government in order to enhance the status of the profession. This has culminated into the establishment of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in charge of the registration of teachers and currently the approval of a special salary scale for teachers known as the Teachers Salary Scale. Although this has not been fully implemented, it is hoped that it will further enhance the profession when it finally takes off in all the states of the federation. The paper is an attempt therefore to bring history to bear on the rough roads of the teaching profession in Nigeria*

### Introduction

Teaching has to do with the systematic presentation of facts, ideas, skills and techniques to students. It involves the sharing of knowledge in the process of developing the individual. Overtime, teaching has developed into a profession as some designated people assumed responsibility for educating the young.

In some parts of the world, especially ancient India, China, Egypt and Judea, teaching was performed by spiritual men such as priests and prophets, these category of persons enjoyed privileges and prestige. In the theocratic state of the Jews many adults regarded teachers as the channels to salvation and urged young ones to always honour their teachers.

The Greeks in ancient times saw the value in educating children which accounted for wealthy people adding teachers to their households, many of them slaves from conquered territories. During the Roman civilization, the practice was not different as they also had slaves in their households.

By the middle Ages in Europe, the church had taken over the responsibility for teaching conducted in designated places and monasteries. Many of these centres later developed into higher schools of learning, especially universities. In the 17th and 18th centuries, knowledge about teaching methods improved as interests continued to arise in the education of children. These made significant advances in the training of teachers in the use of educational theories and methods.

In North America the story was not different. There was serious commitment to education culminating in the establishment of grammar schools and colleges and later universities. It was however in the 20th century that teachers in the United States started to enjoy professional status.

In different parts of the world, the teaching profession varies from country to country. In some countries, the profession is highly respected and prestigious. Some countries pay better salaries and benefits which makes the profession very attractive. In the developing countries, however, the profession faces many challenges, the salaries are meager and working conditions are generally poor. The developing countries lose

many of their most qualified teachers to other more lucrative sectors of the economy because of poor remuneration.

The above notwithstanding, teaching is currently taking the centre stage in many countries as they begin to recognize the effect of schooling on stable and good government, economic growth and industrialization. Education is now a national priority in developing nations including Nigeria. Teaching has gone through a lot of activities in the developing countries in order to professionalize it. While it has significantly reached an enviable level in some countries in this regard, it is still finding its level in others.

## **The Teaching Profession in Nigeria**

Originally to teach in primary school in Nigeria, a person needed a Teacher Certificate Grade II (TC GD II) from four years of secondary school as a Grade II Teacher - Training College. These were phased out after 1998, when the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) became the required diploma for all primary and junior secondary school teachers. In 1996, out of about 420,000 primary school teachers in the country about 80 percent had either NCE or TC GD II.

In 1978, the Government created the National Teachers Institute (NTI) to conduct programmes that would upgrade teacher qualifications to the NCE level, with most of this training carried out by distance learning. Between 1993 and 1996, the NTI graduated 34,486 in their NCE distance learning programme. In 2000, it trained 20,000 teachers, A Bachelor of Education programme with NTI received approval by the government at the end of 2000. NTI also conducts workshops and conferences on curriculum development and other areas of teacher training.

To teach in senior secondary schools in Nigeria, a person must have either a bachelor's degree in education or a bachelor's degree in a subject field combined with a post graduate diploma in education. At the senior secondary level, all staff are qualified as all possess the bachelor's degree.

The bachelor's degree in education are offered at major universities. Of the 63 colleges of education in the country offering the three year NCE programme, about a third are owned by the Federal Government and about half by State Government. The remaining are privately owned, all of them are under the supervision of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), which sets and maintain standards and approves of courses and programme for all in Nigeria. (Atipioko, E et al, 1997)

However, the teaching profession in Nigeria is still an issue of serious debate. This is arising from the way many people see it and the kind of attention given to it by governments. In real sense, a profession is an occupation that performs or plays an important role in a given society. A profession requires some notable degree of skills and techniques. It is also among others a dignified occupation that is based on intellectual training. The pertinent question then arises, what is a profession? A profession can be summarized among varied opinions as that which refers to a calling, or a vocation especially one that involves some branches of indepth learning or science such learning or education should cut across different but related disciplines. Here, the professionals are deeply involved in cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of their chosen career. They comprehend the concepts of different disciplines to develop or create a novelty, which an average man cannot comprehend. This extraordinary ability or intelligence which enables them to perform such complicated activities, which every individual cannot perform, qualifies them as professionals. It is in this premise that many work or vacation, which any person can perform with limited or not training falls short of a profession. (Atipioko, E, Ajuar, H.N., Omoraka V.O. 1997).

A profession is made up of some characteristics. Most of them are inner workings which differentiates it from others.

To this end, the National Policy on Education (1991.42) legally and publicly recognized teaching as other professions. Teachers are seen as critically important in the modernization struggle of the Nigerian

society. Peretomode (1991) therefore suggested six measures for raising the teaching profession to full professional status. They include:

- (1) Better teaching preparation
- (2) Registration of teachers
- (3) Improved working conditions
- (4) Enforcement of code of conduct
- (5) Professional Organization and
- (6) Long duration of training and internship.

The author wish to posit that many of these suggestions have been carried out by governments and other supervising agencies.

### **The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT)**

The rudiments of the enhancement of the teaching profession in Nigeria began in July 1931, by the amalgamation of the first two Teachers Associations in Nigeria, namely, Lagos Union of Teachers (LUT), formed in 1925 with its founding president as Rev. J.O. Lucas and the Association of Headmasters of Ijebu Schools (AHIS), led by Rev. I.O. Ransome Kuti, formed in 1926. At an inaugural meeting of the two groups held at CMS Grammar school, Lagos on 8th and 9th July 1931, a constitution was drafted and ratified and the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) was officially launched after accommodating other Teachers' Associations from Agege, Ibadan and Abeokuta.

The formation of this union was in response to various conditions to which teachers were exposed during the colonial era. Some of these conditions include, the economic situation in the world and its effects on the teachers, the 1926 education code and its consequences, the intentional Nigerianization of the headship of a number of schools, the ambivalent position of teachers between government and voluntary agencies, the negative attitude of the white-dominated inspectorate toward Nigerian school heads and the professional and nationalistic spirit of those who founded the N.U.T.

### **Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria**

To enhance the teaching profession in Nigeria, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria Act was established charged with the duty of determining the teaching profession. It is an agency of the Federal Ministry of Education of Nigeria. It was established by the TRCN Decree No. 31 of 1993 (now TRCN/Act CAP T3 of 2004). The major observable mandates are the regulation and control of the teaching profession at all levels of the Nigerian Education system, both in the public and private sectors.

As mentioned earlier, it came about after decades of agitation by professional teachers and other stake holders for the establishment of a regulatory agency.

### **Mission and Vision Statements**

The mission and vision statements are clearly stated in the Act establishing the council. The mission is to control and regulate teacher education, training and practice at all levels and sectors of the Nigeria education system in order to match teacher quality, discipline, professionalism, reward and dignity with international standards.

On the other hand, the vision is to promote excellence in education through effective registration and licensing of teachers, and to promote professionalism through accreditation, monitoring and supervision of teacher training programmes, mandatory continuing professional development and maintenance of discipline

among teachers at all levels of the education system. To this end lies the responsibilities placed on the Registration Council to effect.

The Act in section 1(1) charged the council with the following responsibilities:

- (1) Determining who are teachers for the purpose of this act.
- (2) Determining what standards of knowledge and skills are to be attained by persons seeking to become registered as teachers under this Act and raising those standards from time to time as circumstances may permit.
- (3) Securing in accordance with the provision of this Act the establishment and maintenance of a register of teachers and the publication from time to time of the list of those persons.
- (4) Regulating and controlling the teaching profession in all its aspects and ramifications.
- (5) Classifying from time to time members of the teaching profession according to their level of training and qualification.
- (6) Performing through the council established under this Act the functions conferred on it by this Act. (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria 2012).

The Act provides for registration through online, manual, annual dues, license renewal and deregistration. Departments are also created for effective implementation of the Act. Therefore the departments are the Registrar/CEO; Administration and Supplies, Finance and Account, Professional Operations Department and Planning, Research and Statistics Department.

The teacher education programme in Nigeria is streamlined according to the requirement of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol. This was endorsed by the Commonwealth Ministers of education on September 1st, 2004.

This is meant to fast track international comparison and equal treatment and conditions of service for teachers who wish to teach outside their country in other commonwealth countries. This protocol was adopted in the United Kingdom.

It is also interesting to note that to enhance the teaching profession, the world body of teaching councils, that is, the International Forum of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (IFTRA), with headquarters at Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom in its 2009 world conference mandated member countries to expedite action on the standardization of teacher education programme and teachers recognition criteria. The need for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Benchmarks was pursued vigorously by the committee of deans of Education, especially by its chairman Prof. O.O. Anowor. It urged the TRCN to expedite action on the challenge. The TRCN CAP T3 of 1993 gave responsibility to the TRCN to determine who is a teacher in Nigeria and to determine the level of knowledge and skills required to be a teacher and to raise the level from time to time. The PGDE National Benchmark, therefore, is an outcome of the international, national and statutory mandates (2012. TRCN).

The council has been doing everything within its power since inception to ensure the sanitization of the teaching profession by expunging quacks from the teaching profession.

## **Teachers Salary Scale**

In furtherance to enhancing the teaching profession in Nigeria, the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1992 presented a position paper to government on the matter of Teachers' salary scale (TSS) as it is with other professional bodies in Nigeria. This was however a follow up to the approval given by the National Council on Education for the T.S.S. The request in 1992 later culminated in a strike action in that year which paralysed school activities, this led the Federal Government to make a commitment to implement the demand, again in 1995, another demand was made which led to the setting up of a committee by Government to advice on the workability. The government announced its readiness to implement but never did until the civilian dispensation.

It was in the democratic dispensation again that the NUT raised the matter for the TSS, at the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) in Ilorin in 2001. The JCCE raised a sub-committee to fine tune the document. The sub-committee submitted its report on August 2003. Approval for the TSS was given by the National Council on Education in 2003. The council is chaired by the Minister of Education Commissioners and Permanent Secretaries of the 36 states.

Although the Federal Executive Council under President Olusegun Obasanjo received the NCE approval through the Minister's memo in 2007, the FEC declined its immediate approval and referred to the National Salaries Income and Wages Commission. After working out a realistic structure, the Commission forwarded its recommendations, based on this the Federal Ministry of Education prepared an upwardly reviewed wage budget. It was in 2008 that President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua presented the budget containing provisions for the payment of the TSS to teachers employed by the Federal Government. Its implementation is staggered among the states, the contentious issue has been an enabling circular from the Federal Government. When fully implemented across the states the teaching profession will have a further boost in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Teaching as a profession in Nigeria is still faced with a lot of problems. This is from the angle of the practitioners themselves and from government and the social environment. The environment has not yet made it attractive sufficiently for anybody to want to make a career out of it voluntarily or even out rightly identify with it. The teacher is still subjected to all forms of ridicule and contempt, this is particularly true of the primary and the secondary school level. The rise to the position of prominence is very slow and sometimes non-existent, the result is a negative re-enforcement which is doing the profession no good. Many brilliant professional teachers have found their way out of teaching due to a couple of problems. While it is easy to identify the social status attached to medical doctors, lawyers and priests, the social structure of the teacher in the Nigerian society is suspect. The teacher's status is really difficult to access because of their various levels and the different work environments, while specialized training a pre-requisite in other professions, in the teaching profession in Nigeria is an all-comers affair. The question is, because an individual possesses a BA and BSC degree, does that qualify him to be a teacher? The answer is certainly not. To be regarded as a professional teacher, the individual must have undergone a long period of teacher training programme and by this acquires a specialized knowledge.

Another aspect worthy of note is the problem of effective machinery to enforce the code of conduct in the teaching profession. Whereas other professions have this internalized, the teaching profession have no such mechanism. Even when cases of misconduct are reported, the expectation is on government to take action. The Nigerian Union of Teachers do not have the authority to discipline its erring members. The above are some of the challenges the Nigerian Union of Teachers face.

Other observable problem is that some employers of teachers in both private and public schools are violating the TRCN Act by employing non-professional teachers in their schools. This is attributed to the reasons for mass failure by children in public examinations.

However, these problems are not insurmountable as the TRCN and NUT are not taking it lightly with violators of the law. The council has also directed those who want to take up career in teaching and any uncertified teaching in the school system to obtain professional certificates and licenses from TRCN as a condition for either being employed or retained as professional teachers.

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