TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY- THE CHALLENGES

Esrom Toro Jokthan
Department of Education, Gombe State University, Gombe
E-mail: etjokthan@yahoo.com; +234-802-3782-504

Abstract
Several centuries ago no society had an institution that prepared teachers to teach. There were no formal schools either. As awareness grew schools were built for the training of teachers. Today, several institutions train and award certificates to qualified teachers. A teacher is someone equipped with relevant skills and abilities to instruct or aid someone to learn something, who is required to undergo a special training in teacher training institutes to obtain certificate to qualify him, to take up employment to teach in schools. The teacher’s challenges in Nigeria today range from overcrowded classrooms, poor condition of service among others. These challenges affect him in number of ways. The paper discussed some of the many challenges a teacher faces even when teaching is said to be a profession in the 21st century. Some proposals for making teaching a profession are made.

Keywords: Teacher, challenges, teaching, profession

Introduction
Teaching is the process of anyone aiding another individual to learn. Teacher is an individual with special skills and abilities. In the long past, societies lacked institutions offering instructions in the principles and practice of teaching. The dearth of teachers and teacher education grew with the rise of democratic principles during the 17th and 18th centuries. It was argued that the political, social and economic development of nations could best be achieved through education of the individual citizen. The earliest known educational institution to offer systematic program of teacher training was the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools established in 1685 in Reims, France by the French priest Saint John Baptist de la Salle, (Brickman, 2009).

In Nigeria, the first teacher training college was established by Church Missionary Society, (CMS) in Abeokuta in 1859. Later, Advanced Teachers Colleges were established. Universities founded departments and institutes of education to train and award diplomas and degrees in education. From the onset teacher education faced the challenges of manpower, funds and equipment. In order to address teachers plight a movement was formed in 1966 called “Teachers’ Day”. It was a promotional event designed to focus attention on the status of teachers in relation to quality education. More than 100 countries worldwide officially celebrate this annually.

Challenges of teachers
Traditionally, society has expected and set very high and at times, stringent ideals for teachers to follow. They are expected to be prospectors, inspirers, critics and appreciators of excellence and enemies of shoddiness. They cannot be aloof but they should not be too bold. They must give as well as receive and most of all they must be above reproach, indefatigable, dedicated zealous and self-controlled.

There are persons within the teaching profession who compare favorably with the foregoing statements and perhaps with their descriptive term a widely held view of an ideal teacher. Some teachers come with much zeal, confidence and dedication to the profession, others are “indolent, awkward, the uninterested, the callous the mercenary and even unfit” (Freedman and Krates, 1968). In whatever form a teacher comes there are certain factors that might affect his day to day official engagement in schools either by students or colleagues, or dilapidated infrastructure or logistics supply or even with the head teacher. When these happen teachers may be disturbed.

In the past society saw schools as a place where there was a sincere effort by teachers to mould human beings to achieve their fullest potentials. Teachers inculcated the right kind of knowledge to students. This was because teachers were motivated and respected. But teachers’ image in 21st century...
in the public has not been favorable. There were times teachers were the only group of public servants that were singled out that their salaries could not be paid, sometimes as long as ten months. Ayu (1994) succinctly underscores this when he said “in more than half of the local governments in the Federation by the close of 1993… were owed salaries and allowances for upward of ten months. Many of them had abandoned their classroom for alternative avenues of livelihood … that pupils would have been smoothly taught or not at all. Also, in place of scientific enquiries and healthy intellectual debates, mysticism and nihilism took over our campuses, giving birth to the detestable culture of secret cults as against scientific and technology thought and invention” (Ayu, 1994:5)

Even though the United Nations recommends a 26% budgetary allocations to education. Nigeria has never come close to UN’s recommended 26%. For instance from 2006 to 2011 the following were national budgets on education.

Table. 1. Budgetary Allocation to Education 2006 to 2011, Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>N1,889,987,922,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>N2,309,223,949,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>N2,647,492,865,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>N3,101,813,750,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>N4,608,616,278,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>N4,484,736,648,992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chukwumerije, 2011, P7-9

In the circumstances, when teachers protest for non-payment of their salaries, or poor condition of service they were sacked or threatened with sack. Non-payment of salaries per se raises major challenge to teacher. Incidentally, strike is the only way teachers can employ to prevail on government to implement agreement or to solve their problems in Nigeria.

Teachers we all know are often treated worse than even the most junior employees in the civil service. For instance, in the distribution of essentials commodities, e.g. fertilizer, while drivers and messengers in the main stream of civil service were allocated one 50kg bag, sometimes more than ten teachers would be allocated the same quantity to share. The same with other commodities e.g. rice, sugar, etc. Teachers are usually given what is left over. Teachers are frustrated by decrepit buildings, inadequate materials and irritated by the pressure of poverty and segregation. Increased awareness has resulted into increase in demand for education and this has brought about overcrowded classes and over loaded teaching schedules.

If an appraisal of the existing physical facilities for teaching and learning in our schools especially their capacity and functionality is to be made, we will discover that they are irrelevant and obsolete learning resources. In the recent evaluation of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria it was reported that none is outstanding. Only 6 were rated good 28 as fair 65 as poor and 3 as very poor. (Leadership, 2012)

Our tertiary institutions are no more places where rigorous and progressive teaching and research work is going on because the infrastructure to aid research is nonexistent neither is the motivation for teachers and students. Libraries are stocked with obsolete books, broken down chairs, poorly ventilated rooms and classes are even worse. Few teachers and libraries that have computers the internet access is very poor.

The poor image of teachers is not unrelated to the relative ease with which people move in and out of the profession. The decline in teachers’ status in Nigeria for instance has been making departures from the profession and teachers shortage. The resulting loss of skilled teachers into either paramilitary or other positions in the main stream of civil service have serious consequences for educational quality and standards. Another challenge is in gender dimension. It is contended that male teachers are becoming scarcer in almost all countries of the world at both primary and secondary levels. In the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) statistical digest 2009 it shows there are 121,750 male teachers and 125,801 female teachers in secondary schools in Nigeria. One of the challenges of the educational
system is to address gender inequality in the educational social systems so that schools and teachers at all levels can have key roles to play in developing a gender sensitive future generation.

Another challenge to teachers in the 21st century is in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The spread of ICT challenges teacher “monopoly” of knowledge and learning process to the point that professional development and access to adequate ICT infrastructure without cutting other school resources had become a critical factor in classroom conditions. Not many know how to use ICT because majority of teachers do not have ICT skills.

Teachers’ recruitment and retention remain high on the list of challenges relating to teacher education. There is continuing concern about attractiveness of teaching as a career, making recruitment a major issue. In some developing countries this has led to a lowering of entry standards, others are unqualified persons and or school leavers with no training whatsoever are employed. Those qualified leave for greener pastures. In developing countries the huge demand for more teachers often means training a large number of teachers’ only to a very basic level of quality at all stages of the education system including technical and vocational teachers.

There is also the issue of the increasing number of students entering teacher training e.g. through the Distance Learning and Special Teacher Upgrading Programs (STUP) all of the National Teachers Institute, NTI, Kaduna with low academic qualifications. Products of these programs are no any better even after completion. There is also the inability of existing teacher education providers to take on the required number of new trainees to fill teacher shortages, leading to the employment of untrained teachers.

Teacher education in the 21st century

To contemplate teacher education for the 21st century is to assume that the present system is not functioning as required. In writing on this one is inclined to look at education as a social system. A social system comprises of three main elements: students, teachers and the curriculum. The efficiency and effectiveness of any educational system depend on the cohesion among these three elements. If one has some deficiency or weakness in performing its role reduced productivity may result within the educational process as a whole. However, it is clear that one of the three elements has profound effect on the other two. In this case, the teacher is the basic element affecting the educational process more than the other two.

A look at the National Policy on Education and relevant section that deals with teacher education, readers will agree with me that there is a dysfunction in teacher education and what is in place today. For the avoidance of doubt, section 6(b) is quoted thus:

- “To provide highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teacher;
- To encourage further spirit of inquiry and creativity in teacher
- To help teacher to fit into the social life of the community and society at large;
- To produce teacher with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment;
- To enhance teacher commitment to the teaching profession”.

Afe (2002) assessed the achievement of the above objectives and concluded that our teacher education programme have been deficient in providing teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment in the society.

Professionalization of teaching in the 21st century

Professionalization of teaching has been a topic of controversy in Nigeria especially among educators, teachers, administrators, organizations and the public at large. The question of whether teaching is an occupation, a vocation, a calling, a semi profession or a profession has further complicated the situation to the extent that members of the public have accorded low status and recognition to teachers. Is a common knowledge that no one is proud to identify or introduce himself as a teacher as do lawyers or medical doctors, etc. Afe (2002) cited an instance to demonstrate the plight of teachers in Lagos, Delta, Edo, Ondo and probably
many other states that: “landlords will not lease their houses to teachers. From bitter experience, the teacher is sure to fall into arrears of rent, not because he is a congenital debtor, but because he is poorly paid and because rarely does he get paid regularly. Parents do not hesitate to disown a daughter foolish to fall in love with a teacher”. This situation led Legatt (1970) to say that teaching is a profession but not a highly esteemed one and may never be. In the 21st century, teaching should be professionalized. The teacher in the 21st century requires a stepped up motivation. Onye (2006) states that any organization that neglects staff welfare and motivation cannot get higher productivity from labor force. It is therefore important that welfare services be provided by employers this it was suggested to include “adequate retirement and pension scheme, medical services, staff school; vehicle and end of the year bonuses for dedicated teachers”.

Funding of educational institutions has to be undertaken in manner to ensure provision of needed materials in schools. There is a seemingly complete absence of furniture in most if not all public schools in Nigeria. Adequate funds must be voted to cater for changing nature of schools. The relative and absolute decline of the status of the teaching profession has serious effects. Quantitative teacher shortage still continues. These challenges called for new policies to teacher and their profession, such as: more flexible working arrangements, a focus on the proper material but especially professional incentives for teachers, rather than reliance on regulation. There should be greater emphasis on quality rather than quantity in teacher recruitment, a commitment to teacher evaluation linked to continued professional development and team work.

There should be social dialogue on education this means all forms of information sharing, consultation and negotiation between educational authorities, public and private and teachers with their democratically elected representatives in teacher organizations e.g. Nigerian Union of Teachers, NUT, All Nigeria Confederation of Principals in Secondary Schools, ANCOPSS, Colleges of Education Staff Union, COESU, Association of Staff of Polytechnic, ASUP, and Academic Staff Union of Universities ,ASUU.etc.

The dialogue should variously address major issues concerning the teaching profession: educational objectives, policies, preparation for the profession and further education for teachers.

Ensure initial and continuing education of teachers. Teachers need to develop professionally. There is the cry for poor reading culture by students. There is the need get teachers in schools not to make students read but to teach them how read and absorb what they have read. There should be regular seminars and workshops for teachers for capacity building. Teachers need to build capacity to integrate the ICT in their work. There is an increasing obligation demanded of teachers especially to global education initiatives such as Education For All (EFA) Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. New and emerging teachers’ role expectations associated will increasingly complex, knowledge societies; all these factors reflect the fundamental priority that must be given to teacher education. As society becomes more complex, so will the demands on schools and teachers. These factors should be captured when teachers are involved in capacity building activities.

The education of teachers in the 21st century must take into cognizance that policies on teacher education are fragmented, with no link between per-service and in-service training. Until recently (even though NUT constitution is yet review that should be a teacher (see Article) p 48. Teacher education in the 21st century should provide opportunities for teachers to have appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the new needs of school and society, most particularly as result of increasing globalization and the use of information and communication technologies. Newly recruited teachers should undergo a systematic induction program to make adequate provision for professional development of teacher educators.

Teacher education of the 21st century should focus on training teachers to be reflective in practice, be active in learning, and be innovative, creative and partnership building. The curriculum therefore needs review in order to ensure that it supports the development of the above. At higher education level personnel who train teachers or eventually take up teaching in tertiary institutions should be
subjected to evaluation by students in both content and personality

Conclusion
Teacher Education has grown over time. They are treasured all over the world as drivers to traditional economic and social development. However the teachers have consistently been ignored by local, state and federal governments. This neglect has grossly affected teachers’ condition of service; classrooms are more buildings that hardly can house animals. Unqualified and untrained are appointed as teachers these has an affected teaching profession.

References:


Dickson, G E and Creighton, S.L (1968) “Who is this Person we call Teacher?” Education Leadership February, 455-458.


Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, (TRCN) Digest 2009


