

Is Teaching the Preferred Profession of Nigerian Women?

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Abstract

The paper examined whether teaching is the preferred profession of Nigerian women. It observed in retrospect the fundamental role of education in human and national development, while noting the import of teaching and teacher in bringing this about. The paper also highlighted the value of the teacher in the society; as well as that of the women as key players in the job of nation building. National and international statistics on the feminisation of teaching were reviewed and juxtaposed. The teaching profession in Nigeria was also critiqued. Finally, it concluded that although Nigerian women have been in the teaching profession over the years at all levels of education; the statistics of women involved in teaching in Nigeria does not measure the standard that would suggest acceptable. Therefore, it recommends among others that recruitment of trained and qualified female teachers should be given priority to increase the statistics to an acceptable level.

Keyword: *Teaching, Femnisation, Profession, Nigerian Women*

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Background to the Study

Education is the live wire of any country. It is a major tool for both individual and national development. The root of education is traced to two Latin words - 'educere'; which means to draw out and 'educare', which means to nourish; to bring up or to raise. Both words shed some light into the meaning of education. While the first talks about education as not being confined to schooling alone, the second sees education as a process of helping an individual to lead life to the fullest capacity (Mbachu, 2011). Education impacts skills and competencies that is central to human development and enhanced quality of life, bringing wide ranging benefits to both individuals and societies. Education could therefore be seen as a continuous process which the society establishes to assist its members to understand the heritage of the past and to participate productively in the future. From the forgoing, it can be referred to as the art of leading out and nourishing the inborn traits and potentials of an individual that enable him or her to face life's challenges as they unfold. This art therefore saliently presents the picture of a teacher and his activities.

A teacher is a person who is professionally trained and certified for the purpose of guiding and facilitating learning in the life of pupils or students. In the submission of Afe (2002), a teacher refers to a person who instructs to facilitate the teaching and learning process. The teacher's role lies in his ability to meaningfully present the much needed experience in a way that will bring forth the desired changes in behaviour. Imogie (2010) sees a teacher as a special person who is subject to the laws of the land; the educational law, and other regulations made under it as well as to the ethics of the teaching profession. He or she assumes various capacities as educator, instructor, tutor, lecturer, counselor, professor and so on. The teacher as a rule is also in-loco-parentis. Describing the nature of a teacher, Oshodin (2011) opined that a teacher is patient, humble, skillful, dedicated, innovative, versatile, tolerant, humorous, energetic and very punctual.

These attributes help to make teaching and learning a rewarding experience. In the view of Okobia (2011), teaching involves curriculum – related duties (instruction) carried out by the teacher in order to ensure that learning occurs. In the author's view, learning can indeed occur for the learner when knowledge is gained, skills are acquired and positive attitudes are attained. The occupation of teaching however, is virtually made up of males (men) and females (women) at all levels of education. At a purely statistical level, an occupation that is predominantly made up of women is said to be 'feminised' (Bank, 2007). However, when sociologists and educators refer to feminization they are referring to labour market tendencies where the participation of women in various occupations is increasing (Drudy, 2008).

Similarly, the Working Group of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) used the term feminization to “describe the phenomenon of large-scale entry into the teaching profession by women...” (Wylie, 2000). Buttressing further, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) use a percentage scale to bracket levels of feminisation within any teaching force, categorizing high feminisation levels as 70 per cent or more, with medium feminisation levels categorized as between 50-69 percent (Wylie, 2000).

The presence of a significant proportion of women teachers - particularly in the early childhood and primary levels - is a long-standing phenomenon that characterizes the education systems of many countries. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are examples of countries often referred to as having 'feminised' teaching professions, denoting that women represent a significant majority of the teaching workforce. An increased number of females in the teaching profession is often associated with education systems that have achieved or nearly achieved universal basic education. On the other hand, those countries that continue to strive towards Education for All (EFA) are more frequently associated with having a deficit of women teachers (Commonwealth Secretariat/UNESCO, 2011). This scenario may not be far from the case of Nigeria where issues about enrollment and number of female teachers are still cloudy and objects of continuous discussion. More so, to say whether Nigerian women have preference for the teaching profession is a matter to be clarified.

The Worth/Value of the Teacher to the Society

An emerging fact globally is that in any teaching and learning relationship, teachers are the most critical and decisive elements. Indeed, they are indispensable in all efforts to develop and modernize the human and material resources of any society. Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (2014) agrees no less to this assertion as it stated in the National Policy on Education, section B (Tertiary education); Sub - B (Teacher education); among others that "since no education may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in educational planning and development". It also noted that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE).

FGN (2014), further highlighted that the goals of teacher education as follows:

1. Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system.
2. Encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
3. Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
4. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to enlighten situations.
5. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Emphasizing further, the policy noted that "all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained. That teacher education programmes shall be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. The following institutions, among others, shall give the required professional training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standards.

- a. Colleges of Education
- b. Faculties of Education
- c. National Teachers Institute
- d. Schools of Education in the Polytechnics

- e. National institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN)
- f. National Mathematical Center (NMC)."

However, weighty and hopeful as the policy presents itself depends to a large extent on its implementation. As it is commonly said, the taste of the pudding is in the eating. Truly speaking, the platform for the achievement of these lofty ideas is not yet available for the Nigerian teacher to express his/her aptitudes and potentials in a challenging work as ours. Supporting this issue, Mbachu (2011) opined that to meet the ever changing demands of pupils, students and clients, teachers have to remain leaders through retraining and updating of their knowledge in educational programs. This stems from the fact that their (teachers) importance cannot be over-emphasized. By this stands, we can say decisively, to neglect the teacher is to commonize development. Put succinctly, the author asserted that no meaningful desirable change can be brought about in education and society if it neglects the teachers input. The teacher must not only be able to teach well, but he/she should be able to live the life of a model for the society. The extent to which this is possible will greatly determine the extent to which education can be reliable as potent instrument for national development.

Why Women and the Teaching Profession?

Having established the fact that teaching is an activity virtually carried out by both males (men) and females (women), but enrollment statistics does not present parity in an era where feminizations is advocated. Several literatures attest to this unequal participation of men and women in the teaching profession which largely tilts in the favour of men. This trend is worrisome knowing the role of women both in the home and society. Education has long been recognized as a fundamental right with far-reaching impacts on human development and social progress. Investing in women's education in particular produces exceptionally high social and economic returns. The importance of education for the advancement of women was highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, in which it was identified as one of the 12 critical areas of concern and affirmed as central for gender equality and women empowerment. The Platform for Action also called for eliminating discrimination in education on the basis of gender at all levels, eradicating illiteracy among women and improving access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education (Commonwealth Secretariat/UNESCO, 2011).

A few excerpts from the report of Aggarwal (2007) will suffice for this. While discussing girls and women education, "O learned lady! All life is dependent on you, because you impact education to all". "From the point of view of reverence the teacher is tenfold superior to the lecturer, a father a hundredfold to a teacher, and mother a thousand fold to father." "Where women are respected, there the gods delight, and where they are not, all there works and efforts come to naught. There is no hope for the family or country where they (women) live in sadness (Quotes from Ancient Scriptures). Expressing the import of women further, the author reiterated with the words of Gandhi on true education:

“As for women's education I am not sure whether it should be different from men's and when it should begin. But I am strongly of the opinion that women should have the same facilities as men and even special facilities where necessary. The question of the education of children cannot be solved unless efforts are made simultaneously to solve the women's education. And I have no hesitation in saying that as long as we do not have real mother teachers who can successfully impart true education to our children, they will remain uneducated even though they may be going to schools. She must have special knowledge of the management of the home, care of children their education etc.” - M. K. Gandhi (1869 - 1948).

The forgoing description of Gandhi ...real mother teachers who can impart true education to our children” does not fall short of what the Nigerian woman stands for. Given the opportunity, the Nigerian woman has proved her metal in several spheres of life, be it medicine, politics, banking, industry, leadership, entertainment and teaching among others. The name of an emeritus professor, Mrs. Grace Allele-Williams, the first female Vice Chancellor of a Nigerian University (University of Benin in 1985) rings a bell. She and a myriad of erudite and celebrated female scholars traverse the length and breadth of Nigeria. Although, one would expect by now an overwhelming upsurge in the number of women in the teaching profession but the scenario is the reverse. Hence, one cannot help but think aloud here and ask, is teaching the preferred profession of Nigerian women? This rhetorical question cannot be attempted without a detailed look at the trend and statistics of women in teaching at varying levels of education especially in developing countries, particularly Nigeria.

Table 1: Female Teacher Percentages in Selected Commonwealth Countries

African Countries	Primary Education School Year Ending		Secondary Education School Year Ending	
	1999	2007	1999	2007
Botswana	81	78	45	54
Ghana	32	33	22	22
Kenya	42	44	-	40
Lesotho	80	78	51	55
Mozambique	25	34	-	16
Namibia	67	65	48	50
Nigeria	48	50	36	38
Rwanda	55	53	-	53
Seychelles	85	85	54	55
South Africa	78	77	50	53
Uganda	33	39	-	22
Zambia	49	48	27	39

Source: UNESCO, 2010

Table 1 shows comparative female teacher percentages in primary and secondary education in selected Commonwealth countries in Africa in 1999 and 2007. The countries with top ranking percentages in primary education are Seychelles, Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia and Rwanda. Whereas the countries that rank about average are Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and Mozambique. In secondary education, the highest percentages ranged from 50 to 55, with Seychelles, Lesotho and South Africa taking the lead. Nigeria had a modest 36 and 38 percent for 1999 and 2007 respectively.

Table 2 presented the data from National Bureau of Statistics indicating the National Summary of Public Primary Schools Statistics in Nigeria 2013-2014. The percentages for the two years were 48 and 45 respectively presenting a decline of 3 percent. That is a deficit of fifteen thousand nine hundred and seventy one female teachers in one year.

Table 2: National Summary of Public Primary Schools Statistics in Nigeria 2013-2014

YEAR	2013	2014
Total Schools	61,305	62,406
Total Enrolment	24,185,027	23,129,927
Total Male Enrolment	12,916,185	12,145,968
Total Female Enrolment	11,268,842	10,983,959
Total Teachers	577,303	574,579
Total Male Teachers	300,589	313,836
Total Female Teachers	276,714	260,743
% of Female Teachers	48	45
Total Classrooms	376,592	342,303
Teacher/Pupil Ratio	42	40

Source: National Bureau of Statistics/UBEC, 2016

Table 3: National Summary of Public Junior Secondary Schools Statistics in Nigeria 2013-2014

YEAR	2013	2014
Total Schools	11,561	11,874
Total Enrolment	4,253,370	4,434,979
Total Male Enrolment	2,290,478	2,392,750
Total Female Enrolment	1,962,892	2,042,229
Total Teachers	169,860	170,628
Total Male Teachers	86,866	83,125
Total Female Teachers	82,994	87,503
% of Female Teachers	49	51
Total Classrooms	66,172	84,342
Teacher/Pupil Ratio	25	26

Source: National Bureau of Statistics/UBEC, 2016

Table 3 above presented the National Summary of Public Junior Secondary Schools Statistics in Nigeria 2013-2014. Although the percentage of female teachers increased slightly from 49 in 2013 to 51 in 2014; this percentage is however within the minimum level of categorization in feminisation of the profession.

The Teaching Profession in Nigeria

Teaching as a concept is as old as man. Hence, it is not only regarded as a profession but as the mother of all professions as other professionals are trained through it. A profession in the view of Kauchak and Eggen (2011) is a distinct occupation that is characterized by a specialized body of knowledge, autonomy, emphasis on decision making and reflection as well as ethical standards for conduct. Teaching in Nigeria has already been regarded as and given the status of a profession. FGN (2014) stated under the subsection of teacher education that teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria; in this regard, government has set up the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) to control and regulate the practice of the profession. This is in consonance with paragraph 6 of the ILO/UNESCO recommendations concerning the Status of Teachers; the following definition is clearly stated: Teaching should be regarded as a profession. It is a form of public service which requires of teachers' expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it calls also for a sense of corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge (Commonwealth Secretariat/UNESCO, 2011).

While commenting on the issue of profession, Elayelagha, Coleman and Aloni (2010) identified some elements for ascribing professionalism to any occupation to include; being knowledge based, control of entry, code of conduct (ethics), in-group association to control and regulate the practice of the profession and conditions of service. Others are public recognition and freedom of practice. The authors further noted that having assessed teaching as a profession in Nigeria, it is difficult to make a categorical statement as to whether teaching qualifies to be regarded as a profession or not, when juxtaposed with other established professions. Therefore, they opined that teaching in Nigeria has definitely not met all the conditions. Additionally, teaching is seen to suffer from an overall limitation of upward mobility within a teacher's career, upward mobility being defined as the 'essence' of a career. Perceptions regarding the relative ease of entry to the career in some countries are also detrimental, especially when compared with other professions like law, medicine and business (Bolton & Muzio, 2005; Drudy, 2008).

In the submission of Kauchak and Eggen (2011) while describing the characteristics of professionalism, they noted that specialized knowledge must include knowledge of content, pedagogy, learners and learning. Autonomy must include curriculum, assessment and standards. Emphasis on decision making and reflection bordered on teachers self-assessment whereas professional ethics implied being guided by a code of conduct. Kauchak and Eggen opined finally that the issue of teaching as a profession is controversial and won't be resolved any time soon, but noted that researchers believe that to truly professionalize teaching, a number of reforms are necessary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Issues surrounding the teaching profession and the participation of Nigeria women have been examined and critiqued. It is therefore noted that the Nigerian women have been in the teaching profession over the years at all levels of education. The roles of women as teachers in the development of the individual and the society have also been examined. A major factor why women choose the profession is that, by being teachers, they can guide their children better to be successful in their studies. When the mother is a teacher they are better aware of the school curriculum, the expectations, learning outcomes and the demands that come up at school and as such they are able for them to support their own children better. Indeed, female teachers are better able to lead a family and also facilitate their own children's learning.

However, the statistics of women involved in teaching in Nigeria does not measure the standard that would suggest acceptable. By extension Nigeria is yet to enjoy the dividends therefore, as noted by Aggarwal (2007), I have no hesitation in saying that as long as we do not have real mother teachers who can successfully impact true education to our children, they will remain uneducated even though they may be going to schools. This paper therefore recommends as follows:

1. Recruitment of trained and qualified female teachers should be given priority to increase the statistics to an acceptable level.
2. There should be increased enrolment of women in teacher education in Nigeria.
3. There should be critical reforms in the teaching profession to standardize it like other notable professions.
4. There should be strict implementation and monitoring of the provisions of the National Policy on Education.
5. International policy framework for feminization of teaching should be domesticated and implemented.

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