



Research Article

Teaching profession in Nigeria: Teacher professionalization is the way out

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Abstract

This paper used a survey design; it provides a conceptual framework on the term teaching profession and its related concepts. The target population of the study is 3000 teachers across Maiduguri Metropolitan. These include teachers from primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. 10% of this population was used that is 300 teachers were selected using stratified random sampling technique. However, to analysis the data, simple percentage and Chi-square (χ^2) test of independent was used as the statistical tools. The study revealed that 60% of the respondents agreed that lack professionalization of teaching was the reason behind the *laisier faire* attitude of people to join teaching as a vocation. In addition, the χ^2 test of independent showed that at $p= 0.05$ level of significance it shows that there is a significant relationship between teaching profession and teacher professionalization. The paper argued that teaching is not profession but an emerging profession. Therefore, the study suggested that teachers' professionalization as the only way out to make teaching an enviable profession in Nigeria.

Keywords: Teaching, Profession, Professionalism, Professionalization, Way-out.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the most noble and the oldest profession in the history of mankind. Man before now has engaged himself in activities such as craftwork, fishery, hunting and even defending their territories as warriors. Today activities of man are categorised into Engineering, Law, Pharmacy, and Medicine. All these professions and others are made by teachers. Thus, the profession of teaching is the most indomitable profession in the world. Indeed history has shown that teachers occupied the position of great honour and influence in their communities. Most sociologists and scholars who concerned themselves with the study of professions and professionalism argued that there are significant strides between occupations. They consider some occupations as professional and others as not. Those that are not considered professional are either semi-professional or non-professional. There is a long debate over whether teaching is a profession or not. A thorough review of the literature involving the attributes and behaviours attributed to a profession according to theorists revealed a consensus that there are some defining criteria of profession such as knowledge, theoretical base, altruism, code of ethics, autonomy, service, competence, commitment, professional association, prestige, authority, and trustworthiness. According to UNESCO and International Labour Organization (1984) in Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (2004) in its 6th recommendations of 194 joint commentaries states

that teaching should be regarded as a profession. Hence, the report sees teaching as a form of public service which requires teachers expert knowledge and specialised skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study. The UNESCO/ILO report calls teaching to be a sense of personal and co-operate responsibility for the education and welfare of the public in their charge. In a similar vein, National Policy on Education (2004) posits that teaching in Nigeria should attain the highest standard possible. Therefore, the Policy states that since no education can rise above the quality of its teacher, teacher education should continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. Furthermore, all teachers in educational institutions from pre-primary to university should be professionally trained. Teacher education programme should be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties (T.R.C.N., 2004). This paper intends to find answers to questions such as: What is professionalism? What are the criteria that make a profession? Why teaching is not enviable profession in Nigeria? The paper will also find answers to these problems and proffer possible solutions.

What is Professionalism?

Professionalism refers to acting appropriately and in a manner that is acceptable and careful. It is completing one's tasks and responsibilities on time. It can also be defined as the proper attitude and conduct of a person. It is a valued quality that has friendly, polite, and business-like characteristics. It is a necessary trait for every employee and business. Hence, it also refers to any activity of man accompanied with the said characteristics. This activity is based on intellectual action along with personal responsibility. However, to have meaning out of the above definitions of professionalism, it has become imperative to define the term profession.

What is a Profession?

A profession refers to a distinct task which could only be performed meaningfully by an individual who has been initiated, trained and assessed. He has got the training, he has being observed under training by more experienced members and due certification that he is fit has been rendered. A job identified as a profession could not be performed by a member of another profession to the satisfaction of a member or group. In the case of some groups modes of assessment for potential members exist which further means entry into the profession is regulated. Code of behaviour too exist which means that ethical standards are set. A profession is a vocation that requires special skills and knowledge. It is an occupation with some department learning and qualifications, especially one that has high social status. It is a job that utilizes functional education and mental abilities rather than manual or physical labour. Cook and Cook (1960) cited in Orubite (2010) view profession as an occupation in which members acquire a body of systematic knowledge on which their work with people is based, develop on in-group feelings of belonging and responsibility, assume an attitude of moral concern towards clients and join together in association to advance the vocation and control members conduct through established ethics. Pratte and Rury (1991) argue that a profession is an occupation with enviable remuneration and high social status. Furthermore, Orubite (2010) posits that, a profession is a paid job that requires prolonged training and liberal or formal educational qualifications. According to Dada and Fadokun (2010), a profession entails an occupation that is dependent upon specialized intellectual study and training, for the provision of skilled service to other members of the society, government and non-governmental agencies for a definite fee or salary. These definitions show distinct characteristics that could be attached to a vocation or occupation to portray them as a profession. Some of these characteristics are extensive but may not include every attribute that has been ascribed to professions. This is because, the search for standardized criteria by which a vocation/occupation can be recognized as a profession has been on for years; yet there is still disagreement on a universally acceptable list of the characteristics of a profession (Dada, 2010). This brings us to the discussion on the criteria of a profession.

Criteria that make a Profession

There is wide consensus among scholars on the criteria that make a profession. Thus, according to Flexner (1951) in his easy described the criterion that makes a profession as:

1. Professional activity is based on intellectual action along with personal responsibility;
 2. The practice of a profession is based on knowledge, not routine activities;
 3. There is practical application rather than just theorizing;
 4. There are techniques that can be taught;
 5. A profession is organized internally;
 6. A profession is motivated by altruism, with members working in some sense for the good of society.
- Furthermore, John and Ogaboh, (2010) the criteria that make a profession include the following:

1. Provision of essential social services;

2. Possession of specialized knowledge or skills through a long period of training;
3. Code of ethics and a kind of control over the quality of membership;
4. High degree of autonomy for individual practitioner and for the occupational group;
5. Exalt service above personal gains. Emphasis laid on services rendered to society rather than economy or financial gain of practitioners;
6. High social status, rewards and recognition by the public;
7. Professional association which is usually a self-governing organization of members or practitioners.

Shepard, (2011) further agreed with the above criteria when he said a profession must satisfy an indispensable social need and must be based upon well established and socially accepted scientific principles. Hence, to be professional you must acquire adequate pre-professional and cultural training. Therefore, going by these ideas and criteria sociologically one can ask whether teaching in Nigeria is a profession or not. Although, the question of whether teaching is a profession or not is a subject of debate among scholars of education and sociology.

METHODOLOGY

In view of the above, this study is a survey design. The population of this study consists of 3000 teachers across Maiduguri metropolitan area. Out of these 3000, 10% were used as the sample of the study. That is 300 respondents comprising teachers from primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions were chosen to find out their opinions on teacher and teaching profession in Nigeria. The samples were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. However, interview was used as the instrument for data collection. However, Chi-square (χ^2) test of independent was employed to find the extent of the relationship between teaching profession and teacher professionalization.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that 60% of the sampled teachers interviewed agreed that lack of professionalization of teaching was the reason behind the laiser faire attitude of people to join teaching as a vocation. In addition, the χ^2 test of independent showed that at 0.05 level of significance the calculated probability value shows significant relationship between teaching profession and professionalization of teaching. However, as the study revealed professionalization of teaching in Nigeria, it is pertinent to know whether teaching is a profession or not. According to Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (T.R.C.N., 2004) Act No.31 of 1993 teachers are categorised into four (4) classes as follows:

1. A - Class: Holders of PhD in Education or PhD in other fields plus Education (e.g. P.G.D.E. and N.C.E.);
2. B - Class: Holders of Masters Degree in Education or Masters in other field plus Education (e.g. P.G.D.E. and N.C.E.);
3. C - Class: Holders of Bachelor in Education or Bachelor in other fields plus Education (e.g. P.G.D.E. and N.C.E.);
4. D - Class: Holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E.) or equivalent.

Due to the above categorization, the status of teaching as a profession in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world has been a contentious issue over the years. Notwithstanding, some scholars have argued in favour while others against for instance Goodlard (1990) posit that the autonomy and self governance is principally missing in teaching. Abdal-Haqq (1992) argued that when teaching is examined within the traditional perceptions of what constitutes a profession, certain attributes are missing. First, teaching lacks clear defined, codified and accessible knowledge base and where it exists, it has not been useful. Furthermore, Ajayi (2004) observed that teaching meets the more accepted characteristics of a profession partly but not fully because of lack of teachers' commitment to the profession, the porosity of entrance into teaching, the low social status of teaching and poor remuneration of teachers. Orubite (2010) posits that the contention among teachers at various level (primary, secondary and tertiary institution) on who is more superior impede the professionalization of teaching, making teaching to lack the basic prerequisite of being a full profession. Although, the decree setting up Teachers' Registration Council was promulgated in 1993, it is yet to be fully operational. Consequently, autonomy in teaching is significantly absent and the vocation is yet to receive professional status in Nigeria (Dada, 2010). Hence, the T.R.C.N. (2004), further argued that teaching is the oldest and noblest of all professions. However, over the years things appeared to have changed for the worst. In status and qualities, there is the need to enact code of conduct to define the minimum standards expected of a professional teacher. From this quotation it could be observed that teaching before now, was a profession in Nigeria but lost her glory as a distinct profession. Thus, there is need to professionalize teaching again to regain its lost status.

Reasons Why teaching is not a Profession in Nigeria

Most empirical studies on the teaching profession in Nigeria turn up with the same conclusions that the Nigerian child is not enamoured to the profession. The usual reasons are those of poor remuneration and the low perception of others about the teacher. Thus, the studies revealed that the profession is characterized with teachers' poor conditions of service and of irregular payment of salaries, lack of uniform salary scale, poor conditions of schools facilities, unfriendly school environment, insufficient chair for pupils or teachers, chalk, table, running cost and poor in-service development etc. In order to put these into proper focus, the question of why teaching in Nigeria is not an enviable profession can be viewed from so many dimensions. Therefore, issues of teacher's welfare, motivation, registration and professionalization were made the focus of many studies. According to Federal Ministry of Education, (2005) the attempt to evaluate the level of job satisfaction and motivation among teachers is an example of such studies. The trio of low regard for teachers, poor conditions of service, and lack of incentives topped the list. The contributions of head-teachers repeated poor motivation, non-payment of allowances and lack of teaching facilities. Though programs exist for teachers to conveniently upgrade themselves at costs that have been alluded to above as being stiff, little is being done in the view of the researchers for professional development of teachers through school-based or in-service training, seminars and workshops. The failure for professionalising teaching that many teachers see as one of the factors discouraging recruitment into the service is being reconsidered in view of the establishment of the Teachers Registration Council charged with the responsibility of registration of teacher. No real evidence is adduced for this expectation other than the fact that the decree setting up the body says so. All other allusions to that council merely repeat the hope expressed in the decree setting it up. Meanwhile some studies also revealed that non-payment of salaries, frequent teacher transfer, transportation problems, and over-crowded classrooms were among the factors that strongly de-motivate them. Other reasons were teacher's poor conditions of service, lack of seriousness on the part of students as well as inadequate supervision and management were among the factors militating against teachers' morale. On the other hand, pupil's regular class attendances positively motivate teachers. It is also claimed that teachers located in remote areas were usually de-motivated because of lack of incentives attached to them. Teaching was quite demanding and should not be taken for granted. The negative attitudes of parents contributed strongly to the negative demoralization, the inadequacy of teaching facilities are sure ways of de-motivating teachers.

Teachers' Professionalization is the way out

Studies on the relationship between professionalization and teachers' effectiveness; as well as the co-relationship between teaching and national development are quite revealing (Abdal-Haqq, 1992). The understandings that the Nigerian Federation is an embodiment of social institutions that are manned by trained personnel who are produced by teachers; and that these institutions function collectively for national development, propelled our quest for the professionalization of teaching. It is therefore imperative that entrance into teaching should be controlled and regulated by a professional body; the T.R.C.N. This can better be achieved through the professionalization of teaching. The unethical behaviour among teachers, the lack of standardized test scores, the rising tide of violence and teenage pregnancy in public schools, the poor academic performance of students, academic dishonesty among teachers at all levels, the ineffectiveness of regulatory body in the teaching occupation; the poor performance of most teachers and the general institutional weakness in Nigeria among others are all pointers that teaching should be professionalized. In addition, the low social status ascribed to teaching, the poor remuneration and other motivational incentives in teaching jobs further amplified why the occupation should be professionalized. Ajayi (2007) and Yusuf (2010) argued that for occupation to be professionalized, society must hold such a vocation in high esteem, and that practitioners in such occupation must be highly remunerated and motivated. Improvement in the quality of education and school results ultimately takes place in the classroom, once a staff is properly motivated and held in high esteem by the management, efficiency at the workplace would be guaranteed. This would in turn accelerate overall growth and development of the organization and the nation at large. The believe that professional teachers are trained not only to solve problems in the classroom, but also to initiate proposals for solving national problems for the fact that most proposals failed especially in the educational sector for they were not written by professional teachers nor consulted (Emeh, 2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made, that:

1. Entry in the teaching profession should be controlled and regulated by the professional body (TRCN);
2. All unethical behaviours emanating from teachers should be discouraged to give a better status to teachers;

3. Government should accord higher social status to teachers through improved remunerations and other motivational incentives;
4. There should be improvement in the quality of education and school results;
5. The government should embark on the training and retraining of teachers through workshops, seminars, conferences as well as symposium.

CONCLUSION

A teacher being the facilitator of learning, a counsellor to his students, a useful member of the school community, a disciplinarian, an evaluator, a model, a custodian of culture as well as a link between the school and community should be directly initiated into the forefront of national issues. It is therefore, believed that his vast knowledge, skills, his continuous growth in the profession, his mental health, and his belonging to the professional bodies, all of which motivate him to play his various role to the best of his ability. Some teachers lack professional zeal, qualification and competence. Therefore, with this attribute one can rightly say that some are teachers and some are rather cheats. They became teachers because they could not get employment elsewhere, and leave teaching as soon as they get a greener pasture. These teachers believe that they are managing the teaching profession but the crux of the matter is that it is teaching that should manage them. They took teaching as a stepping stone for other lucrative jobs. It has been observed that some persons of doubtful character were engaged as a teacher. This entails that a square peg in a round hole. By and large, through pupil-teacher schemes, teacher training and better incentives the position will surely improve for the better. Therefore, teaching is not profession but an emerging profession or semi-profession. To this end, there is an urgent need for government and its agencies to re-enforce the decree establishing the T.R.C.N. so as to make teaching an enviable profession which will compete favourably with all professions.

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