

The Teacher Matters: Strategies for Making the Teaching Profession More Relevant in Nigerian Educational System

Oyaziwo Aluede

*Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Ambrose Alli University, PMB 14, Ekpoma 310001, Nigeria
E-mail: oyaziwoaluede@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT This paper is premised on the fact that education is an instrument for social change. It is the only known weapon that can combat poverty. In this regard, this paper examined the concepts of education and teaching, the importance and the usefulness of teachers. It also provided strategies for making teachers more relevant in teacher education and teaching profession. These strategies include: reviewing the existing teacher education programmes to emphasize how to teach, which can be achieved by replacing the already existing six weeks teaching practice exercise with internship of one- year duration. The paper further recommended the establishment of licensure and credentialing board and the need to propose a bill before the National Assembly to regulate the practice of teaching. In addition, the paper recommended the revision of the curricula of teacher education programmes in Nigerian Universities or Colleges of Education, to align them with the mission and vision of the primary and secondary schools

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, nations have had to review their educational systems to bring about the most desired change and development. This stems from the main fact that everybody has come to realize that education is the major instrument for social change. It is the only known parameter that can bring about the much desired development to any nation. Hence much attention is today being paid by government to the type of educational systems, it is providing to her citizenry (Aluede et al. 2003). Education is one colonial legacy in Nigeria that has permanently come to stay with Nigerians. Hence, if you call anything a school, or college or university, locate it anywhere and open it anytime, Nigerians will stock there hoping to be educated (Imogie 1998; Imogie 2007).

The former Director-General of United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Federico Mayor (1995) was more explicit when he opined that education in its broadest sense, is to develop or to improve the intellectual and moral faculties of the child or the young by means of precepts, exercises, examples, etc. To Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), education is an instrument for national development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. Hence, the Federal government of Nigeria (2004) expected that education would

foster the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society.

Education therefore is the basis for freedom, which is to say with education we can experience or be exposed to personal sovereignty – the ability to decide for ourselves between the various available options of life, including government (Mayor 1995). Personal sovereignty therefore is the only sovereignty that counts. This is why education is the most powerful tool of democracy.

Interestingly, the educated man is expected to assess the world along historical, economic and geographical perspective and will above all these, have regard for the importance of truth, accuracy and elegance in thinking (Moore 1982). The educated man therefore is that individual who is able to create an understanding that change is possible and the knowledge of these alternatives would lead to the desired change. Furthermore, the educated man is that individual who has been able to combat illiteracy and underdevelopment. Moore (1982, as cited in Aluede et al. 2003) noted that an illiterate person is the individual that is characterized by the following:

1. Considerably circumscribed in playing his full potential role in the economic development of his country;
2. Cannot participate fully and meaningfully in the social, civic, political and cultural activities of his country;

3. Forced to live a marginal and dehumanized life;
4. Highly vulnerable to exploitation and oppression; and
5. Cannot achieve his individual liberation, and realize self-actualization.

Even though we have tried to provide different definitions of the concept “education” as provided by leading scholars in Education, mention must be made to the fact that no one has defined education better than Paulo Friere in 1972. The Brazilian educator described education as becoming critically aware of one’s reality in a manner that leads to effective action upon it (Friere 1972). Educated men understand their world well enough to deal with it effectively. Such men, if they existed in sufficient numbers, would not leave the present absurdities of the present world unchanged. But when they exist in scanty numbers, the society is in peril, as disaster and destruction must loom (Imogie 2007). To be educated is to acquire appropriate skills and develop mental, social and physical abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

The thrust of this paper therefore is to succinctly define the concept of education, the concept of teaching, the importance of teaching, the concept of teacher, the usefulness of teachers and provide strategies for making teachers more relevant in teacher education and teaching profession.

THE CONCEPT OF TEACHING

Definitions of teaching abound in literature. For example, Ukeje (1998, cited in Urevbu 2006) defines teaching as a systematic presentation of facts, ideas, skills and techniques to pupils or students or any leader. It is also any interpersonal influence aimed at changing the ways in which other persons can or will behave.

Teaching according to Imogie (1999) is a means of guiding students in securing the amount and quality of experience, which will promote the optimum development of their potentials as human beings. This means that teaching can be conceived both as a ‘science’ and as an ‘art’. It is an ‘art’ because it involves personal style and is developed largely through practice under a master guide. It is science because it helps to impart through paper study.

According to the International Dictionary of Education (as cited in Imogie 1999), teaching is simply the work and occupation of teachers. To Urevbu (2006), a number of approaches and techniques have been put forward in dealing with the question “What is teaching?” One approach is the analysis of languages and concepts that people use in discourse. This is what is known as the linguistic analysis approach. Urevbu (2006) further maintained that philosophers have also used other basic techniques in philosophical analysis, such as asking prior questions, “using counter examples”, making distinctions and various types of analytic strategies such as generic type analysis and condition type analysis. These analyses according to Urevbu (1999) have enabled us to see and group ways of thinking and clarifying our thoughts about the concept of teaching.

Komisar (as cited in Urevbu 2006) observed that the teaching act may consist of a thousand and one things e.g., talking, explaining, writing on the chalkboard, listening to students reading, going round the student seats, marking their papers, watching students carry out their group projects, smiling to a student as a sign of approval of his action, etc. But there are situations where a teacher in a classroom may be engaged in the general enterprise of teaching; he may not be performing a teaching act of getting people to learn. More over, there are other kinds of activities, which are not regarded as teaching in a basic sense, but which or might get people to learn. These acts include indoctrination, conditioning, and training.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of teaching, it can best be described as the interactive human relationship designed to promote behavioural change (Imogie 1999). It is the form A teaches B to C, which Urevbu (2006) has succinctly described as a process that a teacher (represented as A) teaches a subject (represented as B) to some one, a learner (represented as C).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING

The major objective of education is to bring about change, which means to produce good and useful citizens in the society; hence the importance of teaching lies in the fact that it is a process whereby the various educational programmes are formulated into actions at the classroom level (Imogie 1999). Teaching as a

process can mar or make a nation in terms of social-political, economic, cultural and physical development. In Nigeria therefore, the quality of teaching at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcating the following values:

- (a) Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- (b) Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- (c) Moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations;
- (d) Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- (e) Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
- (f) Acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance (Federal Government of Nigeria 2004).

THE CONCEPT OF TEACHER

We have noted that education is the totality of all experiences gained whether learned or unlearned from birth (or even before birth, usually referred to as fetal learning) and throughout till death. The person that assists the individual to undergo these experiences can be referred to as a teacher. A teacher can therefore mean many things to us. Pullias and Young (1968, as cited in Imogie 1999) refer to a teacher as follows: a guide; a creator (stimulator of creativity); an authority (one who knows); a person; an evaluator; a builder of community; a story teller (this may be a factor of reality); an actor; an emancipator; a conservator (redeemer and saviour), etc. This may explain the rational behind very many people claiming to be teachers. Imogie (1999) further argued that the task of determining who is a teacher especially in formal educational systems may not be an easy task. He however points to the fact that the determination of who is a teacher can actually be approached from a legal perspective. Accordingly, Section 47(2) and regulation 71(4) of the education (Lagos) ordinance of 1957 provides that: no person shall teach in any school unless his name has been placed on the register of teachers or after his name has been removed from such register

The teacher, according to Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) shall be the individual that has been professionally trained in any teacher education programmes of any of the following College of Education; Faculties of Education;

Institutes of Education; National Teacher's Institute; Schools of Education in the Polytechnics; the National Institute for the Nigerian Language; and the National Mathematical Centre. That is to say that any product outside these categories of institutions would not be regarded as teachers

IS THE TEACHER RELEVANT?

It is an indisputable fact that the teacher matters in instructional delivery at all levels of our educational system, as the teacher is the individual vested with the responsibility of imparting knowledge on the learner. The teacher is the one that teaches the subject matter to the learner. Also, the teacher is the agent upon which the goal of educating any citizen or nation is achieved. Therefore the relevance of the teacher in achieving social change in any nation can not be over emphasized.

Thus, the teacher is the only one that can help his nation attains her dreams and aspiration, as no education system and by extension the entire nation can rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal Government of Nigeria 2004).

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING TEACHERS MORE RELEVANT

We have already noted that teachers are very relevant in achieving the goal of educating the learner. In this section, we would attempt to prescribe ways of strengthening the relevance of teachers in our school system.

1. Reviewing the Existing Teacher Education Programmes

Urevbu (2006) reviewing Nwagwu's (1998) text on teachers and teaching in Nigeria, presented a dismal picture of the challenges and inconsistencies facing teacher education programmes in Nigeria. He further noted that most of the teacher education programmes in Nigeria are academically inadequate in their ability to prepare teachers for the classrooms. For example, although students are usually taught how to plan a lesson and manage a classroom, how to arouse interests, how to ask right questions and how to react to students' responses, how to give homework, etc, they have never been taught on how to teach.

On this note, I suggest that if teachers are to be more relevant and held in high esteem, teacher education programmes in Nigeria must think of reviewing their programmes to emphasize how to teach. In this regard the teaching practice exercise has to be strengthened. One way is replacing it with internship of one year duration which will afford trainee teachers an ample opportunity to learn under the tutelage of professional teachers for a longer time

2. Professionalization of the Teaching Profession

I recognize the fact that Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) Decree (Now an Act) No 31 was promulgated on May 4, 1993 (Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria, 2007), but must add that the Registrar was only appointed in May 1999, which is six years after the promulgation of the Decree (now an Act). Between 1999 and now, the TRCN has been grappling with the task of creating awareness among the populace of her existence.

It must be emphasized that the development and enforcement of series of ethic and standards is one necessary criterion for a profession. I hear that there exists a code of ethical standards for teachers in Nigeria. But as a former classroom teacher in secondary education level for nearly four and half years, and as a teacher educator in a faculty of education in a Nigerian university for about twelve and half years, I have never laid my hands on this document. It is also very likely that majority of my colleagues have never seen a copy of the bye-laws/ constitution of the National Union of Teachers or even the ethical standards for teachers in Nigeria.

I suggest that the National Union of Teachers should partner with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria with a view to making the Code of Ethics' and Standards for Teachers available to the majority of our teachers, so that they can have a better understanding of their professional responsibilities.

3. Revision of the Curricula of Teacher Education Programmes

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) holds that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession in Nigeria shall be the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE). Unfor-

tunately, the teacher education programmes of our Colleges of Education, outside that of Colleges of Education (primary) are at sharp variance with the curriculum of our primary schools throughout the country.

While most NCE programmes emphasize two subject combinations, these subjects may never be taught at the primary school. Consider someone who majored in French or someone who had a double major in Business Education (Accounting) and seeks employment as a primary school teacher, ask yourself what relevance has this training to imparting on our primary school pupils who may be expected to be taught English language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Health science, Computer Appreciation, French, etc. This horrible situation also runs in our junior secondary schools. I therefore propose that if teachers are to be more relevant, the curricula of our NCE programmes and universities must be directed to meet the contents of our primary schools and secondary schools curricular.

4. Establishment of Licensure and Credentialing Board

As it has been, any body can seek employment as a teacher. Furthermore, majority of the teachers you find in our school system today, originally did not plan to take up employment as teachers. Many found themselves in the teaching profession out of frustration. This has led people of different backgrounds and even without any training in teacher education to pursue teaching career in our system.

In other situations, majority of the teachers even though hold degrees in education consider themselves to be in the teaching profession as a last resort. Also there is growing evidence that many of those who get admitted into our faculties of education originally planned a career in other fields of endeavor. Out of frustration this category of teachers gets admitted into Faculties of Education with a desire to transfer to other programmes at the end of the first academic session. Most times this desire is not achieved because of the existing regulations relating to inter- faculty transfers. So majority of them end up pursuing a degree in education, which they have the least interest for. Teachers in this category would certainly have the least motivation for teaching, and expectedly become highly inefficient teachers

In addition, the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria has not even helped matters by their requirement for registration as a teacher. I say this because of the different registration conditions it has imposed on prospective applicants. One question needs to be asked- Does possession of a Ph.D. in education and payment of the prescribed registration fee to TRNC make one a teacher?

I suggest that NUT should partner with TRNC with a view to establishing the Licensure and Credentialing Board that shall conduct professional examinations for all prospective teachers. It is only through this process that we can begin to appreciate the uniqueness and relevance of teachers in our school system.

5. The Need for Continuing Education Programmes

It is common knowledge that most of us graduated from teacher education programmes over two-three decades ago. In spite of the fact that the teaching profession is the most dynamic of all professions in the world, our techniques of teaching and the contents of what we teach have never changed; thereby continuously imparting those old and stale ideas on our students. Perhaps it is in recognition of the dynamism of the teaching profession that the National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria 2004) stipulated that teachers shall continue to take cognizance of changes in methodology and in the curriculum of taught subjects in our schools. It further added that teachers shall be regularly exposed to innovations in their profession and also in-service training shall be developed as an integral part of continuing teacher education and shall also take care of all inadequacies.

I am informed and recognize that the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has produced a manual titled "mandatory continuous professional development (MCPD) programme" for registered teachers in Nigeria (2008). I do not however know when the implementation will start. However, a look at the focus of MCPD especially the core courses and even the emerging issues, one would conclude that this is a novel and laudable effort.

However, I wish to suggest that TRCN must take a step further to provide adequate information about the contents of each of the core courses and emerging issues in the manual, as the

document in its present state is too brief and shallow in contents. Also, TRCN and NUT must partner together with a view to ensuring that any teacher that does not avail himself of the opportunity of continuing education faces disciplinary actions that may include blacklisting, denial of promotion and withdrawal of registration.

6. Proposing a Bill to Regulate the Practice of Teaching

Though the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in its National Policy on Education Section 70, sub Section B stipulates that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the National Certificate of Education (NCE), what you find in most private schools is a sharp variation of this provision. Many of the teachers do not even possess five credits including English Language. Many of them even lack communication skills with very horrible oral and written expression in English Language skills; yet such persons are employed to teach in our school system

In this regard, I challenge the NUT and TRCN to seek legislation at the National Assembly that must regulate the practice of teaching. By such legislation, all quack teachers in our school system would have been flushed out, which will lead to the closing down of all mushroom private schools that have now flooded our streets

CONCLUSION

It is my candid opinion that the teacher matters in any teacher education policies. On the part of the teachers, they must do everything possible to make themselves enviable elements in the society given the role they play in bringing about social change.

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