
RE-ENVISIONING TEACHER EDUCATION POLICY FOR PROFESSIONALIZATION IN NIGERIA LESSONS FROM HISTORY

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Abstract

Teacher education was part of western education which was introduced in the early part of the nineteenth century in Nigeria. The status of teachers reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society. It is often said that no nation can rise above the level of its teacher. This expression emphasizes the important role of the teacher as transmitter and promoter of knowledge. In this connection, Nigeria has made considerable progress in school education since independence with reference to overall literacy, infrastructure and universal access and enrolment in schools. Prior to 1842, there was no formal training or certification required to teach in Nigeria school system. In 1853, the Church Missionary Society opened the Abeokuta Training Institution for the training of teachers. The development of teacher training colleges in Nigeria started in the second half of the 19th Century with different categories of Teacher Training Institutions. However, prior to this period, the pre-service teachers would have served as pupil teacher for two years before proceeding to the Elementary Training College. Professionalization of Teaching became a struggle over the years as Nigeria adapted its system to meet a rising demand for primary and secondary education with the context of National Policy on Education. The policy reaffirmed that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Therefore, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. The policy further stated that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). The policy concluded that all teachers in the nation's educational institutions from primary to University would be professionally trained.

Professionalisation of teaching is still struggling with a lot of challenges ranging from qualitative degradation and socio-cultural inequalities. With school explosion, teaching activity has become a mass occupation and subordinate to a strong external control. It is concluded that for teacher education to take a turn around, it is important that policy makers, educators and all stakeholders situate a change in the preparation of pre-service teachers for professionalisation.

Keywords: Professionalisation, Teacher Education, National Policy on Education and Pre-Service Teachers.

Background to the Study

Over the years, teacher education has been the subject of numerous inquiries in Nigeria. Most of the recommendations in the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) hardly remain implemented, however, reforms in other sectors of education have shaped the epistemological foundations of teacher education. In Nigeria, and with teaching, the professionalism in education has been exposed to ridicule and dispute in the face of doubtful professionalism in the 'profession' (Ajayi 2004).

This paper suggests some reasons why such profession, with the largest population of workforce in Nigeria with current debate surrounding teacher education and professionalisation. It is organised into three major parts:

- (1) a story of education in Nigeria at the inception of western formal education from the middle of the twentieth century,
- (2) the notion of teacher education and professional policy
- (3) the possibility of new-making teacher education a full profession that will be devoid of controversy. The first section provides a brief overview of the Nigerian education system from 1853-1900 as a way of introducing the larger historical context in which teacher education is situated. This is very crucial for the understanding of the early efforts that have shaped educational policy. Suggestions are offered for re-envisioning teacher education through high quality training for teachers and professional competence to orchestrate fundamental knowledge and skills that are essential for effective practice.

Teacher Education in Nigeria

The emergence of teacher education in Nigeria dated back to second half of the 19th Century. The First Teacher Training Institution ever known in Nigeria was established in 1853 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) known as the Training Institution which was later transferred to Lagos in 1867 consequent upon the expulsion of missionary from Abeokuta. Adesina (2005) observed that history of teacher education revealed that early attempts at the training of teachers were undertaken by the Christian Missionaries. He further at its earliest stage, the teacher was the catechist and sometimes referred to as the 'Master' nor priest, but found himself performing function of all of these.

Statement of the Problem

The study investigated epistemological development of teacher education in Nigeria. Specifically, it highlighted the general features of teacher education and the problems of professionalization as guided by the policy documents.

Research Questions

- a) What were the early efforts of the missionaries in the development of teacher education in Nigeria?
- b) What were the general features of teacher education?
- c) What are the professional predicaments of teacher education?
- d) In what ways can teacher-education be re-envisioned for professionalization.

Teacher Education and Professional Training

The quality of education in any country is reflected and related to the quality of men and women who serve as teachers in its school system (Adesina 2005). The 1969 curriculum conferences described the teacher as 'the key man in the entire educational programme and further deserved that the quality his job as a teacher. Teaching remains the oldest profession in the world because practitioners in the other professions in the world because practitioners in the other professions are taught by the teacher. Government interest in teacher education was expressed mainly in the form regulating conditions of services of those in the profession and organising a number of evening classes and short

vacation courses as in-services programmes for serving teachers. Such classes lasting thirteen weeks were reported in 1912 as established at Onitsha and the Normal Training classes at Warri and Bonny. (Adesina 2005). It was observed that teacher education programme in its earlier stages was predominantly concerned with the provisions of teachers for the primary school system.

Professional teacher education for Nigerian teachers was for a long time, the training of primary school teachers whereas as the professionalisation of secondary school teachers did not reach a significant level until after a long period of time.

What are the Professional Predicament of Teacher Education

The development of teacher education in Nigeria has been impeded largely by many factors

- (a) Teacher education in Nigeria was for a long time a missionary enterprise lacking full support of the government
- (b) Teacher education in Nigeria was primarily concerned with the supply of teachers for the primary schools.
- (c) The scope of teacher education was strictly dictated by availability of teacher redactors.
- (d) Teacher education had always been considered as expensive venture (Adesina 2005)

Classical literature on the professions used a variety of trait models to define and describe the professions. Characteristics helped to evaluate occupations based on their conformity or deviance from the standard taxonomy. Lathan (2000) explained that the approach came under increasing scrutiny in later decades as scholars queried the ability or inability to conform to the traits was influenced by the forces outside, the functional value of the knowledge the profession controlled.

Typical Characteristics of a Profession

- i. Knowledge based on empirical techniques and theoretical complexity.
- ii. Mastery of that knowledge base requiring lengthy periods of education and training that are usually university based.
- iii. Specialised training designed to both equip and socialize into the culture and symbols of the profession.
- iv. Tasks that are inherently valuable to society and relevant to key social and human values.
- v. Members exhibit a long time commitment to the profession and to continuous upgrading of their knowledge and skills.
- vi. Performances of tasks are characteristic by a high degree of autonomy.
- vii. The profession is guided by a well developed code of ethics that guides practice and defines the professions value.

The current predication of the teaching profession draws attention to some of the institutional markers as highlighted above. In some cases, teachers are over-stretched in terms of their workload where their traditional pedagogic activities are curtailed in favour of compliance and over-personalisation. Many literature on the policy effects have painted teachers, as powerless victims operating under a state of Siege Ball (2003), if teachers' professionalism is to be developed, then it must be grounded in some conception of their expert authority because it is this that makes the whole idea of professionalism necessary. Furthermore, it is only through this professionalism that sufficient trust can be re-established in the minds of their clients (students, parents, careers).

The impact of professional knowledge on teachers' professional authority and trust therefore relies on them engaging in a number continuous knowledge engagement processes. These include:

1. Continually expanding and refining their knowledge base-both subject specific and generic.
2. Translating their practice and knowing into articulable knowledge.
3. Learning in action and testing their knowledge through reasons and the use of practical arguments.
4. Developing a deep understanding of the procedural knowledge and processes underlying their thinking.
5. Continually up-dating their knowledge and professional competence.
6. Assessing the ability, relevance and adequacy of their knowledge with the aim of improving.
7. Testing that knowledge in a variety of contexts.

Re- envisioning Teacher Education for Professionalization

If professionalization in its simplest is the shift towards more self-governance of standard and practice, and away from current levels of control by government officials and politicians, then there are really only two main routes to that destination. The first by legislation that will be design to transfer functions from bodies under direct government control to some form of autonomous status amounting to professional self-governance for teaching profession to attain full professionalisation. Secondly, government should transfer functions to a new autonomous body for the teaching profession. The university was the best place for this project of professionalisation through the legitimating by knowledge (knowledge-based education). Moving the training of all teachers to university was done in most industrialized countries during the second half of the twentieth century (Shimihara and Holowin-sky 1995).

Conceptual and Contextual Challenges

Tardif and Borges (2009) identified in broad indicators of the global nature of the professionalisation of teaching

- i) Elevation, prolongation and universitarisation of the training.
- ii. The integration of research in training and building a base of knowledge specific to the teachers' work.
- iii. The central place given to practical training and internships.
- iv. Control modes of learning and skills level
- v. Collaboration between training institutions and schools

A lack of social recognition; moral contract between profession and troubled society with school explosion in the country, teaching activities has become a “mass occupation” subordinate to strong external control aspects activities-programme a hierarchy of near or distant (depending on the context, principals, inspection, guardians) an activity which is structurally subordinated.

Professionalizing Education through Research and Graduate Preparation

The recent developmental effort in professionalizing education through scientific research led to establishment of university of Education. This compared with Medicine and Law, this effort sought to place teacher education in the modern research university with the expectation that this would dignify education as a career, lead to the development of a specialised knowledge base and support the professional preparation of educational leaders (Clifford and Guthrine, 1988). This effort has not yielded much result as Sharon (2006) observed that leading university schools of education bypassed the preparation of new teachers; concentrating instead on graduate programmes for experienced teachers interested in careers outside classroom.

Conclusion

In this discussion, the position of teacher education has been considered in accordance with the characteristics of a profession. In some areas, teacher education qualifies to be regarded as a profession and in others, failed to be described in terms of the characteristics of a profession in broad terms. The professional development of teachers is rigorous such that teachers are not only to learn the various school subjects but also to behave in a way befitting the people who are to bring up the young generations. Discussions around the professionalisation' of teaching via-a-vis the standards and accountability movements have flooded the teacher education literature and research. This however, will very well continue to be the issue of the day.

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