

Teacher Education and Social Ethics

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Abstract

It poses no difficulty to argue that the success of any nation depends to a large extent on the quality of her teachers. This is because the outcome of teaching, which is learning, manifests in all services rendered by the individual in all sectors of life. If the products of the school system do not learn well both academically and morally, they will not perform well in their duties, since all industries are run and survive through the services of those who passed through the school system. Whatever they do in their places of work tell much on the knowledge they have acquired from the school through their teachers. Bearing in mind the role of teachers in the promotion of intellectual upliftment and social responsibility (Ethics), this paper examines Teacher Education in Nigeria, professionalisation of teaching, and the need for the moral training of teachers for the promotion of social ethics.

Keywords: teacher education, professionalisation of teaching, training of teachers, social ethics.

1. Introduction

Durosaro (2006) considered teacher education as a process of developing skilled teaching manpower to enable them provide good quality and relevant education to learners at whatever level they operate within the education system. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), the goals of teacher education should be:

- a. production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- b. encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- c. helping teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and to enhance their commitment to national goals;
- d. providing teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to changing conditions and;
- e. enhancing teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Oyekan (2000) said that the heartbeat of manpower development and training for prudent use and sustenance of resources in nation building is teacher education. This is because for wherever one turns, be it in social, economic or political sphere of activities, one is faced with the ever recurring problem of the need for trained manpower but no adequate training can take place without competent teachers to handle the programmes. Hence, it is a process of imparting relevant knowledge, skills and value-orientations that would promote the production of efficient and effective teachers.

Teachers appeared to be most important refined human species that skillfully identify, develop and nurture the potentials of productive citizenry or meaningful creation of wealth, pleasure and services which may sustain quality of life. Reference of teachers to individual and national development is wholly dependent on their pervasive role in providing functional education and training to the learners within and outside the school settings. Production of efficient educated professionals such as doctors, pharmacists, nurses, engineers, technician, and enlightened artisans or citizens are the refined products of teacher education.

Teacher education in Nigeria may either be pre-service or in-service. Pre-service teacher education is provided by university faculties of education and schools of education in the Colleges of Education while the in-service teacher education is provided by university institutes of education and the National Teacher's Institute (NTI), Institute of Education in the universities mount programmes on teacher education in form of post graduate diploma in education,

part-time degree in education for serving teachers and various skill improvement workshops. The National Teachers Institute provides in-service training in form of “Pivotal” Grade II certificate training for teachers in some disadvantaged states and NCE part time courses. The professional bodies like the Nigerian Union of Teachers and All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools also contribute to in-service teacher education by organising workshops and seminars for teachers geared at specific skill improvement.

2. Teacher Education in Nigeria and the Issue of Professionalism

The Oxford Dictionary (1998) defines profession as ‘a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification. Some may believe that teaching the young children and adolescents cannot qualify as a profession, but rather a craft which any untrained person can engage. But, unfolding events in the teaching profession prove that teaching as a profession in the modern day goes beyond “talk and chalk”. It involves moulding the lives of young ones, guiding youth, motivating students, and general character training. Similarly, classroom teaching does not succeed alone by itself without discipline and adequate guidance which then move it convincingly into the professional realm.

Teaching profession in Nigeria seems to have been recognised by all the stakeholders. The government, through the National Policy on Education has clearly stated that “teacher education will continue to be given major emphasis in all our educational planning because “no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher”. In addition, the government has recognised teaching as a profession by maintaining that teaching like other profession in Nigeria will be legally and publicly recognised as a profession. To achieve this, government has set up the Teacher’s Registration Council among whose functions are registration, accreditations, certification, discipline, and regulation of professional practices. The government has given a period of time within which, those untrained teachers and those teachers without the requisite qualification, to qualify for membership or leave the profession.

The government has also asserted desirability and intention to professionalise teaching. The Federal Republic of Nigeria maintained clearly in the Nigeria Teachers’ Manual that professionalisation of teaching should be given adequate attention in order to enhance the role of teachers in the formulation and implementation of educational policies in the country. In order to achieve this, Ciwan (2000) identified a number of factors as criteria that enhance the degree of professionalism of teaching namely;

‘The theoretical and practical knowledge mastered exclusively by the practitioners, fairly long time of training in the field, continuous practice in the field, ethical codes of conduct for practitioners, regulatory body that licenses and disciplines, as well as promotes professional growth of practitioners, continuous in-service development, rendering of essential and qualitative services to society by the practitioners, exalting service above self and membership of practitioners in the professions.

For Ciwan, these are the criteria that other professionals in pharmacy, medicine, law and other have been able to organise themselves in such a way that they have now become the epitome and symbol of genuine professionalism.

The professionals proudly wear their identities and in whatever job they find themselves, they still prefer to be identified by their respective professions. Application of the conventional criteria (requirements) required of a profession as earlier enumerated to teaching, indicate clearly that teaching is not yet a profession in Nigeria. The teaching career in Nigeria seems to lack ethical code of conduct, certificate of registration and license, mandatory continuing education, exalting service above self, and a membership register. Probably that is why, a professional teacher has been defined in the Nigerian Teachers’ manual cited by Alonge (2011) as “A person who has been registered with professional qualifications which enable him or her to be appointed to teach at any appropriate level of recognised educational institutions in Nigeria and who is of sound mind and is mentally alert”.

To achieve professionalisation, the government enacted a teaching profession act and established the National Teachers’ Council. However, it is the responsibility of the teacher to adhere to the ethics of the profession by belonging to a professional association and at the same time avail themselves of the opportunities for professional growth through in-service training, attendance of learned conference or seminars and member of subject associations. These are pragmatic ways of achieving professionalisation of teaching in Nigeria.

3. Professionalising Teaching in Nigeria

It seems highly erroneous for teachers to consider themselves as professionals upon mere graduation. This is because there are certain things teachers need to put in place before they can be called professionals. These things include; understanding the subject matter, knowing the appropriate method to use in disseminating the knowledge to the students, determining learning experience to use and making appropriate evaluation at the end of the lesson. Abimbola (2005) asserted that they must continually update their knowledge within their discipline especially in this era of scientific and technological advancement. Teachers ought to be informed of new methods and materials that will make their teaching more effective. In order to professionalise teaching, the construct currently being used to describe teachers’ in-service training, continuing education, workshop, seminar, or on-the-job training must be given proper attention. These are the training requirements which include teacher education initiated by the employer.

Jekanyinfa (2005) describes the construct as all forms of in-service, continuing education, training and professional development, whether formal or informal. Teachers’ professional development consists of activities a teacher can engage to keep abreast a new development, evaluate, and improve his classroom performance. Such activities according

to him include participating in in-service courses and workshops, continuing graduate study and participating in reading professional journals among others.

The emphasis in the observation raised is the institutional and the professional needs of the individual teacher. This means that a career-long professional development programme for teachers, which can be realised through a combination of various approaches involving initial training, regular inductions and in-service training programmes designed to cater for the needs of prospective as well serving teachers. It is observed by Leace (1996), that professionalising teaching is a continuum, a creative journey from the earliest stages of initial teacher education through to the latest stages of being an educational professional. In fulfillment of this, Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education in the Universities, Education Resources Centres, and National Teachers Institutes among others, provide training programme for teachers.

The curriculum of teacher education puts emphasis on subject mastery and pedagogy. In most cases, in teacher education, a teacher trainee must offer courses in education, methodology of teaching, project writing, general studies, and teaching practice. All these will go a long way to enhance the quality of teaching and make teaching an instrument of problem solving for both the learner and the teacher.

4. Teacher Education and Social Ethics

In the beginning, Socrates thought that, when it comes to the 'Ultimate Questions' we all start off as dummies. But if we are humbly aware of how little we actually know, then we can really begin to learn, this is because, the more we think, the more confused we are. This brings us to the issue of teacher and social ethics.

Ethics and morality have ancient root words in Latin. Morality is derived from the Latin 'Moralitas' meaning 'manner' 'character' 'proper behaviour' 'norm'. The other Latin derivation of morality is 'more', which means 'social rule' 'etiquette' and 'inhibitions from the society'. Morality has three principle meaning; it is a code of conduct or a set of beliefs distinguishing between right and wrong behaviours, it equally refers to an ideal code of belief and conduct which would be preferred by same 'moral' person under specified conditions and also it is synonymous with ethics.

Ethics on the other hand is derived from the Greek 'ethikos' which means 'accustomed place', 'manner', 'custom', 'disposition', 'character', 'norm', etc. The other Greek derivative of ethics is ethos, meaning: moral character.

Ethics is equally used in three different but related ways. First, it pertains to general pattern or way of life for example, custom, tradition among others. It signifies a set of rules and conduct a moral code. And third, it is an inquiry about ways of life or code of conduct. From the above explanation of morality and ethics, one can now start to see the interrelation or interconnection between Teacher Education and Social Ethics.

The call for professionalism in teaching also calls for the need for the teacher to be morally sound in character and attitude. The National Policy of Education (2004) 4th edition in Nigeria sees education as that process that helps to develop the whole man physically, mentally, morally, politically, socially, and technologically to enable him function in any environment in which he finds himself. If this conception of education is anything to go by then teachers need to be morally developed with emphasis on character and attitudinal 'uprightness' in their handling of educational resources and other critical concerns of the teaching profession. This justified the inclusion of moral education in the National Policy on Education.

For as long as teachers have been working and living together in communities, the moral regulation of behaviour has been and still necessary to the communities' well-being. Fafunwa (1974) recommends that the teacher should possess an in-depth understanding of the cultural, moral, social, and economic problems of the society where the school is located. Even the Nigerian teacher can only be very effective if he takes the necessary steps to re-educate himself or herself in terms of the demands of the society and possible adaptation to his/her area of specialisation.

One may be skeptical about attaining morality in the absolute sense. This is because an issue like morality can be argumentative as different people determined different yardstick for morality. However, there are common grounds minimally expected of human conduct and behaviour as distinguished from animal, which seemingly have no sense of right or wrong. Principles or standards of human conduct, sometimes called ethics have engaged philosophers from ancient time to contemporary times.

Uduigwomen (2006) submitted that moral standards depend on the social setting and that the authority invoked for good conduct may be the will of a deity, the pattern of nature, or the rule of reason. When the will of a deity is the authority, obedience to the divine commandments in scriptural texts is the accepted standard of conduct. If the pattern of nature is the authority, conformity to the qualities attributed to human nature is the standard. When reason rules, behaviour is expected to result from rational thought.

Sometimes, principles even in educational studies like equality of access and opportunities, provision of educational resources among others are chosen which ultimate value is not determined quantitatively or otherwise, in the belief that such a determination is impossible. Such ethical philosophy usually equates satisfaction in life with prudence, pleasure, moderation of power, but it is basically derived from belief in the ethical doctrine of natural human fulfillment as the ultimate good. Socrates in his teachings, as represented in the dialogues of his pupil Plato, maintained that 'virtue is knowledge, and that people will be virtuous if they know what virtue is; and vice-versa, or evil, is the result of ignorance. Thus, according to Socrates, education can make somebody moral. This can be achieved if teachers as well as all the stake holders moderate their desires as well as practice what they preach in and out of the classrooms, churches, mosques, public offices and other possible places.

As a way out in solving the moral question among teachers of Nigerian institutions of learning, efforts should be made to ensure that the appointment of teachers is based on intellectual merit and *younger teachers* should be attached to experienced colleagues as *mentors and guides* for a probationary period to enable the determination of *moral merit* and not political patronage. The greatest need of the world today is men of unshakable convictions, men of integrity, men who will call a spade by its name. Because the rot of a tree normally starts at the top, staff and leaders of Nigerian institutions of learning must be people who are above board.

In the phase of this understanding, if this morality is conceived in the absolute sense, teacher may impose his own idea of good to the students, therefore, given no opportunity for the learners to determine what is good for them. Ordinarily, an immoral teacher cannot be called professional since morality should conform to the demand of the society. The criteria for professionalism like ethical codes of conduct for professional, qualitative services to society, exalting service above self among others, if properly put into practice by the teacher could serve as pragmatic approaches to the professionalisation of teaching.

5. Conclusion

Teachers are perceived as the instruments of change in any recognised society. For this assertion to be true, there is a need for the proper training of teachers to meet the demand of the society in term of morals. This would enable the products of teacher education to impact positively on their students in the areas of academics, social and moral responsibilities. Teaching has to be conformed with institutional morality since the morally conscious mind and trained intelligent of teachers if combined are potent instruments both for self-realisation and for the good of man and the society.

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