

Assessing Professionalism in Teaching: The Secondary Education Perspective in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined whether or not teaching is a full profession. It also determined the relationship between professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness at the secondary education level in Cross River State, Nigeria. A sample of 850 educators (844 teachers, 3 staff of Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria and 3 heads of inspectors of schools) was selected through stratified random sampling, judgemental and wholistic techniques respectively. A 20-item researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. Survey design was adopted. Test statistics adopted for data analysis were frequency, weighted mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.00 and above formed the significant/acceptance level. It was found that teaching is a profession but not in its fullest sense, and that there is a strong and positive relationship between professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness in the study area. It was recommended that licensing should be an essential pre-requisite for entry into teaching; a uniform and lengthy training period should be maintained in all teacher training institutions and be followed by inductive training. There should be strict enforcement of Education Act 31 of 1993; and more awareness be created among teachers that professionalism in teaching is essential in their career and depends partly on them.

Key words: Professionalism; Teaching effectiveness; Inductive; Licensing and standards

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INTRODUCTION

The dwindling fortunes of education and the quest to establish and maintained a culture of high quality in the Nigerian school system are two related phenomena that have attracted the attention of concerned educators and other education stakeholders in the country. The need for all education stakeholders especially teachers to evolve an attitude that is capable of averting any imminent danger or collapse in the system cannot be denied. Ereh and Ina (2007) asserted that the desired change can come about by well qualified and skillfully trained products from the teacher training institutions. This implies that the fate of the educational system rests majorly on teachers. Ornstein and Levine (2006) asserted that the more input teachers have, that is, the more control they exercise over their own licensing procedures for instance, the more teaching becomes or will be recognized as a full profession. This also brings to focus a recurrent question of whether or not teaching is a profession in the fullest sense.

Teaching, one of the world-wide recognized professions, as far as history can tell, lags far behind its Cohorts like Law, Medicine, Engineering (Lee, 2007). This has constituted a problem most probably due to poor cultural adherence to professional standards by members. Obviously, this is contrary to what is known and held about professionals. All professions worthy of the name have standards, that is, a minimum set of knowledge, skills, values, attitude, conduct, rights, privileges and obligations expected of a professional (F.M.E., 2010).

Earlier seminal work of Herbert Spencer and other founding sociologists regarding emerging professions of the nineteenth century, considered that professions were privileged by their positions in society with special knowledge and skills, which set the members apart from other people in the society (Friedson, 1984). In a similar way, Reeder (1972) described professionals as autonomous practitioners who control the production and use of their special knowledge in a way that those outside the profession could not access. Furthermore, professions were self-regulating, with codes of professional ethics.

The ensuring question of whether or not teaching is a full profession which has greatly concerned several sociologists and educators who have studied teaching for many decades, has led to the identification of features of highly professionalized occupations (Corwin, 1965; Howsam et al, 1976 and Rosenholtz, 1989). The characteristics according to Ornstein and Levine (2006:31) include:

1. A sense of public service, a life time commitment to career.
2. A defined body of knowledge and skills beyond that grasped by lay persons.
3. A lengthy period of specialized training.
4. Control over licensing standards and/or entry qualifications.
5. Autonomy in making decisions about selected sphere of work.
6. An acceptance of responsibility for judgements made and acts performed related to services rendered, a set of performance standards.
7. A self-governing organization composed of members of the profession.
8. Professional association and/or elite group to provide recognition for individual achievements.
9. A code of ethics to help clarify ambiguous matters or doubtful points related to services rendered.
10. High prestige and economic standing.

The unanswered questions are: Does teaching at secondary education level in Cross River State meet the criteria for a profession? How does professionalism in teaching relate to teaching effectiveness?

1. THEORETICAL/EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

Human relations model provides a framework for teaching effectiveness and professionalism in teaching. Louis and Smith (1990) explained the model by using seven indicators of work satisfaction. These are: Respect from relevant adults such as parents, school administrators and the community at large; participation in decision-making which increases teachers' sense of control over their work setting; frequent and stimulating professional interaction

among peers (Colleagial relationship); opportunity to make full use of existing skills and knowledge and to acquire new skills and knowledge (self-development); adequate resources to carry out the job; a sense of congruence between personal goals and school goals; and structures and procedures that contribute to a high sense of efficacy e.g. mechanism permitting teachers to obtain feedback about their performance (Quinn and Rohrbaugh 1983 in Scheerens, 2000, p.107).

The effectiveness criteria of this model is growth and resource acquisition. The model can be strongly applied to the work satisfaction of teachers and teaching profession. In other words, professionalism can have positive aspects when used to improve and develop services. Thus, professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness appear to have much in common as enshrined in this model.

In the conceptualization of the teaching enterprise, Etzioni (1969) asserted that teachers are aspirational professionals and described the profession as semi-profession. Lee (2009) also sees teaching as a semi-profession.

Many others viewed teaching from various angles. It is a classless profession (Mattingly, 1975); an emerging profession (Howsam, 1976); an uncertain profession (Powell, 1980); an imperiled profession (Duke, 1984, Sykes 1983, Freedom, Jackson & Botes 1983, Boyer, 1990); an endangered profession (Goodlad, 1983) and a not quite profession (Goodlad, 1990). Given the foregone, Obanya (2004), Udofot (2005) and Ereh and Ina (2007) are of the opinion that teaching in Nigeria needs full professionalism in order to improve the quality of education.

However, there are affirming pronouncements and views that teaching has now attained the status of a full profession in Nigeria. Thus, subsection 78(a) of the National Policy on Education (NPE) categorically states: Teaching is a legally recognized profession in Nigeria; in this regard, Government has set up the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) to control and regulate the practice of the profession (FME, 2004:27). The Council was established by Decree (Now Act) 31 of 1993. The content of the TRCN Act is one and the same with the contents of the Acts that established the councils that regulate and control the professions of Law, Medicine, Engineering, Pharmacy and so on (F.M.E, 2008).

The development of Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers (PSNT) is another indication that teaching is a profession in Nigeria. The document is to gauge, monitor and sustain the performance of teachers on the job and to constantly improve teacher education.

The United Nations, Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1984 jointly issued a document titled: THE STATUS OF TEACHER; an instrument for its

improvement. Recommendation (Rec) 6 of the instrument defines teaching as a profession. One may wish to know the extent of practice of these instruments in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Also in review are the concepts of professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness. Parkay and Stanford (2004) states that professionalism in teaching has three key dimensions which are (i) professional behaviour (ii) life-long learning and (iii) involvement in the profession (reform, certification, professional governance etc). The three major dimensions have sub-components such as reflection-in-action, values, risk-taking, mentoring new roles and responsibilities, ethics, commitments, self-assessment as well as problem-solving. The sub-dimensions of professionalism in teaching appear to relate closely to what Owen (2012) considered as basic characteristics of effective teacher. They include being disciplined, confidence, knowledgeable, good role model, collegiality, being a member of the learning community, always reflecting past performance, passionate about teaching and lots more.

From the components of professionalism in teaching and effective teacher/and or teaching effectiveness, it could be assumed that both are tangential with one another. Similarly, professionalism requires specialized knowledge and skills, lends itself to research for expansion of knowledge, and client centredness which invariably are closely knitted with the attributes of teaching effectiveness. The extent to which these are inherent in our secondary education as a whole and in Cross River State, Nigeria in particular needs to be explored.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching enterprise has over the years suffered the “middleman” status. This situation has caused some doubts and confusion in the minds of practicing teachers and needs to be addressed as to give them a sense of direction. No profession can be considered worthy of the name and as well as command public confidence until there are standardized, comprehensive, objective and measureable yardsticks for judging the performance of its members. This study is therefore designed to find out the extent to which teaching in Nigeria is a full profession, using Cross River State Secondary School system as a case in point.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study examined the extent of professional practice in teaching in the secondary school system. Specifically, the study (i) examined whether teaching is a full profession with particular reference to secondary education in Cross

River State, Nigeria. (ii) Examined the relationship between professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness in secondary education in Cross River State, Nigeria.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

i) To what extent is teaching a full profession with reference to secondary education in Cross River State, Nigeria?

ii) How does professionalism in teaching relate to teaching effectiveness in secondary school in Cross River State, Nigeria?

5. METHODOLOGY

Survey design was adopted for the study. The study area which was Cross River State region of Nigeria was divided into three in line with the existing school zones – Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja zones. The target population was all the 8,486 teachers in the 264 public secondary schools in the state, all staff of Teachers’ Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and Heads of Inspectorate Units across the 3 zones of the state. To this end, a combination of stratified, judgemental and wholistic sampling techniques were used to select 10% of teachers per zone (849), 3 staff of TRCN and 3 heads of Zonal Inspectors respectively, which added up to 855 respondents sampled.

The study used structured questionnaire to elicit information from respondents. A total of 850 questionnaire were appropriately filled and returned, about 99.4 percent retrieval. The instrument was ensured to have face and content validity and was trial tested using test-retest method for its reliability. A reliability index of 0.85 was obtained through split-half analysis. A four point rating scale was adopted.

The test statistics adopted for data analyzes were descriptive statistical tools such as frequency counts, weighted mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (SD). A weighted mean of 2.00 and above scored by respondents indicated acceptance to the respective statements in Tables 1 and 2. The weights and response options for each item are: 4= True (T), 3= somewhat True (SWT); 2= Somewhat False (SWF) and 1= False (F). The weighted mean score is preferred and used for the study because of the inherent limitations of other measures of central tendencies.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: To what extent is teaching a full profession with reference to secondary education in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 1
Overall Frequency, Weighted Mean Score (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) to Items on Whether or Not Teaching Is a Full Profession in Secondary Education in Cross River State (No of respondents 850)

S/N	Statement	T	SWT	SWF	F	\bar{X}	SD	Accept
1.	Teaching is a full profession because it has: A sense of public service/a life commitment to career.	310	352	180	88	3.70	.71	Accepted
2.	A defined body of knowledge and skills beyond that grasped by lay persons (monopoly of essential knowledge)	64	106	358	322	1.90	1.02	Not accepted
3.	A lengthy period of specialized training (induction period following their formal training).	54	98	406	292	1.90	0.92	Not accepted
4.	Control over licensing standard and/or entry requirement (i.e. control over their governance)	38	88	394	340	1.82	1.01	Not accepted
5.	Autonomy in making decisions about selected sphere of work (practising their occupation with a degree of autonomy).	46	82	308	414	1.72	1.04	Not accepted
6.	A set of ethical and performance standards and professional discipline	295	315	136	104	2.94	0.61	Accepted
7.	A self-governing organization composed of members of the profession.	301	299	182	68	2.98	0.72	Accepted
8.	Professionals enjoy a high level of public trust, are able to deliver services that are clearly superior to those available elsewhere.	140	182	320	208	2.29	0.74	Accepted
9.	A code of ethics to help clarify ambiguous matters or doubtful points related to services rendered.	198	300	240	112	2.69	0.74	Accepted
10.	A high prestige and economic standing	22	56	388	384	1.67	1.01	Not accepted

Sources: Field survey 2013.

Analyses in Table 1 show that each of the items 2,3,4,5, and 10 has weighted mean score (\bar{X}) below 2.00 with standard deviation (SD) ranging from 0.91 to 1.04, while items 1,6,7,8 and 9 attracted (\bar{X}) above 2.00 with SD ranging from 0.61 to 0.74. A closed observation of the first set of items: 2 monopoly of essential knowledge (\bar{X} =1.90; SD = 1.02), 3 lengthy period of specialized training/induction after training (\bar{X} =1.90; SD =0.92) 4. Control over entry requirements (\bar{X} =1.82; SD = 1.01) 5. Autonomy in decision making (\bar{X} = 1.72; SD = 1.04) and 10 high prestige and economic standing (\bar{X} = 1.67; SD = 1.06), were not accepted. This implies that teaching at secondary education level in Cross River State of Nigeria is not a full profession.

Other set of items: 1. A life time commitment to career (\bar{X} =3.70; SD = 0.71), 6. A set of performance standard (\bar{X} = 2.94; SD = 0.61), 7. Self governing organization

of members (\bar{X} =2.98; SD= 0.72), 8. Enjoyment of high level of public trust (\bar{X} =2.29; SD = 0.74) and 9. A code of ethics for members (\bar{X} =2.69; SD = 0.74), were accepted as shown in Table 1 that teaching is a full profession in Cross River State, Nigeria. Since all the conditions that qualify a full profession were not met, it is therefore concluded that teaching in secondary education in Cross River State, Nigeria is not yet a full profession. The finding revealed that teaching in Cross River State public secondary school is a partial profession. This finding is in tandem with the opinions of Etzioni (1969), Obanya (2004), Udofot (2005) and Lee (2009), who hold the same view of the teaching enterprise.

Research question 2: How does professionalism in teaching relate to teaching effectiveness at secondary school level in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 2
Analyzes of Frequency, Weighted Mean Score (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Stakeholders' Opinions on the Relationship Between Professionalism in Teaching and Teaching Effectiveness in Secondary Schools Within Cross River State, Nigeria (No. = 850)

S/N	Statement	T	SWT	SWF	F	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	A professional teacher: Is guided by specific set values e.g. maintain high ethical standards.	301	308	199	42	3.02	.61	Accepted
2.	Makes a deep and lasting commitment to professional practices e.g. collegial cooperation.	270	206	194	180	2.67	.72	Accepted
3.	Engages in serious reflective thought about how to teach effectively.	322	258	181	189	2.96	.76	Accepted
4.	Involves in continuous learning to maintain his/her professional effectiveness.	340	304	106	100	3.04	.60	Accepted
5.	Develops experiences that give lots of self-confidence in teaching.	306	194	180	170	2.75	.69	Accepted
6.	Involvement in teacher organization leads to gains in working conditions, salaries etc.	194	206	270	180	2.37	.72	Accepted
7.	Is dedicated to continuous learning.	70	110	313	357	1.88	.96	Not accepted
8.	Seeks additional avenues for growth.	95	100	345	310	1.98	.98	Not accepted
9.	Is proud of his/her profession to be effective teacher.	301	259	116	174	2.81	.91	Accepted
10.	Practices what he/she teaches	260	302	218	180	2.88	.81	Accepted
	Grand weighted mean & standard deviation					2.68	.76	Accepted

Source: Field Survey 2013

Observation of Table 2 reveals that weighted mean scores (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (SD) of stakeholders' responses to items 1-10 ranged from $\bar{X}=1.88$ to 3.04; SD=0.61 to 0.98, with a grand mean (\bar{X}) and SD of 2.68 and 0.76 respectively. The grand mean is greater than the acceptance level of 2.00. The result implies that professionalism in teaching is positively and strongly related to teaching effectiveness at secondary education level in Cross River State of Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the study of Ereh and Ina (2007), that professionalization of teaching leads to improved educational quality.

It is apt to infer from the results in Table 2 that full profession in teaching would most probably lead to improved teaching effectiveness. All hands must be on deck, including teachers, other educators and the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria, to ensure that teaching is fully professionalized in Cross River State, Nigeria.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Results of the analyses in Tables 1 and 2 revealed that

(i) Teaching at the secondary education level in Cross River State of Nigeria has not attained the status of full profession because of the following limitations:

- a) There is no lengthy period of specialized training and or induction after normal academic training.
- b) There is weak monopoly of essential knowledge out of the reach of laypersons.
- c) There is inadequate control over entry requirements.
- d) Autonomy in decision making on issues concerning what to teach, how to teach etc. is quite weak.
- e) There is also low prestige and poor economic standing of teachers.

(ii) There is a strong and positive relationship between professionalism in teaching and teaching effectiveness. Making teaching a full profession leads to better quality of secondary education in Cross River State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be uniform and lengthy period of professional training across teachers' training institutions. This should include inductive training after formal academic programmes.

Licensing should be made an essential prerequisite for entry into teaching at all levels. The license so issued should be renewable as obtained in other full professions. If this recommendation is strictly followed, it would help to eliminate the quacks that have dominated the profession.

Ample opportunities should be created for research and continuous learning. Teachers who do not show evidence of continuous learning should not be promoted. Teachers must practice what they teach by being involved in the learning community.

Teachers should be morally and ethically upright. Any evidence of non-conformity with the Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers (PSNT) by a teacher or group(s) of teachers should be shown the gate after observing due process. The TRCN should adequately equipped to carry out this responsibility.

Professional teachers should be well paid with better working conditions. This will help to raise the prestige of teachers and their economic standing. Recognizing that the status of the teaching profession depends greatly on teachers themselves, all teachers should seek to achieve the highest possible standards in all their professional activities. By so doing, more prestige will be bestowed on the profession.

Above all, the Education Act 31 of 1993 with its provisional framework for dealing with breaches of professional standards, should be strictly enforced. It is assumed, if all aspects of the Act are implemented in the country, teaching will join other full professions.

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