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**HARNESSING THE POTENTIALS OF TEACHERS' REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA IN PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING: A CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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**Abstract**

*It has been severally contented whether teaching is a profession. Goings on in that sector raises a lot of doubts. Nevertheless, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria was established through Act. No 31 of 1993 to regulate and control the teaching profession. The question therefore, still remains as apt today as ever before; is teaching a profession? This paper is an attempt to examine the status of teaching in Nigeria and is of the opinion that the vocation is yet to meet all the characteristics of a profession. The barriers of professionalizing teaching were highlighted. The writer discusses also the benefits of the on-going teachers registration exercise, in the country, to the status of teaching occupation in Nigeria. Finally, the writer concludes by enjoining teachers, in the nation's education system, to appreciate and avail themselves of the unique opportunity afforded by the registration exercise by TRCN and be duly registered as Nigeria takes the bold step towards professionalization of teaching to guarantee quality control and quality assurance in the education system.*

**Key word:** *Teaching, Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria, Professionalization of Teaching, Teaching in Nigeria*

## **Introduction**

It has never been well with teaching, which happens to be one of the oldest vocations in Nigeria and the world as a whole, hence the cliché that *the teacher's reward is in heaven*. It is also against the above backdrop that, Nwagwu (2003) laments that the twin problems of professionalism and professional identity appear to be endemic in the Nigerian education system.

An occupation and a profession are not one and the same thing because sometimes confusion arises as to when to call a given employment and occupation or a profession, Akpochafo (1985) states that all professions are occupations but not all occupations can become profession. He adds that any work which an individual does to earn his/her living is his/her occupation, it that if the occupation is such that requires a special kind of education, training and skill, then it is then called a profession. In effect, therefore, a profession is a higher form of and a better-organized occupation. A profession is made up of members who have undergone specialized intellectual training in order to supply skilled services or advice to others for a definite fee or salary. This means that the professional uses expert knowledge and skills only to the benefit of clients.

In his submission, Mgbodile (1985) states that member of a profession display peculiar etiquette, special norms, conventions, technical jargons and a particular form of politeness. Hence the 'outsider' secretly envies them because they possess an attractive sub-culture foreign to the uninitiated. As for the definition of a profession, they are varied depending on the writer. Lieberman (1960) in Azikiwe (2008) is of the view that many definitions of the concept of a profession have been proposed, but none is so widely accepted that it may be regarded as the best and the most authoritative. Some of the professions recognized worldwide are Medicine, Accountancy, Law, Divinity, and Engineering; Pharmacy and Architecture to mention but a few. This paper therefore takes a critical look at teaching in Nigeria, using the accepted criteria for professionalization, highlighting the constraints to professionalizing teaching, as well as the benefits of the Teachers Registration exercise, which this study believes if properly actuated will go a long way in realizing the professional potentialities of teaching in the country.

## **Teaching in Nigeria: A Critical Evaluation of its Professional Status**

There are as many criteria as there are professions but the eight below are the major consensus of professional status.

Systematic and specialized body of knowledge, professional autonomy, professional code of conduct, control of entry; professional organization, condition of service, provision of in-service training for professional growth, and performance of an essential social service.

### **Militating Factors against Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria**

It is truism and abundantly proved beyond all reasonable doubts that teaching has not satisfied all the criteria for professionalization as is the case with other acclaimed professions. This section of the paper looks into the major constraining factors to the advancement of teaching to a professional status.

Status and background, all comers job, proliferation of professional organizations, poor remuneration, lack of professional culture, job creation, non-uniform qualification and delayed outcome.

### **Harnessing the Benefits of Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria in Teacher Professionalization**

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) came on board through Act No. 31 of 1993 and its primary purpose is to regulate and control the teaching profession.

The 15 benefits of teacher' registration and TRCN as was enunciated in a handbill by the Registrar/Chief Executive of TRCN (2003) have been reproduced hereunder to further drive home the imperative of teacher professionalization.

- 1. Professional Growth:** The TRC code of professional practice will offer guidance to teachers and employers. The registration of teachers will bring the profession under firm control of the Council. Statistics of professional teachers in Nigeria will be easily ascertained. This will make planning and delivery of professional programmes and welfare packages highly feasible. Theory and practice will be readily updated and benefits intended for teachers will be accurately channeled to only those who qualify. National register of professional teachers will be displayed in all the 36 states of the federation and the FCT. TRCN in this context becomes the only professional body for teachers. It is an organization set up to represent teachers' professional interest and to support all teachers in providing the best possible educational opportunities for learners.
- 2. Job security:** With time, especially in the saturated competitive Nigerian labour market, possession of the teaching license obviously will be an advantage, as employers will

always give preference to licensed teachers. Those already in the vocation without the license, indeed, risk being classified as auxiliary teachers. Further, they will easily face retrenchment or exclusion from leadership and sensitive or rewarding positions in the education sector. The Council believes that only professional teachers can properly administer and supervise educational institutions and departments.

3. **The Teachers Salary Structure (TSS):** TRCN with other stakeholder have worked out Teachers salary scale now approved by the National Council on Education. The scale carries unique benefits and allowances, which will be enjoyed by only teachers registered with TRCN. The Council with other bodies will be concerned with teachers' well being and to improve teachers' working condition.
4. **Ethical Rejuvenation in the Profession:** Moral order is the foundation of every social organization. Teachers' registration will certainly facilitate the moral uprightness of the teaching force in Nigeria. This will be made possible by the fact that license can be withdrawn and prosecution can take place against teachers who violate serious professional code of conduct. The TRC Act in section 9 and 10 provides for the establishment of Teachers' Disciplinary Committee (at the TRCN headquarters) and Teachers' Investigation Panel (in all states of the federation). The Act, further, provides for penalties against breach of professional ethics. These provisions by the law to sanitize the profession cannot be achieved unless teachers register and subscribe to a common regulatory authority.
5. **Higher Status of Teachers in Nigeria:** Higher status and public recognition are the ultimate implications of vocation that has duly registered members. High ethical standards, improved remunerative scheme, constant renewal of theories and practice, esprit de corps, common national forum/recommendation of professional teachers for national or international professional conduct, raise the status of the teaching profession.
6. **Fulfillment of legal professional requirements:** It is a mark of patriotism to act, at all times, in conformity with the laws of the country. Teachers who register are simply complying with the provisions of the TRC Act, which is now a law in force in Nigeria. Practitioners of other professions like law, medicine, pharmacy, engineering etc comply with similar provision and this has contributed to their enviable professional status. Nigerian graduates also have to comply with the National Youth Service Corps Act.

Therefore, obedience to legitimate laws should be seen as a way of life. Opportunity for advancement of teachers training (within and outside Nigeria) for professional teachers will be duly recommended by TRC.

7. **Warning Signal:** The registration exercise sends a strong warning signal to unqualified teachers that time is running out on them to qualify or quit the profession. The registration will automatically differentiate between the professional and quacks. This constitutes a strong social and psychological deterrence to non-professionals in the vocation.
8. **Categorization of Teachers:** The registration of teachers categorizes them into four groups. A, B, C, and D. This will motivate those at the apex to be alive to their leadership position in the profession as well as challenge those down the categories to move up the ladder through acquisition of higher academic and professional qualifications.
9. **Halt in Brain Drain:** Improvement in the teaching profession will help halt the brain drain phenomenon in the vocation; which has put education in Nigeria in jeopardy. Very good and prospective teachers can also be attracted to the profession.
10. **Rise in Educational Standard:** Since teachers are the key determinants of educational standard, the improvement in the conduct and condition of teachers will translate into high educational standard in the country. Given that teaching is the mother of all other professions, an improvement in the profile of teachers and profession will have a multiple effect in form of better performance of all other professions in the different sectors of the country. TRC will encourage research, effective classroom practice and professional network through high quality information technology, seminars and workshops.
11. **International Recognition:** A rise in the standard of education will help Nigerian teachers their lost glory and enhance the respect and esteem for the products of our educational institutions as accorded graduates of similar institutions worldwide.
12. **Status and Identity:** Registration of teachers by TRCN, which is a statutory organ, will enhance their status and identity as being part of recognized professional group.
13. **Standard Entry:** Registration will foreclose the notion of teaching as an all-comers profession as it will protect the standard of entry and ensure that it is open to only those who have requisite qualification.

14. **Professional Development Programme:** Registration with the Council will ensure that teachers have a central authority that will foster best practices in professional development programmes. TRCN will campaign for teachers to receive the support they need to do their job effectively. For example, reducing bureaucracy and improving opportunities for professional development.
15. **Provision of Authentic Data:** The limitation of information on the actual number and qualification of teachers in the country will be minimized as the Council will, through registration, be in a position to advice on the number of teachers, the teacher supply and demand profile, and the student-teacher ratio, which are vital for planning in the educational sector. National register of all professional teachers in the country will be published regularly. The register will be reviewed periodically.

### **Recommendations**

The above enumerated potential benefits will no doubt equip teaching in Nigeria with all the characteristics of a profession. It is therefore, highly recommended that the government should take the matter more serious and once again empower the TRCN to carry on with its assigned responsibility while every teacher at the pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education should embrace and subject him/herself to the registration exercise by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria as a way of guaranteeing the professional status of teaching and making education fulfil the roles of national development in Nigeria

### **Conclusion**

It is a fact from the discourse that teaching has been able to fully satisfy just about two of the characteristics of a profession, these are: specialized body of knowledge, and intensive training, and performance of essential services to the public. Since it is yet to meet majority or all of the characteristics, it is therefore germane to hold the view that teaching in Nigeria is not yet a profession in the real sense of the word. Teaching still has many hurdles to scale through to being a profession in Nigeria, which is the primary goal behind the setting up of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. Hence, every teacher should see the registration exercise as a clarion call to duty for the improvement and upliftment of the status and image of teaching in Nigeria. Yes, every conscientious and committed pre-school, primary or secondary school teacher, academic staff of faculties or Institute of Education in Nigeria Universities, or other

tertiary institutions, should lead in this laudable drive to professionalize teaching in Nigeria. It is the only sure way to ensure quality control and assurance towards national development.

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