

Teacher Professionalism and Nigeria's National Development

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Abstract: *Teacher professionalism is the driving force for educational improvement and national development, particularly now that the education system is riddled with so many challenges and conflicting pressures. Investing in teacher professional development is one way that a nation's educational system can improve, and by doing so, ensure that students receive the high-quality teaching they need to succeed. The paper defines who a teacher is and discusses the concept of profession and professionalism, as well as the concept of national development. Teacher professionalism was further conceptualized as a composite of three domains – professional ethics, professional behaviour and professional accountability. Furthermore, the qualities of a professional teacher were highlighted and the relationship between teacher professionalism and national development were discussed. It is therefore recommended amongst others that Policy makers should re-organize and revamp the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and make it more proactive in enforcing the code of ethics and standard of the teaching profession.*

Key words: *Development, national, profession, professionalism, teacher*

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I. Introduction

The teaching profession has remained an all-comers affair. This means that just about anyone who has any certificate and is literate, can be a teacher in Nigeria. This may well account in part for the observed fallen standard of education in Nigeria. The development is greatly evident in the poor performance of students in public examinations and in the tag of Nigerian graduates as being "half-baked" and "unemployable." The establishment of the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was to regulate the practice of teaching in Nigeria. However, this has not been effectively implemented as majority of teachers teaching, especially in higher institutions are still not registered with the TRCN. Professional bodies like the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), Council of Legal Education (CLE), and Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) duly regulate entry and practice of their various professions in Nigeria. These professions have highly functional associations which minimize quackery and impostors. If the teaching profession can have a more effective professional body, this will be one step in ameliorating Nigeria's educational malaise and a step closer to a nationally developed society.

1.1 The Place of a Teacher in the Successful Development of Nigeria

A teacher is a duly licensed professional who has been trained in the art of teaching, possesses dignity and reputation with high moral values, as well as technical and professional competence in the practice of their whole profession. Teaching refers to an act by an experienced and knowledgeable person intended to beget learning through the sharing of information, knowledge impartation, acquisition of skills, beliefs and attitude. Teachers are the greatest asset to any country's education system and they symbolize education itself. A teacher, as considered by Offorma (2009) is a person who has acquired special skills required for effective imparting of knowledge and skills to a group of learners. Teachers are at the central stage in the translation of carefully prepared education plans into reality at the operational and grassroot level (Ibukun, 2009). Unfortunately, majority of Nigerian teachers stumbled into the teaching profession as a result of being unemployed. Most teachers seem to engage in teaching as a last resort while preparing for what they really want to do. Such teachers see it as an opportunity to be in a profession that gives them enough spare time to engage in other profit-making ventures.

1.2 Concept of Profession and Professionalism

There are numerous characteristics and standards of profession. A profession, going by its literal definition, is a type of job that needs special training or skill. Profession refers to an activity routinely carried out by someone with special skills for a fee as opposed to a voluntary activity. According to Baggini (2005), the term profession has its roots in the Latin word 'profess', meaning to be an expert in some skills or field of

knowledge. As defined by Orubite (2010), profession is a paid job that requires prolonged training and liberal or formal educational qualifications. A profession entails an occupation that is dependent upon specialized intellectual study and training for the provision of skilled services to other members of the society, government, non-governmental agencies for a definite fee or salary (Dada & Fadokun, 2010). A key attribute of any profession is a standard list which serves as a central guide and reference for one's conduct, behavior, attitude, and day-to-day decision making. Sha (2011) declared that the characteristics of a profession include; standardized education based on a theoretical body of knowledge, subscribing to codes of ethics, belonging to professional associations, being recognized and acknowledged by the public through accountability, certification or accreditation.

Professionalism connotes that teachers must command the confidence and respect of the public by maintaining a reputation for integrity, accountability, confidentiality, competence and commitment. Campbell (2003) argues that, in many respects, the essence of professionalism is defined by the principles of ethics that govern not only the expected conduct of professionals but also the spirit of commitment and responsibility they embody as both individual practitioners and collective associates. Professionalism in teaching as argued by Adendorff (2001) is best defined and described not in terms of pay, status or qualifications, but by looking at the distinctive kinds of actions and judgments that teachers typically make. Beijsaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) explained the concept of professionalism as a multi-dimensional structure consisting of one's attitudes and behaviours towards their job and it refers to the achievement of high level standards and subject matter expertise. Similarly, Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) portray professionalism as the quality of one's practice; the manner of conduct within an occupation; how members integrate their obligations with their knowledge and skills in a context of collegiality, and their contractual and ethical relations with clients. Furthermore, Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) identified five major aspects of professionalism for teachers namely; character, commitment to change and continuous improvement, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, obligations and working relationships beyond the classroom.

The concept of professionalism as added by Meena (2010) includes teachers' confidence in their ability to control their work, ensuring learning of individual students, cooperation and collaboration, influencing others in improving practice in schools and teachers' autonomy. Some scholars still consider professionalism as an ideology which embodies appealing values of service, trustworthiness, integrity, autonomy and reliable standards (Sachs, 2003; Ianiska & Garcia-Zamor, 2006; Van Nuland, 2009). Thus, according to Salehnia and Ashraf (2015), teacher professionalism affects the role of the teacher and his or her pedagogy which in turn affects the student's ability to learn effectively.

1.3 Components of Professionalism

There are three main components of professionalism which has been identified namely;

Professional Ethics: This component focuses on the legal and ethical issues to which a professional teacher must adhere to, such as the code of professional conduct delineated in the institutions handbook or by state or federal boards of education; and some local, state and federal laws pertaining to educational and instructional issues.

Professional behaviour: This focuses on processes, procedures, competence and productivity applied in the course of carrying out one's duties. It also has to do with the exhibition of appropriate behaviours such as decent appearance, promptness, maintaining a civil and appropriate relationship with colleagues, parents and students.

Professional accountability: This focuses on the exhibition of high level responsibility towards lifelong teaching and learning, students, society, and the profession. Examples of professional accountability would include teachers' availability to students for consultation; regularity in classroom teaching; becoming an active member of one's professional association; volunteering for school or community functions; and engaging in academic activities like conferences, seminars, workshops, among others.

1.4 Concept of National Development

Development means different thing to different people and can be said to be both multidimensional and multifaceted. A country is said to be developed when it is able to provide qualitative life, have a stable economy, and meet basic needs of her citizenry. Nigeria can be termed as a developing nation because in spite of its enormous human, material and natural resources, it is still grappling with the problems of development. Lichman and Markovitz as cited in Kingdom and Maekae (2013) stressed that a developed society is one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for majority of its inhabitants and that in such a society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members.

Lawal and Abe (2011) viewed development as a process of societal development where improvement in the well-being of people is generated through strong partnerships between all sectors inclusive of corporate bodies and other groups in the society. Todaro and Smith (2006) saw development as a multi-dimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or humane life. These researchers identified sustenance, self-esteem and freedom as the three basic components for understanding national development. Development is seen as the gradual advancement or growth through a series of progressive changes (Ugwuogo, 2013). It was opined by the Development Workers in Global Solidarity (2010) that development is to have long and healthy lives, be knowledgeable, have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living and to participate in the life of the community.

A nation is said to be nationally developed when a stable balanced growth is achieved between the country's natural and material resources and the living conditions of its citizenry. National development is seen as a purposeful change in the society that contributes to social and economic well-being and advancement of its people without creating disharmony (UNESCO, 2009). Mohammed, Ayinla and Adeoye (2008) described national development as a process by which continuous increase in a system's efficiency produces the condition which results in general upliftment. In the same vein, Egwu as cited in Adeyera (2011) stated that national development is the establishment of a viable and buoyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the enthronement of equality and social justice and a building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethics, religious and geo-political identities develop a collective sense of imagination that they are one. What constitutes national development includes; quality education by professionals, provision of functional basic infrastructure, access to good medical facilities, productive and rewarding employment, democracy, political, social and economic stability.

Consequently, a nation cannot be said to be developed when a significant portion of her population are not educated and are taught by unqualified teachers thereby creating a rot in the country's education system. That is why Ani, Onyia and Iketaku (2013) opined that national development must therefore route for change in all areas of culture which include the economy, technology and environment in such a way that the physical and mental abilities of the citizenry are best positioned to achieve beneficial change.

II. The Professional Teacher

Acquiring a professional teaching qualification is not the only criterion that makes one a professional teacher. Neither does claiming membership of a particular profession makes one a professional. There are quite a number of qualities which when combined, makes one a professional in his or her chosen field. Therefore, a professional teacher must possess the following qualities:

Competence: A professional teacher must possess pedagogical, managerial and subject knowledge competences. The ability to discover the most effective teaching methods and technique; competence in teaching; undertaking constant self-evaluation; and professional development makes up pedagogical competence. Teachers' pedagogic competence is also related to a series of teaching activities carried out to achieve a successful learning and teaching processes in the classroom. Managerial competence has to do with a teachers' planning, organizational, relational and classroom management skill. Subject knowledge competence on the other hand, entails knowing the curriculum of a particular subject, the body of concepts, learning theories, definitions, skills, facts, methods and how to integrate them cognitively.

Commitment: Teacher's commitment involves multiple parameters like availability to students for consultation, regularity in classroom teaching, guiding and carrying out research, and engaging in other academic activities like conferences, workshops and seminars for professional development. Apart from the students, teachers are also expected to be committed to parents, lifelong teaching and learning, excellence, basic human rules, profession and the society.

Performance: A professional teacher must be efficacious, which means having the power to achieve the desired effect, effectively teach the concepts and must be reliable and dedicated enough to achieve educational targets. Teachers' performance involves his or ability to effectively monitor students' learning during teaching and to effectively assess students' work and behaviour in the classroom.

Good Conduct: An ideal professional teacher must possess the ability to maintain quality communication with students, parents and other professionals. He or she should always accept constructive criticisms, demonstrate honesty and integrity, work well with others, and be punctual at all times. Ability to maintain professional ethics and conducts; acceptable appearance; demonstrate self-respect to others; effective in oral and written communication devoid of slangs as well as maintain a good oral and written demeanor on social media and offline.

III. Teacher Professionalism and National Development

Teachers have been recognized as one of the most significant influencers and contributors to quality education for national development in any self-respecting nation. A nation's achievement of quality education largely depends on teacher professionalism which encompasses teacher quality, values, character, attitude to work, qualification, skills and competence. By this, a truly professional teacher is instrumental to the implementation and evaluation of a responsive national education for development. Professionalism enables teachers to engage in continuous professional development and maintenance of quality standards which measures up to national and international standards.

Teacher professionalism cannot be isolated from the nation's educational policy and its implementation. Recognizing teachers as professionals as it is obtainable in other developed climes and ensuring that their emolument and conditions of service are a true reflection of a professional would determine the professional status of teachers. Ejiogu (2017) stated that for the country to achieve its developmental goals, teachers must assume their incontestable place in enhancing the realization of sound national development plan. Most teachers are poorly and lately paid, operate in offices devoid of good furnishing, denied of some allowances found in other professions and are also subjected to intolerable working conditions which are a major source of brain drain in our institutions. The essence of professionalism is to raise the status and of the teaching profession and improve the quality of education which invariably impacts on national development.

In well recognized professions like the engineering, law and medicine, the minimum number of years spent in the university to acquire a degree is five years. Afterwards, the law and medical professionals embark on a one-year specialized training in Nigerian Law School and one-year internship (housemanship) respectively. This enables them undergo a long period of specialized training which asserts their claim and provide control before they can practice their profession. For teachers, especially those in the universities who do not have the National Certificate of Education (NCE) and those in the faculty of education who undergo six weeks practicum or three months teaching practice, the period for specialized training is missing or considered grossly inadequate for one to become a professional teacher. A similar one-year specialized training should also be introduced to prospective teachers before they become inducted into the teaching profession. This specialized training is a path-way to ensuring that teachers achieve good result in the assignment of teaching, nation- building and the educational system as a whole.

Teacher professionalism resulting in quality education is one of the most potent tool for positive transformation from all the instruments and approaches to national development. This cannot be achieved if teaching is not subjected to well-structured reforms and repositioning strong enough to transform a society. There is a lingering mirage that providing interventions in the education sector is capable of enhancing the quality of education without the equally needed professional teacher to activate the input process for desired educational outcomes. Second only to students, the teacher is the heart of the education process and the main determinant of the quality and effectiveness of its results (Eduwen & Osagie-Obazee, 2016). There is an urgent need to reposition teacher professionalism so that it can be of utility value to national development.

IV. Conclusion

Teacher professionalism is an integral and viable tool for achieving educational goals and national development. In conclusion, it is therefore safe to say that teacher professionalism is a pathway to achieving the highest standards in teaching profession based upon the professional formation, knowledge, skills and values. The paper also described the qualities that a professional teacher should possess so as to engender sustainable national development in Nigeria. Until the teaching profession in Nigeria is fully professionalized across all educational levels, quality of education cannot be any better and national development cannot be achieved.

V. Recommendations

1. Policy makers should re-organize and revamp the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and make it more proactive in enforcing the code of ethics and standard of the teaching profession. Its activities should also be enforced on universities lecturers and not just on primary and secondary school teachers.
2. Federal government through educational policy makers should provide concrete forms of policies to encourage teachers to continue learning and knowledge development. This can be done by incentivizing professional development through monetary support like salary supplements and non-monetary support such as prompt transportation to and from professional development programmes, or time devoted specially to professional development.
3. Policy makers should implement initiatives that bring teachers together for peer networks of collaboration, learning, formal induction programmes and mentoring which are strongly linked to teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction.
4. Federal government should always consult properly with professional teachers' associations like the TRCN on professional standards so as to reflect the richness of the teaching profession.

5. Educational stakeholders should ensure that professional roles and boundaries are clearly defined and maintained across the education workforce and should be recognized by local and national structures of accountability.

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