

## **REGULATORY CHALLENGES IN THE UPGRADING AND MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS IN TEACHERS' PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The compliance with minimum regulatory standards in the practice of teaching is bound to promote a competent, dedicated and productive classroom teacher for character molding and qualitative education. In Nigeria, issues of professionalization of teaching have continued to suffer from setbacks resulting to poor remuneration, low self-esteem and quackery in the teaching profession. This scenario negates the promotion and achievement of functional educational system at all levels. This paper examined the challenges militating against the attainment of minimum regulatory standards in teaching despite its pioneering effort as the mother of all professions. It adopted the exploratory approach to examine the various trend analysis and used the institutional framework design through secondary literature and observation to juxtapose the structures of teaching with other professional bodies. Based on the challenges, it recommended the institutionalization of a professional body for the upgrading, coordination and enforcement of minimum regulations to benefit members in raising the status of the teaching profession to meet global competitiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** Teacher, Standard, Education, Regulation, Quality, Membership, Ethics, Code, Profession

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the work cycle, the process of building a job ethics to bring about dignity of labour to galvanize labour relationships has been a guiding principle from the epoch of human evolution. Quite often, this has been what informed people's ideology of similar work environment to pursue not only their common good but to enhance productivity for improved welfare services. The pursuit of these ethical standards has largely been responsible for the institutionalization of workers professional practice in various work places in the world over. Professionalism is therefore an important element in the interplay of work environment either in the private or public sectors including in the educational field of endeavour.

Professionalism of teaching and teacher development can be seen as a crucial factor for the attainment of goals, learning achievement, organization of programmes and the overall success of any educational system. The bedrock of a dynamic educational system thus, lies on the core of a devoted, knowledgeable, competent and a well-trained teacher in any given society. These qualities are well appreciated and cherished as important factor that brings about the growth and advancement of societies in the developed countries like Britain, United States of America, France and some developing countries of the world.

In Nigeria, there is the need for the continuous upgrading of the teaching profession to bring about the caliber of manpower required to operate or implement the education curriculum in line with global best practices. Over the years, stakeholders especially those in education have made concerted efforts in planning for the development of qualified teacher education in the country. The National Policy on Education (2004) and the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (2005) for instance, have outlined the goals of teacher education to:

- i. Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- ii. Encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- iii. Help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large, and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- iv. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation;
- v. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

It is expected that teachers should be professionally trained and upgraded with relevant skills to improve on the performance of their duties. The development of the teacher is an important task to bring about quality as the National Policy on Education (2004) acknowledged that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Thus, professionalization and ways of upgrading teachers' competencies remains the panacea for the transformation of the nations' economy for global competitiveness.

This study adopted the exploratory approach to examine the evolutionary trend in the upgrading of teaching to becoming a professional body like their counterpart such as law, medicine etc. To achieve this, the institutional framework methodology was used as the design. This method tried to juxtapose through available literature and observation about the different movements taken by teachers to institute a code of practice in the field. It attempted to ascertain whether efforts employed by members has helped to build the structure of a professional body for teachers in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Professionalism of Teaching**

As a term, professionalism has to do with aspects of one's occupation that is affiliated to a profession. A profession is seen as a process of acquiring specialized knowledge to enhance one's occupation which can be gained after intensive preparation. According to Bellingham (2007) every profession essentially possess three features which includes: (a) a body of erudite knowledge that is applied to the service of society; (b) a standard of success measured by accomplishments in serving the needs of society rather than personal gains; and (c) a system of control over a professional practice which regulates the education of new members and maintains both a code of ethics and appropriate sanctions of members.

Attempt at the professionalization of teaching in Nigeria dates back to the period 1920-1930 with the emergence of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). In those early days, the NUT had succeeded in reviewing an education code in 1926 making it possible for Standard V or VI teacher to go for training and be awarded a first class certificate upon passes and obtaining three good examination annual report, Fafunwa (2002). However, despite the success of the NUT, Taiwo (1986) observed that it has only succeeded as a trade union but lack and display a weak side as a professional body. A profession according to Cwar (2010) entails that its tenets ensure high quality of practitioners, qualitative service delivery, restricted entry into the vocation and consequently, high standards, rewards, and prestige for the practitioners. The weak institutional base of teaching as a profession gives room for teacher to suffer all kind of abuses by members and non-members alike as evident in the past.

In other to forge an enduring professional body in the educational system, members of the teaching carrier deemed it fit to put in place a set of professional practice which are intended to regulates the conduct of its members. According to Wokocha (2013) teaching is said to be the mother of all noble professions because of its pioneering efforts in educating members and raising the crop of other professional in other disciplines all over the world. Teaching like every other profession is expected to operate under some acceptable guidelines.

As a guiding principle, Ciwar (2010) highlighted that the practice of teaching has to operate on a universally accepted criteria governing any professional practice which includes:

- a. Theoretical and practical knowledge mastered exclusively by the practitioners.
- b. Fairly long time of training in the field.
- c. Continuous practice in the field.
- d. Ethical codes of conduct for practitioners.
- e. Regulatory body that licenses and disciplines as well as promotes professional growth of practitioners.

- f. Rendering of essential, qualitative services to society by the practitioners.
- g. Membership of practitioners in the profession or regulatory body.

The attainment of these professional guidelines requires that teaching in Nigeria should be upgrade and enforcement of minimum standards if the teaching profession has to be taken seriously. This is because these standards are needed to perfectly guide the professional duties and equally maintain discipline on the action(s) of members towards the realization of the societal, educational cultural and the developmental aspirations of the nation.

In recognition of this important role, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was instituted with eighty four (84) code of practice as the apex professional regulatory agency for the teaching profession to bring about standards in teaching. The aim is to eliminate quacks in the noble profession to achieve minimum set of knowledge, skills, values, attitude, conduct, rights, privileges and obligation expected of a professional (TRCN, 2010).

The essence for the professionalization of teaching is to produce a “highly motivated”, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers in the Nations Educational System from the primary, secondary to the university levels. This is to overcome the manpower requirements stipulated by the National Teacher Education Policy (2009); the UNESCO/ILO position on the status of the teacher, the Child Right Act (2003); the Public Service Rules of the federal government (2000); the roadmap to the education sector in Nigeria (2009) etc intended to meet the target of millennium development goals (MDGS) now the Sustainable development goals beyond the close of 2015.

### **Purpose of Upgrading Teachers Professional Standard**

Primarily, teacher professionalism was borne out of the need to determine the professional standing of teachers in the performance of their duties. It is a way of knowing how fit the teacher is to teach, the qualification required for teaching and the value of the teacher to the profession.

The process of upgrading the teaching profession implies helping practicing teachers to obtain high academic and professional qualification for the practice in the profession. According to Oboegbulem (2002), upgrading the teaching profession involves a mechanism of redesigning teacher preparation to achieve the following:

- i. Update of the academic qualification of teachers to ensure new roles and perform special task connected to changes in the curricular and instructional methodologies;
- ii. Provision of adequate training so that teaching and learning are made more effective;

- iii. Keeping the teachers abreast of new developments in particular subject areas as well as in pedagogy;
- iv. Impacting teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitude which are necessary in the light of changing national development goals and education priorities;
- v. Making teachers more aware of the problems of their communities and developing skills, attitude and competencies needed for them to act as change agents in the community;
- vi. Making teachers aware of recent research findings in the field of education particularly as they apply to teaching, learning and classroom management;
- vii. Exposing teachers to the preparation, maintenance and use of instructional technology such as computers, Microsoft, internet etc; and
- viii. Presenting new textbooks and teachers guide and assisting teachers to learn how to prepare and develop singular text for their subject area.

As a result of breakthrough in information communication technology (ICT) due to globalization, teachers are expected to upgrade their knowledge to cope with the new technology driven era in the world which is operating as a global village. It is obvious, that the emergence of the ICT came with new ideas, discoveries and changes. Teachers must move with the new tide of change through training, seminars, workshops and formal or informal schooling to improve on the quality of their performance for effective service delivery.

The continuous preparation and upgrading of teachers is therefore a vital aspect in the quest for the nations economic and technological development. Obioma, Chukwuma and Ajudeonu (2007) for instance, asserted that the recognition of teacher preparation and upgrading is bound to promote the teaching profession to produce competence, sense of social responsibility and commitment, to function effectively as constructive socio-economic, moral, and spiritual change agents needed to promote goodwill, peace and progress not only in the country, but also in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The accomplishment of this mandate requires that the would-be teacher is expected to undergo a rigorous and extensive training programme to become competent for the task. A minimum of a teaching qualification is needed as benchmark at every level of the educational system from the primary, secondary and universities before any one could gain entry into the field of teaching. Eimuhi and Otomewho (2007) noted that the professional qualification needed for people to practice as teachers are holders of a minimum of the Nigeria certificate in education (NCE) for primary schools level, and for the Junior secondary school (J.S.S), is the Bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed, BA.Ed or B.Sc.Ed).

Enumerating the institutions qualified for the training of teachers, Ojo (2006) listed that virtually all the regular universities in Nigeria offer teacher education programmes leading to the award of BA(Ed), B.Sc(Ed), B,Ed, and PGDE while, the colleges of education, some polytechnic and National Teachers Institute offer programmes for the award of the (NCE). Programme duration for any of the qualification ranged from three to six years depending on the entry point and mode of study. Thus, the need to adequately prepare the Nigerian teacher through a robust and comprehensive framework to enhance its professional standard is an obvious imperative.

### **Challenges Facing the Upgrading and Regulation of the Teaching Profession**

The teaching profession has continued to suffer from lack of recognition as a professional field of practice. This may not be unconnected to the low status accorded to teachers by the Nigerian public. Moreover, there seems not to be appropriate regulatory framework to enforce compliance of minimum standards in the field of teaching. As such, attempts to upgrade the practice of teaching to an enviable profession is shrouded with many challenges.

Among the challenges of the profession is the lack of a strong accreditation and licensing body to regulate its members. One major problem faced by teachers and the teaching profession is the influx of non-professionals into the teaching field without being certified with a practicing license. In Nigeria, most job-seekers in the classroom see teaching as a stepping stone and a job of all comers. These untrained and non-licensed persons lack the requisite professional expertise required to standardize the profession. This development has made the practice undesirable for those with genuine interest who would otherwise seen teaching as a choice profession.

Government attitude towards the welfare of teachers is yet another challenge facing the profession. A major policy commitment initiated by the United Nations to improve teacher development as noted by Osho (2012) was for government around the world to comply with the UNESCO convention which earmarked 25 percent of state budget to education. Regrettably, the non-compliance of the UNESCO convention by the Nigerian government has hampered teachers professional development and welfare. The gross neglect of teachers welfare is largely responsible for the young starry-eyed teachers to desert the profession with any least opportunity without bringing their innovativeness to bear in the field of practice.

Another problem is the issue of poor remuneration packages to teachers. Teachers are faced with poor remuneration and delayed of teachers salaries have been a bane of the teaching profession in Nigeria, Uzoh (2002) and Fareo (2013). Teachers have not enjoyed better pay package compared to their counterpart in the legal, medical or accounting profession. This development dampens members of the teaching field

as their pay packages makes the job unattractive and worthless for members who ventured into the profession.

Furthermore, public perception and poor social outlook accorded to the teaching profession in Nigeria is another teething problem. Over the years, societal view and perception of the teaching profession has been quite appalling. Most people who take to teaching see the work as a stepping stone for other professions and rarely consider it as job preference with dignity and respect by the average Nigerian. This phenomenon is undoubtedly predicated on the ill-orientation of the public attached to the value of the teacher. As a result, most people who find themselves in the teaching field would rather opt for professions that enjoy better social recognition and acceptance.

### **Strategies to Upgrade and Strengthening the Teaching Profession in Nigeria**

The need to upgrade teacher education programme to strengthen the teaching profession cannot be overemphasized. In the light of this, the following strategies will help to upgrade the teaching profession to bring about efficiency of teaching in Nigeria. Modification of specialized training: The emergence of globalization comes with new ideas and policies on education in Nigeria. These ideas and innovations are bound to affect the curriculum content of teaching subjects such as ICT and computer education, technical and vocational education, agricultural science, business education etc in schools. By this development, the course content of teacher education programmes should be reviewed and modified to suit the present educational system in Nigeria. In this regard, every teacher in this era of change needs to be trained compulsorily in computer literacy and new areas of other subject matter to enable them cope with the new trends in the global village.

Recruitment and control of entry into the profession: As a matter of policy, entry into the teaching profession should be well defined and regulated by the relevant bodies like the TRCN, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and ministry of education. The notion of viewing teaching as a general trade that welcomes everybody no matter what stock of knowledge a job seeker possesses must be determined by at least a minimum entry qualification.

Government and proprietors of privately owned schools need to comply and enforce the code of ethics on the criteria for entry and exit of new and old members respectively into the teaching profession. In order to achieve this, a competency based test need to be conducted at the end of a teacher training programme for the licensing and certification of new members for professional practice. Effort must be given in addressing the influx of quacks and those without knowledge of pedagogy into the profession. The scenario where the profession is seen as “all comers affairs” is messing up the system by violating most of the professional code of practice in the profession.

For instance, some teachers who indulge and found guilty of certain professional misconduct like having illegitimate sexual relationship with students, leaking of examinations papers, showing of favouritism and so on are sometimes reported without taking action. The efforts of the teachers' disciplinary panel and teachers' investigative committee need to be strengthened where people of proven integrity are appointed to serve in order to bring about sanity into the teaching profession.

Knowledge and training on Pedagogy: Admittedly, it is a fact that teachers who passes through the ranks of TC II, NCE. B.ED etc programmes in their early years of educational training are better equipped than those who just obtain a PGDE programme, Sheke and Omoraka (2002). In order to strengthen the profession, intending members need to obtain any of the above qualifications as a minimum benchmark into the profession. However, in order to streamline the standard of the PGDE certificate, the duration of study should be reviewed to at least two (2) years with intensive period of teaching practice to enable those without a teaching background to align properly into the teaching profession.

Establishment of an umbrella Teacher Professional Association: The coordination of teachers' matters by the NUT at the primary and secondary schools levels appears to be too weak. The TRCN and the use of Teachers' Disciplinary Council are equally ineffective in the regulation of ethics among its members. Meanwhile, teachers in privately owned institutions and those of the colleges of education and universities seem not to be properly covered by the TRCN legal instrument that is binding on membership practice. In order to upgrade and strengthen the profession to make it attractive to members, every teacher irrespective of the level (primary, secondary, colleges of education, university) should operate under one umbrella like the NBA, NMA, ICAN etc whose members have the liberty to practice at any strata of government without discrimination. In order to achieve this, an umbrella association to be known as the Nigerian Professional Teachers Association (NPTA) should be established as a body to harmonize teachers at all levels in both public and private institutions to attain compliance in the practice of teaching to meet global standards.

## **CONCLUSION**

The teaching profession has suffered from severe neglect despite its pioneering effort as the mother of all professions. The display of unprofessional ethics prevailing in the profession is largely responsible for its relegation in Nigeria. As much as the image of teaching profession ought to be redeemed to attain a professional status, it becomes very imminent to upgrade existing regulations to distinguish the body between professional teachers from quackery. Such avenue will appropriately reward deserving members of the profession as well as impose sanctions on those of questionable characters. Against this background, it becomes necessary to establish



a body to be known as Nigerian Professional Teachers Association (NPTA) to harmonize and coordinate the implementation of the TRCN, NUT and other stakeholders of the profession. This will help to maintain minimum professional standard for the Nigerian teacher to enable them enjoy the benefits of belonging to professional association as a benchmark for global best practices.

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