

Review

Teacher-status and commitment to duty: leadership implication for Nigerian education

A.C Njoku

National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.
Email: anselmnjoku@yahoo.com Tel: +2348034498452.

Accepted 11 April, 2011

Over the years, the status ascribed to the teacher is tenaciously associated with the nature of the teaching profession which can be said to have been warbling when compared with the earlier and more settled professions such as medicine, law and engineering. The picture of the status of the teacher can be figured out from the following questions: How do people feel generally when the term teaching is mentioned and how do they feel when the three other professions namely medicine, law and engineering are mentioned? To what extent would parents wish their children become teachers and to what extent would they wish them study other professions? To what extent are teachers accorded recognition in the midst of members of the other professions. However, prospects of the teaching profession lie ahead with the graduation of the profession from a voluntary work to that of a pensionable one. The Nigerian Teachers Registration Council (NTRC) is on the march towards professionalization and the Teachers' Salary Structure (TSS) has been proposed and is receiving government attention. It is recommended that teachers should be more involved in curriculum programmes, and entry into the profession should be controlled.

Key words: Teacher, status, curriculum, education.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that the teacher in context is the teacher in the primary and secondary schools. Over the years, the status ascribed to the teacher is tenaciously associated with the nature of the teaching profession. By implication the teaching profession has been warbling all through the ages despite all efforts to make it assume the posture of the earlier and settled professions such as medicine, law, engineering and priesthood (Musgrave, 1973). In spite of the challenges posed by the situation, argument for the uplifting of the teacher's status has gained much appreciation judging from the low origin of the profession as a voluntary work with no clear-cut conditions of service and the present situation of pensionable nature of the job.

TEACHER-STATUS: A COMMENT

Position, rank or social standing is what the New Webster's dictionary of the English Language (1994) calls status. By implication the position, rank or social standing of the teacher is taken as teacher-status or the status of

the teacher. Yet it is necessary to probe the position, rank or social standing of the teacher.

This can only be appreciated if compared with professions such as engineering, medicine, and law, etc. In terms of self employment, income level, general acceptable minimum professional qualification, among other professional requirements, the teaching profession cannot be said to be as stable as these other professions already mentioned. If these parameters measure social status, then the teaching profession is not favoured and therefore carries a question mark.

Shekarau (1998:3) refers to Eric Hoyle's (1969) observation of the status of the teacher thus: The status of the individual teacher, his self-esteem, and the manner in which he performs his role are to some extent, dependent upon the status of the teaching profession in society. This is more than simply the question of whether teaching is a profession. It is a question of whether teaching enjoys, or is likely to enjoy in the future, the prestige and privileges which are accorded in society to such high status occupations as medicine, law, Engineering, etc.

From the view about the status of the teacher so far, one can rightly say how the status of the teacher compares with the status of professions such as medicine, law and engineering can be perceived from the answers to the following questions?

1. How do people feel generally when the term teaching is mentioned as a profession and how do the same people feel when the three other professions and others are mentioned?
2. To what extent would parents wish their children become teachers and to what extent would they wish their children to study the other professions?
3. To what extent are teachers generally accorded recognition in the midst of members of the other profession? The answers to these questions and similar ones would suggest the status of the teacher.

It is very essential to note that the work of the teacher is quite indispensable no matter the controversy or otherwise of its status and professional standing. After all one thing about teaching is certain: Learning any trade or acquiring any skill in any field or specialty can hardly take place without some form of teaching. But the bone of contention is the treatment meted out to those who regard teaching as their profession at the primary and secondary levels of the education system when compared with their counterparts in the other more settled professions already mentioned.

To attempt to place the status of the teacher in proper perspective the observations of modern educationists are considered pertinent. Arikewuyo and Onanuga (2005: 23) insisted that teachers' grievances must be addressed. Taa (1995) pointed out that the main issues of concern to teachers are the late payment of salaries, poor working conditions, etc. and suggested that the complaints of teachers must be attended to' adding that these complaints have always been late payment of salaries, poor housing allowances, low social and economic status, lack of fringe benefits such as housing loans, poor working conditions, poor management of teachers such as lack of deployment or posting policies. These views would go further to buttress the earlier views of teacher status which appear to come after the aforementioned professions.

TEACHER-STATUS AND COMMITMENT TO DUTY VIS-À-VIS PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS

To further attempt to place the status of the teacher in proper perspective, let us quickly place teaching side-by-side with the general professional requirements. In doing this a set of seven professional requirements outlined by Musgrave (1973: 139-152) and which is considered universal is examined. The requirements are examined as follows:

Knowledge: A profession would seem to have an "optimal base of knowledge". If the knowledge is too narrow, "the ignorance that forces the layman to approach the practitioner will largely disappear". In addition, its mastery requires high intelligence and some training.

The four years training for a bachelor's degree in education requires in-depth knowledge which a poor intelligence cannot assimilate. But the scaled down curriculum in respect of Grade Two Teachers Certificate (TCII); Grade One Teachers Certificate (TCI); Associate Certificate in Education (ACE); Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and perhaps other similar lower teaching qualifications which are below the bachelors degree in education suggest no standardized minimum qualification into the teaching profession. In addition, programmed textbooks and other teaching materials used by the media, members of whom are not professional teachers, seem to rob teaching of its professional mystique.

Control of entry: Every profession has its minimum entry requirement which must be possessed by a new entrant. For teaching in Nigeria one can hardly hold fast to any entry qualification: Holders of primary school certificate, Government Class Four, Junior Secondary School certificate, incomplete papers in Senior Secondary School Certificate, and other Certificates lower than the general entry requirement for degree programmes in other professions are admitted for teacher training programmes, at least by the National Teachers Institute (NTI) in their TCII and NCE Programmes. There is need for a generally agreed minimum requirement for training and for qualification as a professional teacher.

Code of professional conduct: Apart from its abuse, the teaching profession via the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in its revised constitution of as far back as 19th August, 1969 adopted a certain code of professional ethics in which five main principles emerged (Fafunwa, 1974). These are commitment to the students; commitment to the parents; commitment to community; commitment to the employer and commitment to the profession. There is the Hippocratic oath for the doctors, the inviolability of the confessional for the priest, and the devotion of the lawyer to his client's interest - all bearing affirmation to their respective professional code of conduct. Although the professional ethics of teachers may be there on paper no known oaths is administered on teachers on completion of their training. These need to be done during which they receive copies of their professional ethics.

Freedom to practice the profession: Contextually, freedom to practice here means relying on self for employment as well as practices the profession and control the skill. The freedom to practice teaching is controlled by the state and private proprietors both of

whom employ a very high percentage of the teachers. While professions such as engineering, law, medicine have freedom to practice on their own, the teacher depends on the government to a very large extent for employment. This situation gives the government the advantage of being in a position to often dictate conditions of service for the teacher who cannot easily build a school and get employed.

Professional organization: The professional organization of teachers is even an International organization with its national counterparts such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). Though there are other unions below the NUT such as those of subject teachers, and others in respect of certificate/degree or position occupied. The professional organization can wield influence in the control of entry. But today, even though the NCE is the minimum teaching qualification those teachers with the TC II are being registered by the Nigerian Teachers Registration Council. The Professional organization has not been able to peg down the minimum qualification for registration since holders of qualifications below the so called minimum teaching qualification are registered.

Condition of service: The conditions of service for teachers used to be poor and reflected on their status. However, there is improvement on teachers' conditions of service in respect of salary structure. But other incentives such as duty tour allowance (DTA) and other allowances do not often and easily get to them; they still need to be treated like their counterparts in the core ministries.

Recognition by the public: That teachers have far less control over their profession suggests the extent of recognition of their worth by the society. The ability to control self as well as the skill one has and what the one does with it would suggest the extent of recognition and respect one commands. Because people who never trained as teachers are employed to teach - such as holders of diplomas, certificates and degrees without bias to education. The assumption by the public therefore is that any other person than the so called professional teacher can teach. Yet the fact remains that it is the teacher that makes other professions what they are. Therefore to what extent is the teacher recognized by the public among other professionals?

TEACHER-STATUS AND COMMITMENT TO DUTY: THE COMPARISON SYNDROME

Man by his nature is always comparing himself with others in terms of body size, food eaten, property owned, means of transport, profession or occupation, recognition accorded, and other spheres of life. The teacher makes this comparison and there is no gain-saying the fact that

the outcome of the comparison reflects on his/her self concept and commitment to duty. The situation, as described, in which the teacher finds himself/herself gains more illustration in the treatment of comparison syndrome.

Agulanna (1994: 76) in his work on "Executive stress" with particular reference to "causes of stress" and "comparison syndrome" highlights two theories namely: The theory of relative deprivation and the theory of relative privilege. The theory of relative deprivation suggests that people will be more dissatisfied when they feel others are better off than they are, whether they actually are or not. On the other hand, the theory of relative privilege suggests that satisfaction will increase when people feel they are better off than others whether they actually are or not.

The Nigerian teacher is often confronted with the comparison syndrome in respect of the theory of relative deprivation. In respect of his/her academic and professional qualification, he/she considers the conditions of service of his counterparts in other walks of life in terms of work place environment, staff training and development including DTA, provision of work materials and welfare services that should encourage an officer to put in his/her best effort and become highly committed to duty. The absence of these, or even their poor state would inform the teacher to conclude that others are better off than he/she is and therefore feels dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction would naturally reflect on his/her level of commitment to duty as it rubs off on his/her, strength, ego, prestige, recognition by society, etc. and therefore status (Agulanna, 1994).

TEACHER- STATUS AND COMMITMENT TO DUTY: CURRICULUM ISSUES

Within a decade, Nigeria has witnessed an avalanche of curriculum issues: The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, millennium development goals, vision 2010, disarticulation of junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary schools (SSS), rearticulating of JSS and SSS(perhaps the disarticulation was an experiment that could not work) in respect of Universal Basic Education(UBE), Essential Learning Package (ELP) being tried out in 14 states of the North, Family Life Health Education (FLHE)- all with their implication for programme of studies (involving text books and their review based on new subject areas and levels), programme of activities and programme of guidance counseling. These curriculum issues are not bad on their own. But their frequency and manner of introduction, advocacy and sensitization, and administration seem to cause teachers much embarrassment. Perhaps this scenario and possibly others informed Oriaifo (2005:5) to comment on "Curriculum crisis in Nigeria", the unpleasant situation of which he pointed out, as rubbing off on the

teacher, the following indicators among other: The unfortunate situation is aggravated by his/her marginalization by not being recognized even in pertinent issues like curriculum programme in which he/she displays his/her professional expertise.

VALUE SYSTEM AND THE TEACHER'S PREDICAMENT

The value system in Nigeria is such that recognition is accorded the wealthy people in society and those who occupy such influential positions that attract respect and adulation not minding the morality behind such amassing of wealth and ascendancy to such positions (Njoku, 2009). How does this relate to the teacher? The corollary is that if one does not have these status symbols of wealth and enviable position of influence, no matter how, he/she is not accorded due recognition by a large population in the society. Aptly put, the Nigerian teacher does not have either, and conscious of this, he/she is stressed as he/she has low self esteem. Writing on Macro Environmental Stressors, Agulanna (2001: 142) observes that "the Nigerian Macro environment is fully charged with many stress-induced elements" including geo-political variables, poor infrastructure and corruption including poor value system- all of which compound the stressful nature of the teacher's low status. Continuing, he laments:

Consider the frustrations of teachers these days in Nigeria: regular confrontations with unruly and undisciplined students as well as dangerous secret cults; non-regular payment of salaries (there were situations when teachers were owed two or three months of salaries); no chalk and no working papers in school; no laboratory reagents for practical.

The aforementioned situation predisposed our teachers, many of whom are women in the private Pre-primary and primary schools (35.19%-males and 64.81% female) (Federal Ministry of Education 2006: Basic and Secondary Education Statistics, 2005) to burnout and therefore suggests the would-be obvious low commitment to duty following his/her perceived low self esteem: "So 'am not regarded by government and society because 'am a teacher" , he/she may say (inferred from Agulanna's Macro Environmental Stressors, 201v). Thus stress and value system can affect status but cannot be used interchangeably.

Furthermore, value system, is tending heavily towards materialism. Specifically, achievement in life now tends to be measured by the number, type and size of motor vehicles, houses, factories and other properties owned; type of chieftaincy titles acquired; amount and number of donations made for community projects. Our priorities seem to be distorted and utterly misplaced with success

calibrated in Niara and kobo (Agulanna, 1994). Consequently, the teacher who hardly meets up his/her basic needs ,let alone brandish wealth and other personal acquisitions keeps hiding and is not accorded due recognition as he/she cannot meet up with the societal criteria. In the circumstance, no matter whatever effort he/she makes towards the academic and character molding of the child such contribution is hardly recognized by the majority who now go by this new value system. This would rub off on the teacher's status and would affect his/her commitment to duty.

PROSPECTS OF IMPROVED TEACHER-STATUS AND COMMITMENT TO DUTY

Growing awareness of the teacher's role in national development

There is a growing awareness that education is the hob of socio-economic and political enhancement without which society might go extinct. The indispensable role of the teacher is obvious and cannot be substituted with any cheaper means.

There is also the growing awareness that the teacher who is the technician in the field of education has been grumbling over the years for want of motivational incentives (because there are some things government calls incentives that are not motivational) and recognition of his/her status. The growing awareness is expressed both by national and international communities concerned with the advancement of education and proper use of human resources. The first formal international concern was expressed six decades ago when, in 1947, the first reference to a Teacher charter was made in a UNESCO programme. In 1952, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Advisory cCommittee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers drew attention to teaches' problems (Shekarau, 1998).

Within 12 years, from 1951 UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education made a series of comparative studies on various aspects of the training and the status of primary and secondary school teachers. In October 1966, a Special Inter-Governmental Conference on the Status of Teachers was held in Paris by UNESCO. The Conference was attended by delegates of 75 member states and observers from 23 international organizations. Since then, many member states have addressed the issue of teachers' status. Recently, the World Teachers Day was celebrated, and this added to the number of efforts made to raise the status of teachers.

The Nigerian teachers registration council: Today, the Nigerian Teachers Registration Council is established. This is a landmark in the fight for professionalization of teaching. Most teachers have been registered and

certificated. That there is a legitimate Council that will collaborate with the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is an achievement every teacher and every other stakeholder of education should be proud of. Meanwhile a new Teachers' Salary Structure (TSS) has been proposed and even implemented by some state governments barring undue political sentiments. This has at least sensitized the Government to the fact that the task of teaching is enormous and should be adequately rewarded. With all these positive moves and many others one would admit that the future holds very reliable prospects for the teaching profession in the era of globalization.

LEADERSHIP IMPLICATION WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of leadership in education is very indispensable especially in means of addressing the challenge. This is important and calls for an appreciation (at this juncture) of the distinction between management and leadership. While management ensures that the system (of education) functions well if it is a good system, leadership is needed when it is discovered that the system is no longer right and must figure out how to change it (Bolman and Deal, 1994). Furthermore, while leadership seeks to break new grounds in terms of creating a new vision with new policies to better the lot of the Nigerian teacher, management puts educational resources to effective use. Given the present awkward situation of the Nigerian education system especially in respect of addressing the issues of teacher-status and commitment to duty, a leadership that is more caring, modern and carries all along must be resorted to. Transformational leadership is the one- Generally, transformational leadership among other things, emphasizes, 4Rs - Repositioning, Refocusing, Re-energizing to bring about Revamping of any ailing institution. It aims at making the institution optimally functional. Transformational leadership, among other qualities, identifies five clear factors each with two specific behaviours (Sashkin and Sashkin, 2004). The adapted factors with their behaviors are as follows:

1. Challenging the process:
 - (a) Searching for opportunities to do things better.
 - (b) Experimenting and taking sensible risks to improve the education system and the teaching profession.
2. Inspiring a shared Vision:
 - (a) Construction a future vision for Nigerian education and making stakeholders work towards its realization.
 - (b) Building follower support for the vision.
3. Enabling others to act:
 - (a) Fostering collaboration (as opposed to competition)

among followers(especially teachers).

(b) Supporting followers(teachers) in their personal development.

4. Modeling the way:

(a) Setting an example by one's own behaviour.

(b) Focusing on step-by-step accomplishments by followers, (teachers), so that large-scale goals seem more realistic and attainable through a process of many "small wins".

5. Encouraging the Heart:

(a) Recognizing followers'(teachers') contributions.

(b) Finding ways to celebrate followers' achievements.

Source: (Adapted): Sashkin, (2004). Leadership That Matters: Benin City: Gospel Press.

A critical appraisal of this leadership style would confirm its relevance to the appreciation of the status and commitment to duty of the Nigerian teacher.

Appreciating the theory of relative privilege

A leadership strategy to encourage teachers improve their commitment to duty and be proud of their profession could be the appreciation of the theory of relative privilege. It will be recalled that the theory of relative privilege suggests that satisfaction will increase in people when they feel they are better off than others whether they actually are or not. There is no occupation or profession without its attendant hazards and/or challenges. The medical doctor experiences trauma as he/she watches his/her patient die; the civil engineer must go to the site of his building under the vagaries of the weather. Money is not all that gives joy and happiness in life. This implies that there is need for the leadership and management of education to incorporate guidance and counseling programmes to make the Nigerian teacher feel that other professions/occupations which he/she(the teacher) may think are better off are not with attendant hazards and challenges, and therefore should be proud of his/hers. To further step up the status of the teacher to get him/her more committed to duty, the following recommendations are made as aspects of leadership implication.

Re- orientation for value recovery: Since empirical evidence shows that our values have been misplaced to the extent that over 58% have changed for 'worse', 15% for 'better' and about 27% 'indeterminate' (Okeke, 1986), there is urgent need for re-orientation for value recovery in respect of education workers generally. Thus, the worker's effort and commitment to duty will be more appreciated than the amassing and display of wealth as well as of positions of influence without questioning the morality behind such acquisition and display

Provision of adequate as well as motivational welfare package: Much of what is often called incentive in addressing the issue of teachers' welfare is not motivational. Whatever incentive provided for teachers in their welfare package should be seen to be motivational in nature. Shekarau (1998: 2) as one time National president of ANCOPSS outlines incentives for teachers' welfare and motivation as follows:

- i) Adequate salary schedules, and allowances to cater for peculiarities and hazards (where applicable);
- ii) Definite lines of promotion;
- iii) Job security;
- iv) In-service training;
- v) Study leave or leave of absence with full or part pay;
- vi) Adequate provision of working environment;
- vii) Conducive working environment;
- viii) Reasonable and workable curriculum;
- ix) Reasonable teaching load;
- x) Reasonable housing policy;
- xi) Provision of membership of association, organizations and unions.

Involving teachers in curriculum programme: Teachers should be carried along in dealing with curriculum programmes. All government agencies including Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Federal and State Ministries of Education and parastatals should give teachers that-much-needed professional sense of belonging by involving them actively in issues and programmes concerning curriculum.

Quality control in teacher training: Granted that more teachers are needed to meet the national teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40, quality should not be sacrificed for quantity. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) needs to be assisted to check the proliferation of half-baked teachers who have constituted a ready ugly reference point in every issue of teacher-status and commitment to duty.

Control of entry: The issues of quota system and educationally disadvantaged or educational advantaged nature of any part of the country should not becloud control of entry into the teaching profession. In this era of globalization where a teacher is supposed to be able to teach his/her subject in any part of the world, a universally acceptable minimum entry academic and professional qualification should be determined and enacted for acceptance before a person is recognized as a member of the teaching profession in addition to other requirements.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The status of the teacher and his/her commitment to duty has been examined with leadership implication for education. A comment was made on the status of the teacher with reference to expert conceptualization of status as the position, rank or social standing in respect of the teacher. This was followed by a discussion on the status of the teacher and his/her commitment to duty vis-à-vis professional requirements which, in part, favoured the teacher. The comparison syndrome was seen as a source of worry to the teacher, so the issue of his/her marginalization in curriculum issues and the value system that has been truncated to the worship of wealth and those who have it. In spite of these draw-backs, the growing concern about the status of the teacher both nationally and internationally is an evidence of the teacher's future prospects. Leadership which creates vision and an enabling environment for the worker was considered a suitable option as it will strive for providing motivational incentives in the teacher's welfare package while advocating for re-orientation for value recovery.

REFERENCE

- Agulanna EC (2001). Executive Stress: Managing the manager for survival; Owarri: Crown publishers Nigeria Ltd.
- Alonge MF (2001). Issues and Researches in Curriculum Evaluation. Studies in Curriculum, 3, 85-94.
- Arikewuyo MO, Onanuga PA (2005). "Efficiency In school Administration". In Erinsosho SY., Arikewuyo MO, Oginkola BJ. Eds. Issues in School Organization: Lagos: African Cultural Institute.
- Bolman CO, Deal TE (1994). "Looking for Leadership: Another Search Party's Report". In Educational Quarterly.
- Fafunwa BA (1974). History of Education in Nigeria. Federal Ministry of Education (2006). Basic and Secondary Education status in Nigeria 2004 and 2005.
- Ivowi UMO (1998). "A New Structure for Nigerian School curriculum" Studies in Curriculum, 2, 1-11
- Kosemani JM (1984). "Teachers: The Missing link in the Nigerian Curriculum process". In PAI Obanya's (ed) Curriculum in Theory and in Practice in Memory of Peter Olatunde Okunrotifa. Ibadan; Educational Research and Study Group. Faculty of Education; University of Ibadan, 138-152.
- Musgrave PW (1973). The Sociology of Education: London Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Njoku AC (2009). Humility – What Nigerians need: An Educational approach for re-orientation reconscientization and re-construction; Ibadan ALDIS BOOK.
- Okeke AN (1986). "Educational Administration and the changing values of the youth: The Nigerian case". In B.O. Ukeje's et al (eds). Issues and Concerns in Educational Administration; Ibadan: Macmillan publishers.
- Oriaifo SO (2005). " Curriculum Studies: An Overview of some significant issues" In S.O. Oriaifo, Edozie GC , Eze DN. eds. Curriculum Issues in Contemporary Education; Benin City; Da-Sylia influence.
- Sashkin MG, Sashkin O (2004). Leadership That matters; Benin City: Gospel Press.
- Shekarau I (1998). " The Teacher: his Welfare, Motivation and Status" .In The Nig .J.ANCOPPS. 5(1).