

Teaching Profession in Nigeria and Logical Inconsistency: An Exercise in Rationality

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Abstract: *Teaching in Nigeria is not a 'profession'. The word "profession" is only a universal term, and does not need to be considered in the absolute sense. A universal term would apply to everyone and every society. On the other hand, an absolute term does not permit exceptions. To say that teaching is a profession in the universal sense means that this ought to apply to all people and all societies; and to view it in the absolute sense as is often the majority belief in Nigeria means that there are no circumstances in which it would be wrong to call teaching a 'profession' Our position in this paper is that the term teaching profession can only be attributed to societies which in the course of their educational development attained the level of professionalism.*

I. Introduction

It may not be an overstatement to say that the contemporary history of education has significantly been characterized by issues bordering on teachers and professionalism. This is so when we consider the fact that education in Nigeria is regarded as an "instrument par excellence" for national development; and the axiom that "no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers" (National Policy on Education, 2004:4,39).

The long and short of it all is the global recognition of the all-importance of teachers to human development and the consequent admission of teaching to the comity of professions. This was evidenced by a joint declaration in 1984 by two organs of United Nations, the International Labour Organization (I.L.O.) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that: "Teaching should be regarded as a profession" (Nwosu, 2011:2-3).

However, despite the said declaration, certain issues needed to be clarified about the official status of teachers, especially in the third world countries. Such questions include: 'is teaching profession' an absolute concept? Or put differently, are there no conditions under which teaching could not be regarded as a profession?

Responding to the above questions with regard to the Nigerian situation, some scholars like Asuru (2008:93) believe that the establishment of Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in 1993 has laid to rest the controversy of whether or not teaching is a profession in Nigeria. However, other scholars in the like of Amaele (2006:43), present an opposing view that teaching in Nigeria is yet to witness professionalism.

This, in fact, is the crux of the matter. Granted a self-evidenced knowledge that teaching is a profession, can we also aver that teaching in Nigeria is a profession? Our intention in this paper is to clarify this nagging issue within the context of truth-claim about teaching profession, and its implication for the concept within philosophy discourse. This is necessary because the claim to knowledge of teaching as a profession in Nigeria has precipitated what amounts to lots of conceptual confusions, especially among scholars who may not have drank deep enough from the 'well' of philosophy, thus denuding teaching profession the language game of philosophy. Here, we are going to appraise teaching in Nigeria in terms of the extent to which it exhibits the characteristics of a profession in line with the principles that guide human thinking.

Finally, let us crave your indulgence to heed to the advice of Epictetus to "throw away conceit, for it is impossible for a man to begin to learn when he has the conceit that he already knows" (cited in Udoidem, 1992:1).

II. The Concept Of Teaching: An Historical Evolution

Discussions on teaching may not be complete without reflecting on the background from which it sprang and thrived. This is necessary because according to Aristotle "he who considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else will obtain the clearest view of them (cited in Nsirim, 2013:476).

Though, history has shown that there must have been learning undertaken through experiences and imitation, there still existed evidences of deliberate teaching and learning. In this regard therefore, we find the Greek system of education a good starting point. This is because the Greek education approximates that of the contemporary Western system (Ogbonda, 2002:23). Teaching at this period was carried out by foreigners

(travelling teachers) called Sophists (intellectuals) who received wages for their services. Stumpf (1999:30) named three of such outstanding sophists of the 5th c BC as Protagoras, Gorgias and Thrasymachus. Then came Socrates, a great Athenian philosopher who established a school in his home near Lyceum in 390 BC. However, it was Plato, a student of Socrates who made a greater impact in the field of education. His school, the Academy laid the foundation for modern education.

This system of education which started in Greece, soon became a universal phenomenon, spreading to Rome, Europe and other parts of the world. In Nigeria, it was colonialism that made its penetration and spread possible. Mbachu (2011:197 quoting Fafunwa) avers that the first teacher training colleges were built by the colonial missionaries. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) started a training institute at Abeokuta in 1859, the Baptist Mission started a training college at Ogbomosho in 1897 and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society built their school at Ibadan in 1905.

All these centuries, teaching passed through some moderations and sophistications differently in these areas but retained its basic characteristic as an occupation (i.e. done for a living). It was not until the 20th c that teaching attained its golden age as a profession.

III. Teaching And Professionalism

The term 'teaching' has generated different meanings and interpretations over the centuries. The reason may not be unconnected with the wide range of tasks and activities its dynamic nature has engendered over these years. However, judging from the historical antecedents, we can for the purposes of this work take teaching to simply mean, the art of imparting or giving knowledge. This art of imparting knowledge, as pointed out in the last section began with the sophists who were paid for the services so rendered. Ever since then, teaching in its dynamic nature has continued to evolve and to improve on its knowledge and pedagogical skills.

At the moment, teaching has progressed from its traditional base as an occupation to a professional status, having attained some heights in specialized areas of knowledge and skills. The ILO and UNESCO recommendation is a testimony to this fact when it stated in a document entitled, "The status of the teaching profession: Instrument for improvement, recommendation 6, that:

Teaching should be regarded as a profession, it is a form of public service which required of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study ... (T.R.C.N. Teachers Code of Conduct, 2004:3).

In Nigeria, for instance, the areas of knowledge and specializations have been delineated into grades and levels. They are Teachers Grade II, Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), masters Degree in Education (M.Ed), Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D), Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and professional Diploma in Education (PDE). Section 72 of the National Policy on Education gives credence to this when it states that "All teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained" (NPE, 2004:42). The implication of the above is that only those with teaching qualifications are qualified to carry out the teaching functions in Nigeria.

Now, judging from present practice in Nigeria and given the generally assumed characteristics of a profession, which are trans-cultural, trans-social and trans-political in nature, can we by the same token assume teaching in Nigeria to be a profession? We are of the view that the assumed characteristics of a profession if applied to teaching in Nigeria must of necessity possess, reflect, and be located within the identified criteria for professionalization.

IV. Reason, Teaching And Professionalization

Civilized lie depends upon the success of reasons in social intercourse, the prevalence of logic over violence in interpersonal conflict (Juliana, Geran Pilon in M. Copi, 1978).

Our effort in this section will be geared towards identifying the extent to which the respective characteristics of teaching in Nigeria can be assumed as providing the grounds for professionalization in the court of reason, employing the language game of philosophy. When we say that philosophy is a rational enterprise, we do not intend, as it is erroneously believed sometimes, that philosophy engages in extreme rationalism. In fact, philosophy, among other things, is about clarification of concepts, notions or ideas in a bid for an enlightened critical evaluation of things and as well, as our knowledge of the essences or what Plato described as the 'really real' of things. What we are actually saying is that, we are going to make use of reason in our quest for an enlightened understanding of the operation of teaching as a profession in Nigeria. This is given the fact of the common nature of reasoning capacity of man in general. We cannot doubt the fact that what outcome or conclusion that is reached through reasoning faculty of one person must of necessity be attainable to another person's reasoning. Otherwise the truth stands falsified for failing to keep within the bounds of reasoning.

Let us therefore, consider the following basic characteristics of a profession:

- ❖ A profession must possess a definite field of knowledge with specialized training and skill.
- ❖ A profession must possess the autonomy to be able to control entry and the conditions of practice through licensing.
- ❖ A profession must possess monopoly over the essential services rendered to humanity.
- ❖ A profession must possess ethical code of conduct prescribed by members for themselves.

A close examination of the above characteristics of a profession will reveal the difficulties associated with identifying teaching in Nigeria as a profession.

With number one characteristics above, we can say with a great amount of certainty that teaching in Nigeria has certified expertise in different areas of knowledge, and that trained teachers in Nigeria are experts in their different subject areas and are also skilled in the art of teaching at the different levels of our educational systems.

For the number two, the authority to control entry and conditions of service is still a rhetoric, operating only in principle. Section 17(12) of the T.R.C.N. Act states that: If, on or after the commencement of the Act, any person not being a registered member of the profession practices as a registered member of the profession or in expectation of reward, or takes or uses any name, title, addition or description implying that he is in practice as a registered member of the profession, he shall be guilty of an offence (Nwosu, 2011:126).

In pursuant of the above objectives, the National Council on Education at its 50th session held at Yenegoa in Bayelsa State in 2003, gave 2006 as the deadline for unqualified teachers in the various education system to update their professional competence (Nwosu, 2011:127). Up till date, from our common experience, not much has been achieved in this direction, especially at the tertiary level of our education system. The position today is the continual engagement of unqualified persons as teachers – ‘Teaching without teachers’. The consequence of this situation is that even the qualified and trained teachers now show lukewarm attitude towards registration and licensing. After all, to those people, it makes no difference as to who a teacher is or not.

For the number three characteristics, there is no gain over-flogging the fact of the importance of the peculiar essential education services teachers render to their society. Despite this fact of the peculiar nature of education services, almost everybody irrespective of his academic background and training believes himself equal to the task of teaching. This I-can-do-it attitude by everybody has caused education much harm, thus resulting in bad services so rendered as essential. No doubt this puts the prestigious position of teaching to question.

Presently, in Nigeria, there is a conglomeration of almost all persons from different fields of human endeavour in the teaching field. No wonder BabsFafunwa’s remark that “a vocation in which all-comers can participate can hardly qualify for a profession”. A demarcation line must be drawn between the acquisition of academic corpus of facts and the actual training in the art of impartation which teaching entails. A case in point is the recent employment of about thirteen thousand applicants by the Rivers State Government who will serve as teachers at the primary and post primary levels of her schools. A good number of these employees are not ‘teachers’ and the Government are of the believe that they have equipped such persons for the task of teaching by organizing a four day seminar. What an irony and mockery of the teaching profession.

The last number under consideration is the idea of code of conduct which simply refers to the rules and regulations guiding teachers’ professional practice. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria has in a publication entitled “Teachers code of conduct” reeled out the moral rules, it considers appropriate to eliminate unethical behaviours from all practitioners. By this code of conduct, trainee teachers are expected to be injected with the culture of morality in anticipation of the task of producing citizens who will be both worthy in character and in learning. This is in pursuance of the belief that character of teachers to a large extent determines the quality of their products.

Now granted that the professional teachers have been injected with a good dose of the teaching ethics as already stated, what becomes of the non-professionals who may be lacking in this regard? In the event of misconduct, the license of a culprit could be withdrawn. But what happens in the case of a culprit who has none? The much that could be done is sack and that makes no difference as such an individual would readily go back to the field where he rightly belongs.

Having gone this far, it has become necessary now to juxtapose our statements with the laws of reasoning. Reasoning of whatever kind presupposes three laws of thoughts: the law of identity, the law of contradiction or non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle. These laws are rules of right thinking and must be present if correct reasoning is to follow:

The law of identity states that ‘A’ is ‘A’ or that everything is what it is. By implication, to say that teaching is a profession, it would mean that it shares in the universal characteristics of a profession. Here, the law enables us to assess the identity of a profession, for by its identity, it is known and conceptualized.

The second law, the law of contradiction states that nothing can be both 'A' and not 'A' or simply put, no proposition can be both true and false at the same time. For instance, it would not be proper for one to say that teaching in Nigeria is a profession because it meets with some assumed characteristics of a profession, and at the same time, claim it is not a profession for failing to meet other requirements.

Here again, this law helps to provide us with a standard that makes one distinct from another. In brief, this law rejects the idea of making conflicting statements or contradicting statements as it appears to be the case with teaching in Nigeria.

Lastly, the law of excluded middle repudiates the possibility of having any middle ground. It is either that teaching in Nigeria is a profession or it is not with regard to the assumed characteristics of professionalism. There is no partial truth or falsity in teaching profession.

Finally, we shall not fail to point out what may be regarded as some gap in the laws, for philosophy is a discipline that reflects on self. For instance, the principle of identity is criticized on the grounds that a proposition may be true at one time, and false at another time. What is important here is that the principle does not deny the possibility of change and therefore, cannot assert that, because teaching in Nigeria today is not a profession that it will never be. What is asserted is that things in some definite contexts and occasions (i.e. place and time) have definite character.

V. Reconciling The Inconsistencies

Granted that our study so far has proved beyond any reasonable doubts that teaching in Nigeria is not a profession, and granted the fact also that the Federal Government of Nigeria, at least, in principle believes in the professionalization of teaching, we make the following recommendations as a solution that will launch teaching in Nigeria into comity of professions.

- ❖ Teachers must be encouraged to continually improve upon their subject areas of specialization and methodology. This could be done through such programmes as in-service training, workshops, and seminars.
- ❖ Teachers must be given the autonomy to control entry and conditions of practice of the profession. This can only be possible when the ministries, parastatals, and departments of education are headed by professionals as it is the case with such profession as law and medicine. Also, all untrained and unregistered teachers must not be allowed to teach at any level of the educational system.
- ❖ Teachers must have a well spelt out conditions of service. The necessary professional allowances due teachers must be paid. The present impasse between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government over non-implementation of agreement reached since 2009 only attests to the low regard for teachers and their profession.
- ❖ Every teacher must be registered and licensed before going into practice. This means that no unregistered teacher, even if well trained should be permitted to practice.
- ❖ Lastly, teachers should be oriented to a functional ethical code of conduct spelling out in clear terms the duties, rights, privileges and rewards or punishments for different forms of offences.

VI. Conclusion

We have come thus far in our attempt to explain the laws of logic and how they may be applied to propositions. This we have done by placing the features observed in teaching in Nigeria vis-a-vis the essences of a profession, applying the laws of logic.

The result of our effort is that teaching in Nigeria is not a profession. This is because the features it exhibits are inconsistent with the characteristics of a profession. We insist that if Nigeria must live up to its professed statements that education is an "instrument par excellence" and that "no nation may rise above the quality of its teachers", then the warnings of St. Thomas Aquinas that "... it is a much heavier offence to corrupt the faith whereby life of the soul is sustained" becomes instructive (cited in Akamese, 2012:113). Diffident teachers should wake up and build some confidence in themselves and have faith in their avowed profession. The doctrinal belief that teaching is the "noblest of all professions but the sorrowest of all" must be fought to submission. After all, the once common statement "as poor as a church rat" is now history.

Lastly, fellow scholars, are we still perplexed about our subject-matter? If that is the case, philosophy has bewitched our minds. Welcome then to the club, for this is the starting point of philosophy, 'wonders', 'surprise' and 'bewilderment'.

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