

The Teaching Profession in Africa: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Teachers play a very important role in the day-to-day lives of a country and its citizens. They train professionals, experts, innovators and problem-solvers. However, their roles in the development of communities are not commensurate to the salary they are paid and this is enough to explain that teaching is a calling. Nevertheless, whoever qualifies to be a teacher should be valued in terms of time, salary, housing, medical allowance, career and professional development so as to minimize on challenges that can detract their devotion towards this noble profession. Since teachers hold the mantle for future development of any country, countries like Finland and Germany attach a lot of importance to teachers' welfare. Therefore, being sensitive to teachers' concerns at all levels of education should be an important matter for governments, parents and other stakeholders so as to prepare critical masses with needed skills of the time. Along similar lines, teachers' professionalism should be upheld if they are to effectively play the transformative and development role. In this paper, I contend that because of poor teachers' welfare, their professionalism gets compromised to the end that generation is threatened. This is evidently seen in the challenges faced by the education industry in Africa such as the many school dropouts, incessant strikes, merciless teachers, and moonlighting, among others. This is an alarming situation that can only be mitigated if the African countries come up with practical solutions that take teacher professionalisms as the key to the success of government policies towards human development and transformation. The purpose of this paper is to examine the current situation under which teachers operate and how this affects their professionalism.

Keywords: development, future generation, professionalism, teachers, transformation

With the recent COVID-19 and its impact on the education sector, the role of teachers remains indispensable as the major strategy for transformation of communities all over the world (Clum, 2022; Ossiannilsson, 2022). This can be attributed to the notion that the future of any country lies in the education of its people. Therefore, the survival of any country and its citizenry must evolve through the use of education as a tool for transformation without which competing on the world map will remain a myth for some parts of the world. However, the ideas mentioned above cannot be realised if teachers are not given due diligence to predict a better future for the next generation. Countries all over the world design their education systems to train their citizenry with the help of curricula (Alsubaie, 2016). The curriculum normally states the direction, mission and

vision of a particular country. It is used as a medium or tool for preparing and nurturing the future generation. The curriculum of any education system is implemented by teachers with the supervision of other education stakeholders. This implies that teachers play a very great role towards transformation, growth and development of a particular country.

If it is true that teachers are responsible for whatever kind of graduates that a country gets from different education levels; such as scientists, technocrats, specialists, teachers, accountants, politicians, professors and doctors, to mention but a few, then any country that wants to achieve the goal of its designed curriculum should avail teachers with all the necessary support, equipment and incentives so as to execute their role wholeheartedly and professionally. The reason for this claim is that if any government and its citizenry want to gain support and at the same time transform their communities, they normally use teachers to communicate the direction of their countries through teaching and sharing of skills and experiences. Therefore, the role of a teacher is to prepare leaders, great thinkers, and think-tanks; communicate skills, nurture, inspire to aspire; and this is done through the use of education. Therefore, whoever intends to attain a position on the world map should use education to get the best citizens that any culture in this world may need or copy from. This is due to the fact that all the human development and civilization that the world has enjoyed since the creation of man have been achieved through the use of teachers (Alsubaie, 2016; Su, 2015). Hence, motivation of teachers in terms of salaries, career and professional development, housing and medical allowance, paying fees for their children, and availing them with necessary equipment should not be a question that requires answers from each and every body. Teachers' welfare is a key to not only their professionalism, but also to sustainable development and growth of any civilization in the world. Some countries have foresighted this strategy that to reform a country and cause high civility levels requires teachers who are highly motivated, professional in nature, highly skilled and smart in and out so as to aspire and inspire learners with forecasted mind-set geared towards community transformation.

It is therefore important that stakeholders of the education sector in any country handle teachers with sensitivity since teachers can turn into slow killers and kill several generations once frustrated. The many challenges for instance; civil wars, elites looting their countries, land grabbing, injustice and merciless communities that we see in today's world have a certain contribution of a given teacher at a certain level of education. Therefore, treating them fairly with justice and sensitivity so that they exude the highest levels of professionalism should be the core focus of all stakeholders in the field of education. One may ask the following questions; Who is a teacher? What is the work of a teacher? If teaching is the work of a teacher, then what is teaching?

Who is a Teacher?

In defining who is meant by a teacher, a reader of this paper will find divergent opinions depending on the background and diverse forces like culture,

civility, social events, work and commercialization of human activity. The forces mentioned above and their divergent impact towards human life and behaviour cannot be easily understood well especially by a common man when it comes to shaping the issue of nurturing and child upbringing in the world of today.

In many parts of the world Africa inclusive, a teacher has become a full-time parent for children in schools; a practice that was never imagined in our country. This is because all parents; both mothers and fathers are after work or day-to-date survival. For children who are lucky and have not been left in the hands of un-trained maids, at a tender age of two years, they are taken to teachers as day scholars or boarding pupils given the location of their schools. So, this practice has turned teachers into parents for many African children. A teacher is a mentor, a guardian and sometimes a parent to any child that has been put under his/her responsibility. In the history of education, the role of teachers was far different from what is happening to today.

In Uganda for example, for a child who has become big-headed, parents believe that he/she must be tamed by a teacher. So Ugandan teachers operate beyond the roles they are trained for and become parents of children at school. Some pay for them fees, while others have to find up-keep and the like. Technically, scholars define the word teacher in various ways as shown in the figure below;

Mentors and people worthy imitating or copying from.	(Diaz et al., 2019)
Someone special that a community of student, parents, government, schools and school leaders expect to use his behaviour, actions and attitude to influence the young one of a given country.	(Makovec, 2018)
Someone that instils skills into another.	(Rajagopalan, 2019)
A very good individual that deserves to stand in a classroom and offer our children high quality education they deserve.	(Baratz-snowden, 2007)
Someone who shares experience and knowledge to his or her learners.	(Flores, 2022)
Someone who has been trained and equipped with skills, knowledge and attitude of handling pupils.	(Werler & Tahirsylaj, 2022)
A professional and competent person capable of thriving into forces that shape knowledge through interaction, research, scholarship and experiential learning which can be achieved through use of practical teaching and learning that is not based on knowing ways like reflexivity.	(Rowan et al., (2019).
A person who has been equipped with content of a given subject, and skills or pedagogy or styles of how to deliver it to a learner using a professional vision that can help him understand and drive an idea from an image and translate into a practical way of shaping someone of community life.	(Carmi & Tamir, 2020)

Figure: Various definitions of teacher

From all the definitions above, it can be realized that a teacher is someone entrusted with a duty of shaping learners into responsible citizens using his/her skills, content and experiences for purposes of preparing future leaders, technocrats, professionals and experts in all fields of human development, growth and transformation. Therefore, a teacher is not only trained to teach and go but his work entails nurturing, upbringing and modelling apt people who can provide solutions to the immense challenges affecting humanity. Even though many scholars seen above define a teacher in such ways, they do not contextualize to the life of an African background where a teacher has been turned into a parent – either a mother or a father, a sister, a brother; mention it especially in countries that give knowledge without soul, knowledge without direction and knowledge without a defined framework. Teachers at schools in our African setting have been part and parcel of our families. Our children are put in their hands from a tender stage up to when they graduate. Parent-child interaction has been limited due to work schedules and school programs that start from 7am to 5pm, and sometimes beyond.

In some countries like Uganda, many parents leave their homes for work as early as 5am for fear of traffic jam and other unavoidable circumstances, and as such, children too wake up at 4am to go with their parents so as to drop them at school. This trend is repeated in the evening hours. This kind of practice can cause psychological dissonance and disturbance among young ones but parents are at cross roads due to work demands. This kind of situation makes the work of teachers burdensome and disturbing due to overload and working out of the known working hours hence affecting their professional ethics.

Roles of a Teacher

The role of a teacher is more than teaching and facilitating learning. Many countries like Germany, Malaysia and Japan, today take teaching as the major foundation for transformation and change of mind for learners. Learners are supposed to be equipped with skills, attitudes, competences and experiences by teachers. Countries like Finland, German, Turkey, and other developed countries take the teaching profession as ingenuity and trajectory for moving generations and countries ahead if they are to survive the forces of the unprecedented world. Teaching is not just mere delivery of knowledge and information but it also requires to know why do we teach and for whom we are teaching. In some African countries like Uganda, teachers and the teaching profession are less valued, least respected and undermined to the extent that even the learners that go through teachers' hands have no audacity, courage and morale to love both the teachers and the teaching profession (Evans et al., 2020). For instance, some schools pay teachers money that cannot even facilitate them for two weeks. Also, some of the teachers in the teaching profession say it verbally that they were forced by their parents to join the profession but have no love for it. As such, little can be gained from such a person towards community change. Meanwhile, for nations, countries and communities that intend to survive the waves of a VUCA world and compete favorably on the world map, they must accept that teaching profession

roles require teacher-training programs to focus more on turning teachers into game changers, hipper and change agents in order to fit in the knowledge economy that calls for resilient and wisdom pedagogies. This is because; teachers of today are required to be innovators, representatives of society change and communicators. Therefore, teachers are expected to be creative and equipped with pedagogies and technologies that can address the rising demand of human solutions at all levels of development and transformation (Srinivasan, 2020).

Moreover, teachers are paid less and because of that, many graduates are into this profession either by accident out of frustration or just to earn something for eating however little it may be (Bennell, 2004; Berg et al., 2006; Evans, 2018; Evans et al., 2020; Ogari, 2008). This kind of tendency can lead to ill-prepared teachers, inept school heads, and training students who end up as poor graduates with skills that do not measure to the standards of the time hence killing our own at all levels. This belief can be more demonstrated with strikes that have engulfed most of the government schools in Uganda.

In Africa today, some teachers may fail to take their children to good schools and they can fail to afford good medication due to low reward and remuneration, hence failing them to attain other necessities that facilitate good living to manoeuvre in the unprecedented life in the world. However, this kind of scenario seems not to be the case in other parts of the world for instance; in Israel, teachers play a role of being artists, intellectuals and master craftspeople (Carmi & Tamir, 2020). These definitions imply that teachers are the designers of how the world should look like. Therefore, their efforts and motivation must be in line with the countries' directions. In Finland, the role of teachers is to understand the demands of his/her work, and prepare the necessary competences that can help him/her and learners to achieve the intended plan of going to school (Makovec, 2018).

Key Issues to Note

- i. In other words, teachers are the pinnacle and foundation of any transformation, civilization, growth and development. Therefore, their contribution must be respected with reasonable salary that can motivate him to remain committed to their work.
- ii. All stakeholders must take the teaching profession as a medium for transmitting their notion for them to survive. Otherwise, if they leave teachers as professionals that do not matter, many countries will continue to get graduates without soft and hard skills that can advance transformation and development in the African continent.
- iii. If teachers do not teach well and they are demeaned by others, students will shy away from joining the education profession and instead go for other programs like accounts, industrial art and others, which poses a threat to the future growth and development of our country and the entire continent.
- iv. Furthermore, teachers' low morale will kill the spirit of research and all the efforts and investments that the government has put in to change the

mind set of learners for example curriculum reform and reconstruction may lose meaning.

- v. Furthermore, teachers' poor attitude towards work will affect learners most. Time wasted is never found. So, when learners go to school and do not find teachers who can attend to their needs, the minds of learners will be diverted to other issues not related to school and hence cause moral degeneration and school dropouts.

What is Teaching?

Teaching is the process of imparting knowledge, skills, experiences, values and attitude among learners. It is a situation where a teacher dedicates his/her time, life and experience to ensure that learners attain information from an imaginary situation so as to live with that information and skills in their lives.

It can also imply nurturing and upbringing of a child. Or it may mean training and sharing knowledge and skills regarding a way an individual should live for himself and community transformation. It is done through an interaction of both the learner and teacher with an agenda of changing mind set so as to provide solutions to the community (Rajagopalan, 2019b).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are my conclusions. To attain teachers' loyalty, commitment, submissiveness and devotion towards work; there is need to do the following;

Increment of teachers' salary if governments and other stakeholders are willing to change and provide the best education strategy to their citizens. For instance; USA, China, Malaysia, Turkey, Finland and German. These countries treat teachers in special ways due to the sensitivity of these professionals and their attitude towards work, and what it can mean to generations. Teachers can be slow killers once played around with and in the case of Uganda we have tested the worst scenario of having graduates without skills for transformation of their country.

Governments should put up funds and scholarships for training and developing teachers up to doctoral levels. This kind of arrangement can make teachers attain higher career and professional development skills that do not only impact on a teacher as a person but also on the community. When teachers attain the best training skills from good institutions with good trainers, they will always want to extend such skills, knowledge and experiences to their learners so as to see a better community after retirement.

Furthermore, teachers should be availed with all necessary facilities and instructional materials to smoothen their work. What many people do not know or they know but do not want to acknowledge is that, the kind of product you may want to attain as a factory / industry or a government depends on the input, process and mechanisms used to prepare that product. Even in teaching when teachers are forced to do things unwillingly, without facilitation in terms of salary and facilities, they will work for the sake of working but the product after all

levels of education have been attained, that is; the graduate will be an enemy to himself, government, community, Africa and the world at large.

Furthermore, we need to be sensitive with whatever attitude, behaviour, experiences and knowledge that teachers expose our learners to. Mind you, whatever the teachers do, the learners take it as something that is worthy copying and living with; technocrats must diagnose issues of teachers with the sensitivity they need and act within the framework that solves the national challenges so as to prepare a better community; full of harmony, happiness and love for one another.

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