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"TEACHERS AT THE HEART OF EDUCATION RECOVERY": AN OPPORTUNITY AT MIRRORING THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

BY

BENJAMIN N. NYEWUSIRA (PhD)
Department of Educational Foundations,
University Of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
E-Mail**: Ben.Nyewusira@Uniport.Edu.Ng. Phone: +234 8033157969**

ABSTRACT

The teacher is unarguably a livewire in the education system. For this and many other reasons, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found it imperative to commemorate the teacher and his activities every year. This paper is therefore focused on the thematic choice of UNESCO's world teachers' day for 2021 tagged "Teachers at the Heart of Education Recovery". While attempting to make an appraisal of the import of this theme, the paper perceives the import of the theme as a veritable opportunity for mirroring critical matters relating to the teacher and the teaching profession in Nigeria. The paper roundly reviews the challenges of the teacher and the teaching profession in Nigeria, noting particularly how the making of the teacher and his professional handicaps have consequently become part of the broader and complex challenges of education in Nigeria. It therefore copiously x-rays the qualities and tools of the teacher that are prerequisite for the recovering from the pitfalls and gaps in Nigerian education. Effectively, the paper strongly posits that with well-trained teachers, and where they are armed with appropriate tools in addition to requisite work-incentives, part of the road-maps to reclaiming the glorious days of Nigerian education would have been discovered.

Keywords: teachers, education, recovery, opportunity, profession.

Introduction

The traditions of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have over the years accommodated the celebration of teachers across the globe on the 5th of October annually. The celebration tagged Teachers' Day celebration is usually heralded with a thematic discourse around teachers in particular and education in general. The celebration has been used as a platform to pay tributes to teachers. It also provides a golden opportunity for some robust conversation aimed at resolving some critical issues affecting the teaching profession. Interestingly, the focus on year 2021 celebration is "**TEACHERS AT THE HEART OF EDUCATIONRECOVERY".** Understandably, UNESCO presented this theme at period when education and the world at large have suffered a new dimension of challenge, arising from the setbacks of the emergence of COVID-19.

For Nigeria, before the advent of COVID-19, there is a broad perception that in the recent past the nation's educational development has suffered humongous setbacks. It will therefore be most

pretentious and immaterial to hinge or dovetail this discourse on the bottlenecks that the pandemic has presented to education in Nigeria. To this end, this paper will attempt to review teacher-related issues that have not only facilitated the perceived stunt in the growth of education, but have remained responsible for plunging the sector into some kind of doldrums. The paper would hence raise and address a double-barrel question bordering on who is the archetypal teacher? And how would this brand of teacher provide the road-map in the search for the much needed recovery of education in Nigeria?

Teaching in Retrospect

The trajectory of the Nigerian educational system and its appraisal over the years has mostly been chequered going by the conventional indices that are used for determining the growth and development of any educational system. A clear case scenario is that some national systems of education that were at par with Nigeria appear to have made much more progress than the country. Indeed, things appear to have moved from glory to gloomy days. Part of the reasons for the aforesaid scenario is the very postulation by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria that things have moved from bad to worse in the teaching profession, (TRCN,2013). Nevertheless, there is yet a school of thought that posits that the professionalization of the teacher has improved since the emergence of Nigeria as a nation (Osokoya, 2015). What are however obvious, in-between the arguments on the downturn or improvement of the teacher in Nigeria, are matters arising from the need to address the gaps that exist in the making and functions of the Nigerian teacher.

The contemporary Nigerian teacher, like some of his counterpart in some other less developed countries, have been subjected to disdainful perceptions that are not befitting his profession, thus dampening the moral and spirit of commitment that his job requires (Nyewusira and Nyewusira, 2012). Aminigo (2003) was extremely blunt in observing that the teaching profession in Nigeria has become the Cinderella of all other professions in Nigeria. A number of other factors, ranging from poor status and occupational mobility, poor job satisfaction, to lack of academic autonomy, have all contributed to enhance the despondency suffered by the teachers and the public disparagement of the profession (Nwaokugha, 1999; Nixon 1995). Nonetheless, Obayan (2004) posits that what is required is a combination of attitude, training and an enriched social status so that professionalism can thrive in teaching

Suffice it to say that back in the day, the Nigerian teacher was highly respected, if not revered, because of his unalloyed commitment to his duty. The level of teachers' commitment to education was typified in the character of the protagonist in "Village Headmaster"- a soap opera that was beamed in the national television in the 1980s. Had the Nigerian teacher continued in the characteristics of the "Village Headmaster", the education system would have probably remained on the right track.

From the foregoing, it is only hypothetical that it mostly would take the involvement of teacher to recover and re-position the educational system, bearing in mind the old, factual and

indispensable policy statement that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN,2004).

Who is a Teacher?

It may appear very elementary for us to engage our time in the conceptualizing and understanding of who the teacher really is and what he represents in the science and art of teaching, but then that remains about the surest way to appreciate the duties, qualities and roles of the teacher vis-à-vis how the teacher is expected to strengthen and uphold the tenets of a sustainable educational system.

There is actually no stereotypical definition of a teacher. This is so because the teacher represents different things in different circumstances. Of the 18-point description of the teacher by IGI Global, publishers of Timely Knowledge, 5 points are central to the understanding of whom and what the teacher depicts. These include:

1. The teacher as that fellow who is in a position to help others to learn. In this context, he is easily referred as a fellow who facilitates the occurrence of learning.
2. The teacher is one who helps students to acquire knowledge, competence or virtue.
3. The teacher is a professional whose interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary focus is on teaching students how to access, interpret, and create new information.
4. The teacher is a professional who is qualified for theoretically profound and critical analysis of educational phenomena.
5. The teacher is a humanist and leader of the teaching process, coordinator and supervisor, motivator, rightful stakeholder, facilitator, and predictor of the school culture improvement.

All the tenets above clearly underscore the instructional expertise of the teacher. Above all, the teacher is much more than a navigator of learning. The counseling and managerial requirement of the teacher also come to bear in fixing the educational system. According to Osokoya (2011) the teacher is also saddled with the responsibility of keeping law and order in the learning environment in addition to ensuring that his personal character robs off on the learner, hence the teacher is depicted as a role model and a character moulder. The aforesaid five-fold understanding of the teacher undoubtedly underlines the indispensability of the teacher in the process of teaching and learning.

In the words of Gbamanga (1997 p135) "…a poor teacher tells stories, a good teacher teaches but an excellent teacher inspires". The value of Gbamanga's proposition is that what is essentially needed for the revamping of any educational system is no less than the excellent teacher. This also presupposes that the relevance of the teacher is far beyond his interface with the student or the classroom; it necessarily implies that the teacher engages not only in the moulding of the students but also in preparing them for societal and occupational survival.

The teacher is trained personnel with the pertinent certification to teach. It therefore suffices that anyone, even with a First Class degree but without the applicable training, that strays into the teaching arena is to be considered a quack. Based on the Code of Conduct for teachers in Nigeria and the National Policy on Education, teachers at all tiers of educational institutions shall be professionally trained. For this reason, it is extremely germane to note that the unending debate on whether the teacher is born or made has not been sufficient to fault the assertion that training is vital in the making of a teacher. To that extent, even those who are said to have merely "signed up" for a degree in education are not qualified teachers. They may have been in desperate need of the degree but covertly not interested in the training or in the career therein (Karanwi 2010, p37).It then follows that "teachers" who fall in the category of persons who merely pick up degrees in education and others who do not have cognate certificates in education but have found themselves in the school setting have only failed to realize the extant provision of the National Policy on Education (2013, p43) that: "all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained."

Ethical codes are inextricably linked with the practices of the teacher. This is why the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria came up with Teachers Code of Conduct. Essentially, the code spells out the moral rectitude, guiding principles, modes of relationship between the teacher and student on one hand and on the other hand the relationship between the teacher and his colleague. The code epitomizes the teacher as a beacon of integrity, dedication and competence. It is therefore expected of the teacher to exhibit highest form of professionalism in thoughts, words and action. The essence is to keep and defend the character, trustworthiness and corporate image of the teacher (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, 2013; Osokoya, 2015)
Perhaps, the analogy of the goal-keeper, as the last man standing in the game of football, is akin to what the teacher ultimately does in the process of teaching, learning and overall development of education (Okorosaye-Orubite, 1995). This is to say that if the teacher as the last man standing fumbles or fails in his responsibilities, then it is only expected that every other fabric in the system would fall apart. That is what makes the teacher the engine room of the entire educational system. Hence, the teacher must be firmly and rightly rooted in the practices and processes of the education system if the system is to recover from any gaps, hitches or setbacks. Obanya (2014, p 455) emphatically supported this when he said that:"teachers are key actors in the education process and every meaningful reform of education should pay due attention to the teacher factor"

Mirroring the Qualities and Tools of the Teacher for Education Recovery.

1. **Quality Training and Orientation**. The training of the Nigeria teachers has had its tale of lapses in Nigeria. Given the fact that Teachers Training Colleges have been scrapped with the extinction of Teachers Grade II Certificate (TCII) and the introduction of the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum requirement for teaching; the Colleges of Education, Institutes of Education and recently Universities of Education that are saddled with the mandate of producing quality teacher are facing some challenges. These teacher training institutions are ill-funded, ill-equipped and ill-administered. Again, these institutions that ought to be specialized in education contents and curriculum have ironically

delved into other fields of study other than teacher-education. Also saddening is that one of the teachers training institutions in the country, the National Teachers Institute (NTI), has been alleged to have watered down the quality of its training, to the extent that some state governments do not value their certificates (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008). These are worrisome concerns that urgently need to be addressed so as to properly equip the teacher for the task ahead. Similarly, part of the provisions of the National Policy on Education/ National Teacher Education Policy (2009) that graduates of education courses must undergo one-year compulsory internship before they are engaged is not enforced by relevant authorities, thus making it difficult for the education system to benefit from the most refined products in the teaching enterprise. As a result of the aforesaid, laid down policies for teacher-preparation must be strictly adhered to in order to refocus education in Nigeria.

The emphasis on training equally implies that those without requisite professional training must not be engaged in teaching, not even on the grounds of paucity of teachers. The dearth of qualified teachers should not give room for misfits into the teaching profession. We cannot for the lack of doctors expect nurses to carry out surgeries, neither can we expect graduates of English Language (owing to their linguistic competence) to argue cases in courts where there are scarcity of lawyers. It is such untrained persons in the teaching profession that constitute the incompetent, untrustworthy and self-centred practitioners in the system (Ezewu, 1990). Therefore, the set of teachers who could have accidentally found themselves in teaching or have been smuggled into the profession must quickly be excused from the system so that whatever little progress that has been made in the profession does not suffer any reversal.

Furthermore, the training and formation of the teacher require an intentional and articulate programme, process and incentive so as to produce the requisite qualities of the teachers for actualization of the overall goals of education (Paully and Buseri ,2019).The recent move by the Federal Government to create a career path policy for trainee-teachers, beginning with the promise by government to pay N75,000 and N50,000 per semester for students studying education in universities and colleges of education, respectively, is a step towards ensuring that prospective teachers are encouraged to give their best in service (Kanabe and Ileyemei, 2021).In addition to that, it has equally become germane to conduct seasonal or routine competency tests for teachers. With recent evidence and melodrama manating from Kaduna and Edo States, where the incumbent Governor Nasir El-Rufai and erstwhile Governor Adams Oshomole noted that some sizeable number of teachers in these States could not pass exams they set for their students, competency tests for teachers as ways of ensuring higher watermarks for the qualities of teachers are only but of the essence (Olukotun, 2017).Competency tests therefore become complementary strategies for ameliorating the gaps in the teacher-training institutions.

2. **Reward and Motivational System for Teachers**. This is yet another burning issue that urgently needs to be addressed if the education system must recover fast. A teacher who is poorly motivated can hardly find the desire to give the best. The countless ordeals of both serving and retired teachers in the hands of their public and private employers/ paymaster

are extremely worrisome. This narrative must change for teachers to find the necessary zest to make the needed commitment for the overall development of education. Besides, a good reward and motivational system is capable of stemming the tide in the waves of corruption in the system, considering that there are some established and strong inalienable correlations between motivation and productivity.

3. **Ethics and Codes**. Teachers' ethics and codes in Nigeria appear to also lack tracking and enforcement, hence the myriads of noticeable misdemeanors and malfeasance that go unpunished. Nyewusira and Worgu (2020) have identified sundry evils in the educational system, some of which are traceable to the depravity of the teachers, and hence alluded to the proposition that teachers be profiled in order to curb such ills. It is irreconcilable to find teachers whose responsibility is to shape characters fail character test. The panacea to this abnormal situation lies in ethical checks and rearmament of teachers. Only a systemic regenerated set of teachers would be able to pull the Nigerian education system out of the woods.

4. **Revamped Teachers Organizations**. Teachers' organizations and umbrella bodies of the teaching professions such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Association Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPS), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to mention but a few have over the years been traditional agitators for the well-being of the teaching profession. Their agitations, picketing, strikes and other forms of industrial actions have yielded limited results. In view of the dire need for a paradigm shift from the traditional and conventional modus operandi of these industrial unions, it has become necessary for them to be completely overhauled and refocused so as to evolve new ways for resolving trade disputes and providing industrial innovations that would engender desirable and lasting impact on the educational system. As the saying goes; you can't do same thing over and again and expect a different result. These organizations must find fresh ideas and tools in tackling the existing and emerging challenges in the nation's educational system.

5. **Information Communication Technology (ICT)-Compliant Teacher.**

In 2020, when UNESCO muted the idea that teacher should set the pace in the "reimagining of the future" in education, the message was evidently translated to mean that teachers need to work with the pragmatic and modern tools that would reposition the future of education. The leading, of all others possible and available tools, is ICT. For the recovery of education to happen, ICT is indispensable. According to Oriji (2021) ICT facilitates a holistic and collaborative interaction in the web of the educational system, and for this reason the 21st century Nigerian teacher cannot do without the e-skills that currently and mostly drive education in other developed climes. For Nigeria, the COVID-19 pandemic ultimately exposed the educational technology deficiency in the teachers in particular and the teaching profession in general. Retooling teachers with e-skills is no longer just an option, it is inevitable. Thus, where armed with the right digital skills, the Nigerian teacher is good to go in search of the pathway to restoring education back to its rightful footing.

Conclusion

This paper has established that Nigeria is one country in dire need of education recovery. It has therefore put forward the responses and steps that are essential for the teaching personnel in Nigerian to be in the frontline for this recovery. It has also highlighted the proactive and promising policy template necessary for teachers to set the ball rolling towards the anticipation and actualization of an educational system of the Nigerian dream.

Recommendations

The duties, obligations and expectations of the teacher must vigorously be pursued and redeemed in view of the quest for the recovery of education. The government, society and practitioners in teaching must realize and come to terms with the critical roles of the teacher in the overall development of education, and much so if the revival and sustainability of education in Nigeria must happen.

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