

Teaching Profession in Nigeria; Issues, Problems and Prospects

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I. INTRODUCTION

Developed countries will always trace their roots of success in all sectors to the quality of their teaching profession. The long chain of all other professions like medicine, law and engineering originates from the teaching profession. Reverse is the case in Nigeria. Teaching has been seen as a mere activity, occupation and vocation for the academic losers. Some people even refer to teachers as substitutes on the bench of life, who are left with no option than to proceed and get employed into the teaching profession.

It is worrisome in Nigeria that teaching profession has moved from the foreground to the background which the aftermaths are continuous insecurity, under-development, retrogression, corruption, indoctrination, low-technological advancement, economic insufficiency, cultism, mediocrity, students unrest just to mention but few. The focus of this chapter is to X-ray the concept of teaching, the concept of a profession, characteristics of a profession and prospects of teaching profession in Nigeria.

II. WHAT IS TEACHING?

Teaching can be defined as the axon moving education impulse to deliver growth, development and knowledge. Oyekan (1994) described teaching as an all-purpose profession engaged in human resource development for individual and economic growth. Olatunji (1996) defined teaching as a social function that aims at necessary growth in others. Teaching as an act of guiding and imparting knowledge in and outside the classroom, can only be done professionally by qualified and trained teachers. Teaching profession in Nigeria has been under a flash flood warning of unqualified "cheaters" who cannot constantly as a matter of bounden duty bring about effective teaching and learning process.

Teaching task is so challenging that it surpasses holding chalk, standing before students and giving out different kinds of instructions. Teaching as an application of intellectual technique is the only hope that can bring about overall national progress and development to every citizen of Nigeria.

III. CONCEPT OF A PROFESSION

The concept of a profession has been defined by so many authors in different ways. Amaele and Amaele (2003) defined a profession as a service occupation, which applies a systematic body of knowledge to problems that are of great relevance to the

needs and yearnings of the society. Yahyah (2004) described a profession as an occupation which has its basis on specialized and organized skills, knowledge and intellectual competence. He further stated that profession derives its raw materials from the society and utilizes the raw materials to achieve set and desired objectives. Thus professionals usually have clients who seek their services and terminate such relationship at will.

Oyekan (2004) said viable professions are so much appreciated for their crucial and distinct rides from their repertoire of cherished knowledge, practical skills and intellectual competence. Among them are teaching, journalism, engineering, medicine law, accountancy etc. These occupations render professional activities for certain fees by their clients.

A profession is therefore an occupation which renders services useful for the survival of individuals and the society, these valuable services are vital to survival and it is knowledge based, problem-solving, rare, managerial and full of expertise.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSION

There are many attributes which can be used for judging profession and they vary based on the perception of different scholars. Garrison and Norreen(2003) highlighted four major characteristics of a profession which included maintenance of a high level of professional competence, maintenance of personal integrity and objectivity in all disclosures and treating sensitive matter with confidentiality. Nwachi (1991) listed six criteria as hallmark of a functioning profession, while Taylor, Gerald and Runte (1995) recorded six major characteristics of a useful profession for training and education (usually associated with a university), certification based on competency testing, formal organization, adherence to a code of conduct and altruistic service. As recorded by Richey (1979) eight criteria were listed as crucial features of any profession. They include knowledge, professional code of conduct or ethics, professional organization, legal recognition, freedom to practice, controlled entrance in to the profession and services to members of the larger society.

1. Knowledge: - A profession has its roots in a skill based systematic body of knowledge. Jekayinfa (2003) opined that a profession should require a specialized knowledge to equip the practitioners with the basic mental skills and good scientific foundations of such profession. This knowledge is to be acquired through attendance of formal recognised institution of learning .The mastery of the core relevant knowledge requires high intelligence, competence and long period of intensive training. Oyekan (2000) contended that professional competence and practical experience of a professional emanate from brilliant ideas and principles arrived at by creative research and logical

analysis towards a resolution of human concerns and problems. There is no doubt that the acquisition of knowledge by a professional usually takes a lengthy period of years so as to expose the trainee to the core knowledge competence require which includes: ethical conducts, practical skills, handling different circumstances, industrial training, strategic competence and mental alertness needed. Professionals exhibit high standard of professional and intellectual excellence. This is a major feature that differentiates a professional from other occupations

2. Professional Code of Ethics: A functioning profession rigidly adhere to profession's laid down rules, values, norms and standards to ensure control the mode of entry into the occupation. Profession is not a pop-corn business that cheaters or anybody can be invoiced in. Practitioners have their "yeses and nos" binding on all members. They are guided by principles of not exploiting the ignorance of their clients to enrich themselves. Practitioners have strong legal demeanour to withdraw the licence of any erring member and discipline as appropriate. They have strong insurance cover (e.g. professional indemnity) to prevent bring indebted to any client when a mistake or any error is committed. Maintenance of minimum standards of decorum for professionals included self confidence, vitality, honesty, transparency, dignity, integrity, loyalty, productivity excellence etc.

Oyekan (2000) emphasized that professional ethics are the basic habits made up of equitable principles or basic habits made up of equitable of practitioners of a profession. The ethics are philosophically inclined for being morally good in a wide spectrum of professional activities.

3. Professional organization:- A profession should have a strong organisation that would see to the welfare and protection of their members. Besides all other provisions, practitioners are better protected by the organization they belong to. All professional organisations are duly registered in Nigeria. They include the Nigeria Society for Engineers (NSE), the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), just to mention must few. But the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is only recognized as a trade Union not as a professional organization in Nigeria.

4. Controlled entrance: - Entry into the profession is guided by setting and enforcing standards for selection, training, licensure and certification (Jekayinfa, 2003). A very good example is the medical profession; nobody can belong to the profession, without attending mandatory one year housemanship and enrolled them as a practitioner.

5. Freedom of practice:- The policies of government does not inhibit the autonomy of a profession. There is a total and absolute freedom to practice a profession. A practitioner has an unshakable display of quality job as a result of freedom granted him to perform altruistic service in the affairs of others.

6. Professional and in service growth: - Different organisations have avenues for training and re-training their practitioners. Various professions believe that knowledge is dynamic and ongoing. Practitioners attend mandatory and instituted seminars, lectures, conferences, workshops, presentations and exhibitions to update their practitioners' skills and knowledge. It is pertinent to note here that attendance of all the above in-service trainings is not an optional affair for all practitioners.

7. Legal Recognition:- Engineers, lawyers, medical doctors and teachers are highly recognized and respected professions in the society. Jekayinfa (2003) reported that the public trust their judgements and skills. The society cannot do way with the unique service to humanity. For example, Decree N031, of May 1993 gave legal recognition to teaching as a profession but it appears the decree is yet to be implemented in Nigeria.

8. Period of Internship of Apprenticeship:- In the process of acquiring process of acquiring professional knowledge needed to practice the occupation, extensive period of internship of apprenticeship is needed for practical knowledge and excellence. Engineering, pharmacy, medicine and law profession require one year mandatory practical knowledge of internship. A teacher requires a period of twelve weeks of teaching practice.

V. THE CONCEPT OF TEACHING PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

Teaching profession in Nigeria have been handed a lot of criticisms, maybe it is a profession or not. These criticisms have been making needed changes difficult and often incur resentment. Critics of teaching profession have said, teaching lacks the germane characteristics of a viable profession. For example, entrance and certification is not strictly controlled by the set standards. This is believed to open the flood gate for cheaters and unqualified staff to erode the standard of teaching profession.

In Nigeria, teachers are poorly motivated and less paid. This makes the profession replete with some features of other occupations that make life worth living for the practitioners. The orientation of those in teaching profession is that of very low esteem and those permanently stucked on a plateau.

Okunloye 2003 opined that teachers, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and others who have put up an advocacy about teaching as a profession have identify those features of a real profession which are true of teaching in Nigeria. The characteristics possessed by teaching profession includes, being an occupation, an activity that requires basic skills, acquisition of a systematic body of knowledge, profession code of ethics and by various tiers of government.

In retrospect, teaching profession since the ages has been an occupation that enjoys the unpleasant nickname of an "ungrateful trade" a profession for the "never-do-well or an occupation for the down-trodden (Ajayi, 1997). Other members of the society regard teaching profession with contempt, feeling that it is a refuse camp for mediocre; people who are industrious but unimaginative and uncreative; people with average drive for power, average ambition and escapism (Majasan,1995)

Oyekan (2000) said the situation was worsened by the lingering social, economic and political crisis in Nigeria. Hence, the teachers were compelled to demand for:

- Full professionalization of teaching
- Better condition of service
- Full professionalization of teaching
- Prompt payment of the gratuities and pensions on retirement;
- Adequate public recognition for teacher s that nurture all the productive citizens of the society
- Special teacher's salary structure (TSS)

The entire above mentioned requests are so important to the development of professionals, educational system and good citizenship.

Finally, teaching profession in Nigeria should be fully reckoned with and recognized so as to help keep the country (Nigeria) together in the midst of the tornado like frenzy we often find ourselves in without a lasting solution.

VI. PROBLEM OF TEACHING PROFESSION NIGERIA

Teaching profession has been dogged by so many problems and challenges that had attended its conception in Nigeria. A catalogue of problems has deprofessionalised teaching profession in Nigeria. They include;

- Low wages, bad motivation and poor welfares
- Irregular self esteem in the society
- Absence of education professional academy
- Lack of professional and in-service trainings
- Short period of internship
- High teacher –pupil ratio
- Politicizing education
- Lack of autonomy by Nigeria Union of Teachers(NUT)
- Unwarranted Governments' intervention
- Poor budgetary allocation to teaching profession
- Poor work environment (e.g. infrastructures amenities etc)
- Governments inability to register NUT as a profession organization
- Massive unqualified staff.
- Porous entry qualification

VII. CONCLUSION

The above challenges are bane and sheer difficulties smearing the image of teaching profession in Nigeria. The extent to which these challenges are solved will determine the prospects of teaching as a profession Nigeria. If the populace and the three tiers of government can develop a gnawing unfettering and flaming urge to tackle these problems, teaching profession will surely move into over drive to be the best profession in Nigeria.

If the problems are not ruthlessly dealt with or peripherally addressed, teaching profession will surely go into a bad shift in Nigeria and degenerate into “off-purpose and pap occupation where body can be invoiced in for making ends meet. The nation at large will sure pay bitterly for it by being on the bottom rungs of economic ladder.

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