

Repositioning the Teaching Profession to Meet Developmental Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The issue of nation building and development is cardinal among the goals of any nation. In an attempt to meet the needs of citizens and also be in tune with other nations in a dynamic and globalised world, Nigeria is currently grappling with a lot of challenges. The place of the teaching profession in meeting these challenges cannot be overemphasized. This paper attempts to examine the concept of development, developmental challenges of contemporary Nigeria, the place of the teaching profession, and recommended strategies for repositioning the teaching profession in Nigeria. It concludes that repositioning the teaching profession to meet developmental challenges in Nigeria should be paramount in the mind of all stakeholders. The drive towards making Nigeria one of the top developed economies in the world by year 2020 could be realized if teaching profession is highly recognized by the government.*

Keywords: *Development; Nation building; Profession; Teaching; Teaching Profession.*

1. Introduction

Every nation strives towards sustainable development. Thus the issue of nation building and development is cardinal among the goals of any nation. For instance, Nigeria is a multi-tribal, multi-ethnic and multi-lingua nation. Perhaps, this is why various sections/groups have been agitating for the meeting of their pressing and varied needs. In an attempt to meet these multi-farious needs in a pluralistic and dynamic society, there are a lot of challenges which developing nations, like Nigeria, have to cope with. Busari and Madueke (2004) observed that the essence of education in post modernism is to ensure for peace, liberate oppression, fight poverty and promote industry through entrepreneurial skills. All these are necessary ingredients for development. It is against this backdrop that this paper examined how the teaching profession in Nigeria could be repositioned with a view to meeting emerging developmental challenges.

2. The Concept of Development

Development can be conceived as involving, not only economic growth, but conditions in which people in a country have adequate food, job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. Following this logic, it is quite possible for a country to experience rapid rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and income per capita, as well as increase in unemployment, poverty and inequality. Thus, the indices of development should be based on such things like nutrition, infant mortality, health, political participation etc. Perhaps, this is why Umo (1986) viewed development from the socio-economic perspective thus:

Development is a process by which high degree of self-reliant economic growth in a given society, sustained over a long time, is associated with substantial reductions in poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Obasanjo (1990), in an article "Key to Africa's enduring development", in the Nigerian Tribune of 13th September conceived development as a "process concerned with peoples' capacity in a defined geographical area, over defined period to manage and induce change; that is, to predict, plan, understand and monitor change". He went further to submit that increase in GDP/GNP is a product of change process and only serves as input for further change.

An examination and careful analysis of the various definitions of development in literature will reveal certain common characteristics of the term, whether from economic, social or political perspective.

These include:

- Development focuses on both individual and society.
- Change is perennial to development as it is to modern science and technology.
- Development is human-centred and it must therefore be humanistic. That is, it must be people-based, people-centred and people-inspired.
- The quality of life should be used as an indication of our level of development.
- The keyword in development is change, its inducement, monitoring and more importantly the ability to reject unwanted changes.

3. Developmental Challenges of Contemporary Nigeria

In an attempt to meet the needs of citizens and also be in tune with other nations in a dynamic and globalised world, Nigeria is currently grappling with a lot of challenges. These include:

- (i) Growing urbanization and rural neglect- This has led to unprecedented rural-urban drift with its attendant problems.
- (ii) Youth unemployment – This has been compounded by declining capacity utilization and unfriendly investment environment in the country.
- (iii) High incidence of Poverty-Majority of Nigerians live below the poverty line of \$2 per day.
- (iv) High incidence of crime and social vices-drug abuse, child abuse, kidnapping, human trafficking, prostitution etc, are endemic in contemporary Nigeria.
- (v) Terrorism and insecurity- These include the violent crimes by the Niger Delta Militants and the Boko Haram Menace, among others.

4. The Place of the Teaching Profession

Olunike Asaolu in Sunday Punch of February, 12, 2012 (P.60) reported that “falling education system is responsible for insecurity” in Nigeria. She added that mass failure are the causes of various crimes and challenges of insecurity facing Nigeria.

It should be noted that a virile education system is a sine-qua-non for national development. According to Abernathy and Coombs (1960),

Most nationalist leaders, once in power, have employed mass education in their campaign to eradicate ancient antagonism of tribes, religion and class, and in general they regard schools and colleges as primary means of building their nation.

Thus, the panacea to the contemporary developmental challenges in Nigeria is in a virile educational system. However, the quality of education in Nigeria has been a source of concern to all stakeholders in recent times. Agba (2007) observed that despite the centrality of education in national development, the Nigerian educational system is at a cross road. The observed woe in the system has been linked with the quality of the teaching personnel. Perhaps, this is why Olunike Asaolu (Sunday Punch, February 12, 2012, P.60) opined that manpower training should be embarked upon to enhance teachers’ performance with a view to enhancing students’ performance and consequently address the insecurity challenges in Nigeria.

The role of the teacher in ensuring the success of any education policy/programme cannot be overemphasized. This fact has been recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education (Revised 2004), that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. The policy further noted the need for a “highly motivated, conscientious and effective” teaching staff at all levels of education. Teachers constitute not only a vital input to education, but also a major drive in the production process and in the determination of the output (Oyewole, 2008).

The report of the Baguada Seminar (NERC, 1980) stated that,

teachers are the main determinant of quality in education. If they are apathetic, uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, unmotivated, immoral, antisocial, the whole nation is doomed. If they are ignorant in their disciplines and impact

wrong information, they are not only useless but dangerous. The kind of teacher trained and posted to the schools may well determine what the next generation will be.

The foregoing necessitated the need to accord the teaching profession the much desired recognition it deserves with a view to using the profession as an instrument to face the developmental challenges in the country.

Teaching as a profession should be endowed by teaching aptitude. It includes a set of intrinsic values relating to intelligence, interests and other abilities. A teacher is therefore a man of many parts who combines love of knowledge with ability to impregnate others with his wealth of knowledge and skills. He is neither a fellow who manifests interest in teaching without the intellectual skill to see it through, nor a fellow who is an intellectual giant without the necessary communicative skills, but rather someone who imparts knowledge, skills and attitude geared towards solving societal problems.

In the past, teaching profession has been an all comers job. Graduates who were not trained as teachers were employed to teach in our various schools except in recent time when teaching qualification is now seen as a pre-requisite for recruitment. However, many of the teachers in our schools are not professionally qualified and as such yet to register as Certified Teachers with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). Anikweze (2004) noted that 49.2% teachers are unqualified while the trained form 50.8%.

5. Recommended Strategies for Repositioning the Teaching Profession

Repositioning the teaching profession in Nigeria requires a blunt and radical change from the present practice. It is therefore the function of the society and those involved in the trade. It includes the teacher training institutions, the teacher, schools authorities and managers of the educational system as well as government. Therefore, the following recommendations shall be considered noble:

Awoniyi (1979) opined that a good teacher training programme is the key to the accomplishment of educational goals. This is perhaps because the teaching profession requires specialized knowledge to equip practitioners with the basic mental skills and sound pedagogical foundations of the profession. This knowledge could only be acquired through specialized intellectual study and training. Thus, adequate attention should be given to a more robust teacher preparatory programme by various teacher training institutions. Emphasis must be on both theory and practice.

No teacher training or teacher preparation programme is complete without the teaching practice exercise (Adesina, Fagbongbe and Talabi, 1985). Teaching practice is thus an important and indispensable part in the training and preparation of teachers. It helps the student-teachers to learn more, put into practice what they have been taught and imbibe the professional ethics. The current teaching practice programme of twelve (12) weeks duration should therefore be increased to one year programme to develop the professional competencies of prospective teachers.

A profession should have laid down standards which ensure control of entry into such profession. According to Richey (1979), the professional code contains the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the profession. The teaching profession should have a functional legal backing so that teachers who contravene any of the ethics could be sanctioned as appropriate. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) should be empowered legally to play its role of regulating entry into the teaching profession and also control ethical conducts of members.

Teacher education in Nigeria is bedeviled with a lot of challenges in the modern day technology of imparting knowledge in the teaching-learning process. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is relatively a very new development in Nigeria educational system. ICT plays a significant role in teaching profession to effectively surmount the enormous task of capacity and nation building (Oyewole & Oke 2011). Adako (2006) opines that if Nigeria must catch up with other developing countries at a very reasonable pace, the nation builders (teachers) must be abreast of all new development around the world more so that the world is now seen as a global village. This implies that a practicing teacher must frequently update his/her knowledge in this dynamic world to be relevant in the profession. An obsolete teacher loses touch with realities of life and will gradually lose his/her status as a professional teacher. (Emeh and Agba, 2010). E-teaching should be promoted. The teachers must be adequately trained on how to use ICT facilities to enhance their productivity in the classroom environment. In-service training, seminars, workshops and conferences should be regularly organized for teachers and well funded by the government and other educational agencies to develop their manpower and productive capacity.

It should be noted that inspite of the copious exposure to computer education as a General Studies course in Nigerian Universities, more than 80% of Nigerian undergraduates and graduates are unable to adequately utilize computer and more than 90% of Nigerian secondary school students are unable to use computers, while at the primary school level, less than 5% of the total population is computer literate (Adako and Aturamu 2006).

The usage of ICT in facilitating teacher education is still a myriad in Nigeria as many of the teachers are not ICT literate and those under training in Colleges of Education, Institutes of Education and Faculties of education in Nigerian Universities are not fully exposed to the use of ICT in the acquisition of skills and practical teaching.

Before 1995, teaching profession had been an all comers job. Many of the teachers were not professionally qualified. In 1994, out of total teachers strength of 435,210, there were 91,868 teachers in various primary schools in Nigeria who did not possess the Grade II teachers certificate and 361,118 who did not hold the NCE, (UNESCO, 2000). It could be observed that less than 10% of the teachers in Nigerian primary and secondary schools are computer literate. This is a great challenge facing the effective use of ICT in teaching profession.

Today, in most developed countries, nearly every aspect of human life including education is ICT drive. The education sector in Nigeria still lags behind in this aspect of technology. However concerted efforts are being channelled towards this direction by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC), (Aturamu, 2006).

Busari and Madueke (2004) remarked that while team teaching seems new and experiential, it actually has a long history dating from the time of Socratic dialogue to medieval times with special education colleagues of regular education and/or support services. Successful team teachers are those who are united and have a true partnership in the classroom environment. Team teaching could help to discourage rigidity among instructors as well as the students. Collaboration helps to enhance professional growth and development. It encourages cross fertilization of ideas and development of new approaches to teaching and learning. Team work and partnerships should therefore be highly encouraged. Collaborative efforts should equally be emphasized to develop creativity and exposure of teachers to new ideas.

Hargreaves (1994) remarked that teaching as a profession had a long and difficult history. Its social and cultural functions have never been critically challenged; nevertheless, the public has not adequately supported teaching. Compared with other professions such as Medicine, Law, Engineering and Architecture, Teaching ranks rather low (Fakoya, 2009). The society and teachers should therefore be re-oriented to see teaching as a prestigious vocation with high social status/recognition. Government should make teachers one of the highest paid workers in Nigeria. Special salary scale could be given to teachers to make the profession more attractive and highly rewarding. Recruitment of teachers should be strictly based on professional qualification and competency.

Teachers in Nigeria have no strong and united voice because of divided interests. Teachers at all levels of education should therefore put a common front to reposition teaching profession in Nigeria. The division in Teachers' Union should be urgently addressed. Teachers in Nigeria must come together as a unified body, strong and reliable to reposition the teaching profession in the country.

Recruitment of teachers should be strictly based on professional qualification and competency. In addition, the reason for this is not far fetched. The teachers teaching these students and pupils are not skilled in computer education and application. This calls for urgent need to address the present situation as teachers constitute a major influence on the use of ICT in teaching and learning process.

Teachers as nation builders cannot afford to be left behind in the revolutionary approach to modern day knowledge. It becomes highly imperative for the educational planners to be concerned with evolving effective strategies for teaching and learning of instructions in our various schools. Modern education techniques will have to be increasingly used and improved at all levels of the educational system.

It should be mandatory that only people with teaching qualification are appointed as Commissioners/Ministers for Education.

6. Conclusion

Education is a vital instrument for national development. The importance of teachers in making process of education possible and successful is inevitable. They are nation builders; hence, any national development hinges on the abilities of the teachers to meet the challenges. The teaching profession needs to be repositioned to possess all the attributes/characteristics of a profession. Repositioning the teaching profession to meet developmental challenges in Nigeria should be paramount in the mind of all stakeholders. The drive towards making Nigeria one of the top 20 developed economies in the world by year 2020 could only be realized if teaching profession is highly recognized by the government, thereby putting education in a strategic position towards the realization of the lofty goals of the government.

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