

A Call for Teachers: A Sine Qua Non for National Transformation in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT---- *This paper was focused on a call for teachers as a tool for transforming the Nigerian education system in the twenty first century. The word teacher was considered as referring to persons in schools that are responsible for the education of Learners. Again, the teacher was described as the centre between knowledge and learning and at the same time the hub of the nation's educational system. The characteristics and the leadership qualities of a teacher were identified. The need for teachers' performance improvement and personal development together with the threats to the call for teachers were stressed. It was recommended among others things that a conducive environment should be provided for teachers to improve their performance and professional development.*

Keywords---- Teachers, national transformation, professional development

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher is an important and indispensable tool in the achievement of educational goals in all educational institutions. It is important to clearly state who a teacher is, because, from the common usage of the term “teacher” there is a tendency to lump together the scholar and the instructor, the research worker and the professor, the theoretician and the coach in practical skills. In the past, a teacher could combine all of the above activities to deserve the name and a status commensurate with the dignity and eminence of teachers. In fact, the teacher is a semblance of a complex of loyalties and social ranking. Okeke (2004) opined that today things have changed and “teachers” are no longer looked upon as encyclopedia of human knowledge. The realm of knowledge has grown too vast and the reputation of teachers now rests on investigation and teaching of a small fragment of a single specialization. This new concept of the term “teacher” is remote from the classical model of the University Professor (Okeke, 2004). The concept has therefore introduced an impressive array of technicians who are generally termed “teachers”. The word teacher connotes all those persons in schools that are responsible for the education of learners. This means the teacher is the centre between knowledge and learning. Thus the term teacher encompasses all those who discover, or order, transmit, disseminate, appraise, or administer in any learning and teaching process.

The teacher as the centre between knowledge and learning is the central process of quality and equality in education. Teachers are crucial inputs of an educational system. It is important to state that, no school can be stronger than the quality of the teachers, upon their numbers, devotion and quality, the effectiveness of all educational arrangements must chiefly depend (Okeke, 2004). Ukeje in Odiba (2008) opined that, the teachers are the hub of any educational system, for

the schools cannot be better than their teachers. The teacher is the implementer of the national education curriculum. His / her role among others include inculcating positive values and attitudes in students, guiding them towards the discovery of new knowledge, exposing them to useful skills, counseling them on personal and societal issues. Above all the teacher has the responsibility of moulding and equipping the students to fit into the society and any political environment, equips them with the necessary orientation in terms of attitude and values to cope with challenges, and give them the skills that will make them functional contributors to the economic development of the society.

The kind of teachers the paper is addressing is more than numbers and it is not just about the supply of teachers in a given system. In recent times, so many people find themselves in our educational sector as teachers, the one million naira question one might ask at this point is, who are the real teachers in our educational institutions and secondary schools in particular? How do we isolate professional teachers from the non professionals? The answers to these questions are not farfetched as attempt would be made to identify some of the characteristics of a teacher. Okeke (2004) and Odiba (2008) opined that, the following are some of the characteristics of a teacher.

- 1) High professional and academic ability and qualification;
- 2) Interest in and aptitude for teaching;
- 3) Prior professional education and training;
- 4) Sound professional attitude;
- 5) Grasp of subject matter;
- 6) Balanced mental health and emotional stability;
- 7) Good quality voice and speech,
- 8) Good physical appearance and
- 9) Suitable personal qualities like kindness, self – control, firmness etc

In the same vein Nacino-Brown in Okeke (2004) contended that the qualities of a professional teacher are as follows:

- a) Mastery of the subject taught,
- b) Understanding of the basic principles of children's growth and development,
- c) Good general knowledge,
- d) Knowledge of methods and techniques;
- e) Positive attitude to work
- f) Willingness to adapt his or her teaching to local needs, taking into account the materials, available, and
- g) Courage to struggle for better standard and conditions in the school.

The kind of teacher this paper seeks to address is the one assumes leadership position in the classroom. The leadership qualities of the teacher put him ahead of the students in the classroom. Farrant (1980), contended that the teacher should as much as possible possess the following leadership qualities;

- 1) Authority: those who possess the natural gift of authority can control people simply by force of personality. The teacher is given authority by virtue of his position but it is better that he maintains it by earning the respect of his pupils than by insisting on it by right.
- 2) Competence: teachers as leaders require a general level of competence to save them from embarrassing failure in the skills their followers must perform.
- 3) Decisiveness: good leadership requires an ability to make wise decisions and to act without hesitation in respect to them. This very much depends on confidence and sound judgment exhibited in a given situation.
- 4) Drama: every leader must possess a sense of what is dramatic and be able to create scenes that grip his followers and stir their imagination.
- 5) Energy: effective leaders reveal capacity to work tirelessly for a long time as is needed to achieve success in the object of their efforts.
- 6) Enthusiasm: teachers as leaders of instruction must have an inner passion for the cause which is infectious, arousing enthusiasm in their followers that is difficult to dampen.
- 7) Humility: the humility in an individual qualifies him for greater support and cooperation in any organization.
- 8) Humour: humor reveals itself in pleasantness, cheerful fullness, friendliness, a sympathetic, and understanding manner towards events.

- 9) Imagination: an inspiring leader fascinates because he overflows with fresh ideas. He also has a way of firing the imagination of other people so that they too become spurred with enthusiasm.
- 10) Initiative: followers wait to be told what to do. Leaders recognize when action is needed and implement it without hesitation.
- 11) Integrity: a good leader inspires trust. He does not pretend or try to conceal his true nature or activities and always tries to give of best whether or not people are watching him.
- 12) Loyalty: leaders not only expect loyalty from their followers but give loyalty to them. When there is a conflict between personal and group loyalties, the good leader gives precedence to the later.
- 13) Perseverance: the successful leader faces difficulties with a determination that refuses to accept defeat. He will try and try until he overcomes them. Type of leader does not take no for an answer. He demonstrates what is called shameless persistence.
- 14) Responsibility: good leaders are conscious of the responsibility they carry by reason of their position; they are therefore considerate both of the people entrusted to them and the materials or equipment committed to their charge.
- 15) Self control: a person who lacks self control is not fit for leadership. It is a characteristic that has to be learned and practiced until it becomes a habit.
- 16) Single-mindedness: no person can act as a leader who is easily distracted from his policy or chosen course of action.

It is important to state that the public place high premium on the activities of the teacher. For instance the public normally would expect his teacher to exhibit leadership in helping the school to actualize its goals including fostering school - community relations. High demonstration of professionalism is required in the activities of the teacher and this could be epitomized in the demonstration of certain traits. According to Ogunsaju (1983) the teachers should exhibit the following traits:

- 1) An active interest and noticeable pride in being a member of the teaching profession.
- 2) A positive approach toward the status of the profession and gains made toward professional status.
- 3) A willingness to do the "extra" expected of the strongly motivated individual.
- 4) Interest in working with fellow educators and citizens to solve educational problems and to plan for improvement and evaluation.
- 5) Academic advancement in general degree work and also within the particular field of the educator's responsibility.
- 6) Willingness to endure temporary setbacks while working towards long range improvements.
- 7) An instance (when deserved) on recognition as professional in matters of
- 8) Student-teachers-supervisor teacher, citizen-educator and other Personal relationships.
- 9) Courage to speak out when a situation demands attention.

A call for teachers in the twenty first century is more than numbers and it is certainly not the supply of teachers. It is a call for productivity and performance improvement. It is a call for personal development to become more relevant in contributing to the socio – economic development of the economy. National transformation ought to be the goal of every citizen. Transformation is a form of enacted change that is planned and is intended to bring about significant changes in how an institution is managed. Norris (2001) posited that, unlike crecive change which is unplanned and takes place through natural course of events, transformational change is intentionally planned to alter organizational structures and relationships. Again, transformation can be taken to mean a process for developing and maintaining a work environment in which everyone can be developed and allowed to contribute fully to the life of the nation and its objectives. National transformation therefore implies a change in all the sectors of the economy as a result of environmental influences, economic, legal, demographic, and or technological forces.

2. A CALL FOR TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A call for teachers in the 21st century is a clarion call. It is a call to performance improvement and personal development. A good number of teachers today at the secondary school level specifically are still with their entry qualifications into the teaching force. Performance improvement is the needed drug for our ailing standard of education. The teachers' performance improvement could be made possible through the following:-

- a) Computer appreciation and awareness. With the current technological advances in most economics of the world, the need for teachers to be computer literate becomes necessary. That we are in the age of information technology is not an over statement. The question then is how many teachers are computer literate? It is a paradox that our students have a better understanding of the computer in terms of utilization than the teachers. How then can we effectively perform our duties as the custodian of knowledge and centre between knowledge and learning? Our teaching efforts and overall performance would be improved if we possess the knowledge of computer. Internet services are available to aid our lesson preparations to produce the students the society desire. A teacher in this generation should strive to own a computer set, be it desktop or laptop. If we wish to remain relevant any have any hope of engaging future generations into learning, we need to get smarter about information communication and technology (ICT) devices.
- b) Reading and research. Closely related to the above is reading and research. Reading and research creates new information in the life of the reader and researcher. Soaring academically is a function of reading and research. In Nigeria generally, there is a poor reading culture. The best way to hide anything from a Nigerian is to put the thing in a book or printed material. A call for teachers in this dispensation is a call to reading and research efforts. There is always something new in both the printed and electronic materials that could be useful in the teaching and learning process. In this age of information technology, it would be embarrassing if the student have more information than the teachers on some basic concepts. Research is a fundamental phenomenon in any educational endeavour in the present dispensation. Teachers need adequate information to keep them above their students in all academic activities.
- c) Personal Development. Personal development is critical to performance improvement in the teaching profession. It is out of place for any teacher to still remaining with the qualification at the last graduation or entry qualification to the teaching profession. There is need for an additional qualification to remain relevant in any given organization. Attendance to workshops and seminars are necessary. Some teachers still remain with the qualification at the last graduation or entry qualification to the teaching profession. There is need for an additional qualification. To remain relevant in any given organization. Attendance to workshops and seminars are necessary parameters for performance improvement. A part from seminar and workshop attendance, teachers ought to be engaged in professional in- service Programme.

3. THREATS TO A CALL FOR TEACHERS

The following constitute a big threat to a call for teachers.

- i. Poor remuneration: Teachers in Nigeria are poorly paid compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world. Wage disparity is a problem in Nigeria. Secondary school teachers are not well paid. The take-home pay of an average secondary school teacher is less than what a messenger in the private sector takes. This situation reduces the level of commitment on the part of the teachers. The current pay level does not attract job satisfaction; for job satisfaction leads to job performance. Poor remuneration is the reason for moonlighting among most secondary school teachers. Most female teachers compete favourably with the market traders in terms of sales of goods of different sort as the male teachers are majorly "okada" riders all these activities are aimed at improving the economic security of the teachers.
- ii. Problem of insecurity: Nigeria in recent times has been bewildered by insecurity on every side of the economy. Boko-Haram insurgency in the north, kidnapping in the south-east/south-south, OPC activities in the west make commitment to duty impossible. Fear of the unknown has made most teachers to abandon their places of primary assignment. Recently, some secondary schools were attacked in the North Eastern part of Nigeria and

so many students lost their lives. The economic insecurity in the teaching job specifically is a cancer worm that has destroyed the educational system. Teachers' salaries and other benefits are delayed or absolutely denied. The take pay does not meet up with the challenges of the economy in terms of the living standard.

- iii. Corruption in high places: corruption is one of the cancer worms that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the people in power. Education leaders are not free in spite of the perfect excuses generated by them. Recently, an audit conducted by the state universal basic education board, revealed that the payment vouchers were replaced with names of ghost workers. The corruption level tends to be very high enough to threaten our education system.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the recommendation of this paper that

- 1) Both the state and the federal government should provide a conducive environment for teachers to operate by way of organizing workshops and Seminars for the teacher's productivity improvement. The cluster schools model of teacher's performance improvement could be used to advantage. By this method teachers gather in clusters for capacity building or professional development Programme. Schools in the district or zone are grouped in tens, to form a cluster. The following are some of the components of the cluster school model: sensitization meeting; sit-in - observation; needs assessment; classroom intervention; cluster teacher meetings and report writing. Training institutions with education bias are engaged in the Programme. Experienced teachers in the training institutions act as mentors to the teachers in the clusters based on subjects.
- 2) Secondary school education should be properly funded: this should include improved payment in the salary structure of the teachers. Allowances and other payments made to teachers should be appetizing enough to warrant total commitment of the teachers. The government should be honest enough as to devote 36% of the budgetary allocation to funding education and education related programmes. Salaries of teachers should be paid as at when due and not in arrears.
- 3) Provision of computer sets in all secondary schools: equipping the schools with computer set would reduce the computer illiteracy burden. Nothing stops the government and public spirited individuals from donating laptops to the teachers.

5. CONCLUSION

The teacher is the only instrument for positive change in the society. As the centre between knowledge and the learning, its call is unto performance improvement. The teacher is the hub of the nation's education system. The quality of our education system is dependent on the quality of our teachers. Computer Appreciation Programme is a must for all teachers, the opportunity must not elude any teacher. In the words of Huainanzi cited by Ale (2012) opportunities are changing ceaselessly. Those who get there early have gone far while those who got there too late cannot catch up. As the sun and the moon go through their courses, time does not go along with people. Therefore, sages do not value huge jewels as much as the value little time. Time is hard to find and easy to lose. Let us therefore, as teachers improve our performance level to be on top of our situations and challenges.

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