

6. THE TEACHER VIS A VIS HIS MORALE AT THE CLOSE OF THE LAST MILLENNIUM: THE IMPLICATION FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: *The article focused on the place of the teacher at the close of the last century and the issue of morale in the teaching profession. This investigative effort was designed to address the teacher's personality, his training, his activities, roles, problems and prospects and his morale as he delivered the goods at the close of the last millennium. The article is significant especially at such a time that Brain-Drain was at its peak in Nigeria. Certainly, positive response of stake-holders to findings in this investigation will assist in no small measure in ensuring that the teacher takes his rightful place in Nation Building. It was clear that the teacher has been relegated to the background and thoroughly demoralized. It is expected that this effort would re-orientate the society, Government and other stake-holders to sufficiently appreciate the fact that the teacher is indispensable in society, knowing that there can be no meaningful national development without the teacher. It is the teacher who guides the learner in the learning process, produces the needed manpower for all sectors of the economy and the goose that lays the golden egg.*

Key words: *Teacher, Morale, Close of Last Millennium*

In this article, emphasis was placed on teachers from the primary to tertiary level of our education system. However, the situation in our primary and secondary schools attracted serious attention as the foundation is laid at this level, though were often neglected. The attitude of the teacher, his disposition and vision have far reaching effect on the learner. It certainly would be disastrous for the future if these levels of our education and their operations are neglected.

The tertiary level though more conspicuous is sensitive as it produces the middle and high level manpower needed in the country. Information utilized in the production of this article was procured through available records in schools and publications. As a result, a number of materials were consulted in relation to this investigation. The information procured focused on various areas such as categories of teachers in our system; the learning environment, morale and the role of the school authorities/ government.

Categories of Teachers in the System

Teachers in the system have various orientations and backgrounds, some are trained and others untrained. We cannot shy away from the reality of problems posed by the various inclinations, orientation, training and backgrounds. This categorization can further be represented thus: The ideal teacher; the untrained; the problem teacher; colourless teacher, older teacher; the undemocratic and the teacher who disagrees.

Nwagwu (1984) stressed the danger associated with untrained teachers. Imogie (1999) similarly expressed dismay at the non elimination of untrained/unqualified teachers, noting that Nigeria was not making progress in

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this direction. It is in this premise therefore that we will recognize the presence of the problem teacher. A trained teacher would be concerned with the challenge of advancing the course of education rather than be a problem. The problem teacher is not distant from the problem child. Just as the problem child is seen as a child who creates problems for himself and for others, so do the problem teacher, to say the least.

The same goes for the colourless teacher. The colourless teacher is dull and uninteresting. He possesses a colourless character. The older-teacher-syndrome manifests where training of teachers is de-emphasized. Such teachers are usually carried along by school Heads by virtue of their age and longer years of service. For the fact that this category of teachers did not receive adequate training, and lacks on-the-job training because of age and interest, he ends up pulling back the hand of the clock. The undemocratic teacher and the teacher who disagrees also exist in the school system. It could therefore be summarized from the forgoing discussion that it is all part of their ignoramus. Proper training would sanitize the teacher and enable him to perform to expectation.

The ideal teacher therefore is one who is trained and manifests expected desirable traits of a trained teacher. As Aigbomian and Iyamu (2001;108) put it “The primary function of the teacher is to facilitate learning by various means, that is to say, that the aim of teaching activities is to bring about learning”. The trained teacher apart from being a man of integrity and character, Bell-Gam (1998) stated that he must be a master of his subject and an encyclopedia of his subject. He stressed that the teacher should master his subject beyond question.

Materials on learning environment were consulted to provide information on the effect of physical structures, facilities and materials among others. This was considered necessary as availability of materials and adequate learning environment capable of facilitating effective learning can improve the morale of the teacher. The need for physical facilities and good learning environment has been stressed by a numbers of scholars. Urevbu (1997) noted that the conditions in many schools were chaotic which have negative effects on the quality of learning.

Awanbor (1996) similarly observed that the physical environment in our secondary schools was unstimulating. In respect of creative arts; Baike (1985) made a case for accommodation for the arts. He stressed that its unique nature of course offering requires specialized spaces and furniture arrangement. Availability of materials for teaching and learning, would therefore raise the morale of the art teacher. Ajayi (1985;43) argues that “Fine Arts cannot be well taught without materials” certainly this implies that lack of adequate teaching materials can demoralize the teacher as he would not be satisfied when his work is not properly done.

In discussing the morale of the teacher therefore it is clear that the absence of facilities and equipment, teaching materials and good learning environment have far reaching effect on the quality of work done by the teacher which indirectly demoralizes him. The use of instructional materials equally serves as a

strong motivating factor to the teacher and the learner in particular as his work through this medium is more rewarding.

The provision of instructional media for teaching and learning would go a long way in raising the morale of the teacher as he would be satisfied that his job is not only well done but made easier. As Siberston in Imonikebe(2010;) rightly put it, “Instructional materials generally provides increased interest in a teaching, learning process”. While Basset in Imonikebe(2010;) asserted that” the ability of imagination and creativity can only be effectively developed through the proper use of instructional materials”.

Just to throw some light on the word “morale”. Hornby: Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary of Current English defines morale as “state of discipline and spirit (in a person, an Army etc) temper, state of mind as expressed in action. It could also be put as a feeling of well being, committal and loyalty to the aims of an organisation. Morale could further be explained as moral condition as regard courage, confidence of the worker or emotional and mental reaction of the worker to his job. Morale could be high or low.

Consequently it was observed that the teachers, like other categories of workers need incentives in order to boost their morale. Since the calibre of teachers in our schools today range from trained to the untrained, more often than not, the untrained teachers tend to exhibit negative attitudes and thus contravene professional ethics. If the morale of the teacher must improve, the lost image of the teaching profession must first of all be restored. The amount of confidence the teacher has in the teaching profession would to a large extent determine his level of morale on the job. The 20th century, particularly the last half, has failed in the area of recognising the teaching profession. This was identified in this presentation as the root cause of low morale for teaching staff in our training institutions.

The popular opinion on the performance of teachers at their duty posts revealed that teachers were demoralised. The teachers seem to have perceived and portrayed themselves as the most-wretched-on earth. In the actual sense, the incidence of the untrained syndrome; the problem teacher; the colourless teacher; older teacher’s activities; the undemocratic and the disagreeing teachers discussed in this article are a consequence of the ugly situation in the profession. In a situation where the teacher occupies his rightful place in the country, there would be free in-service training opportunities for teachers to grow on the job thereby averting the menace of the untrained.

With adequate reward, recognition and commensurate remuneration, the teachers’ standard of living will improve. This would make him confident and conscious of his position as a role model. He would therefore take his work seriously and become committed. The on-the-job training would give a new orientation to the teacher to enable him cope with innovations, new experiences and contemporary issues in the profession.

At this juncture, it is interesting to observe that as a result of proper motivation, incentives to workers coupled with good condition of service and working conditions, workers in the oil sector appear to be more interested and

committed to their work. Consequently they earn a lot of respect from the society. In the teaching profession, teachers became a laughing stock in the society. Their accommodations were threatened, and a good number of them who were not involved in private practice were humiliated.

Incidentally, teachers formed the bulk of the Okada riders(motorcycle transporters), market women and in other odd-jobs in a bid to make ends meet. As Hadden (1999;48) rightly observed, “we can only make something new when we are at our optimum best”. The morale of the teacher is vital to the production of creative individuals. The teacher like every other worker has set aims which he expects to achieve. These aims, needs and aspirations must be addressed in order to raise his morale. Aghenta and Arubayi (1981;71) identified the aims such as:

- i. Direct Personal satisfaction - money, food, and living,
- ii. Security
- iii. Advancements/Promotion
- iv. Staff Development
- v. Continuity in Job
- vi. Health schemes and services that go with either,
- vii. Opportunity for negotiations

The Teacher is bound to be demoralized when he is unable to realize his aims. Lack of incentives, such as teachers at all levels of our education system experience today in Nigeria, could lead to frustration for very many. This trend will certainly not augur well for effective classroom interaction that fosters the much needed creativity that moves a nation forward. The teacher needs motivation for maximum efficiency. Maslow Hierarchy of needs should be generously applied to the teacher’s situation. Hanson (1970) pointed out that workers’ out-put are influenced by the general conditions in which they work. Hanson added that improvement in the physical welfare of the workers will raise their standards more especially if they are adequately fed, housed and clothed.

True, a teacher who cannot feed himself, whose appearance is drab, and often under threats of shylock Landlords would be aggressive, colourless, and consequently undemocratic. He may be overcome by circumstances and could become indifferent and frustrated. The picture painted in this article is not different from what obtains today in Nigeria. A number of teachers with some insight into to the future of the teaching profession in this country had gradually turned to Business tycoons; contractors; hawkers etc, all to the detriment of the learner. The learner was left to guide himself and discover for himself what he needed to be taught. Consequently a number of our learners today who were challenged by the ugly situation have found themselves at the mercies of quacks who run mushroom private schools, in a bid to acquire knowledge.

The adverse effect of incessant Strike actions embarked upon in Nigerian institutions of learning is yet another consequence of relegating the teacher to the background. Teachers’ strikes have gradually and indirectly become part of the school calendar in recent times. The Nigerian teacher seems to believe that the Government deliberately waits for teachers to embark on industrial actions

before audience is granted them. The truth remains that effective learning cannot take place in such conditions.

It is sad to observe that Nigerian teachers were least paid in the world (ASUU bulletin,1995). This report therefore implies that in a country like Nigeria with a runaway inflation, teachers' morale was lowest. The government in collaboration with the training institutions should look into the teaching profession with a view to recognizing it as such. This will give the teacher a sense of security and confidence. The teacher must be perceived as the producer of our manpower needed in all sectors of our economy. He should be rewarded accordingly bearing in mind that the destiny of the learner to a large extent lies in the hands of the teacher. Government and Managements of our training institutions must not wait for industrial actions before looking into the plight of teachers.

The incessant strike actions in our country only end up demoralizing the good teacher. Certainly, the society's sad impression of the teacher will change by the time employers and government are prepared to fulfil their obligation to the teacher. The people of Nigeria were however still hopeful that although the century did not witness a raise in morale of teachers, it was possible that there could be a new dawn for teachers in the 21st. century.

The Implication for Creative Arts in Contemporary Nigerian Society.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the teacher was relegated to the background particularly at the close of the last millennium. The unfortunate incident cannot be unconnected with the low level of awareness of our leaders in respect to the role of the teacher in national development.

It would be pointed out at this point that the teacher is indispensable in nation building. The teacher turns out individuals who are expected to have acquired one form of knowledge or the other. Our institutions of learning, particularly the vocational and tertiary institutions, graduate trained personnel for the country on a regular basis. Among the products are professionals such as teachers, medical and para-medical staff, engineers, architects, scientists, business men and women, artists, lawyers, administrators, educational planners, researchers, military and other law enforcement agencies, psychologists and philosophers to mention but a few.

We also have the technologists, technicians, artisans, craftsmen; and a number of other skilled personnel. It must be stated categorically that all the above mentioned knowledgeable persons who form the work force of this country are products of the teacher. They have in one way or the other passed through the tutorship or guidance of the teacher because it is the teacher who imparts knowledge to the learner. The teacher therefore is indispensable in discussing creativity. It should be emphasized that, there can be no meaningful development in any society without the teacher, as he is first and foremost in the training of manpower.

He plays an indispensable role in national development. It is needless to list breakthroughs that society has experienced through the efforts of the engineer,

the invaluable contributions of the artist are too numerous to mention; the scientists and a host of other professionals have made their mark in society. It is the teacher who produces these creative individuals. Indeed, he is the channel for transmitting the much needed knowledge on which the individual builds to greatness. We shall consider what would happen to our society, if this channel is blocked. Nigerian Union of Teachers (1981) further buttresses this assertion, that teachers being the pillars of any nation produce scientists, scholars, politicians, Doctors; and para-medical staff, industrialists; technicians, etc. NUT had loudly declared that the teacher deserves the nation's respect, reward and gratitude. This brings us to the consequence of relegating the teacher to the background.

Consequences of Relegating the Teacher to the Background

As mentioned earlier, if the channel be blocked, the consequences are obvious. As earlier asserted, that there can be no national development without the teacher by virtue of his position as the agent of manpower training of the society. It is common knowledge that the sheep would naturally go to where the pasture abounds. This brings us to the issue of the Brain-Drain Syndrome. At this period under review it was confirmed that Nigeria was one of the countries where teachers were least paid. (ASUU, 1995).

We are aware that a number of our Nigerian Professors left the shores of this country to Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world in search of Greener Pastures. It must be pointed out at this juncture that, in a situation where a good percentage of our trained teachers particularly at the tertiary level, have cause to migrate to other parts of the world in search of Greener pastures, it is clear that the result is a replacement of such professionals by teachers who would take over for mercenary purpose. Definitely, an inexperienced person would not be able to perform up to expectation but would be paid inspite of all havocs he might do to the system.

Teachers by virtue of their indispensable role in nation building, should earn salaries commensurate with their unique calling. From the above sceriaro, it becomes obvious what the fate of creative Arts in contemporary Nigerian society would be. This article has addressed the issue of qualified teachers, the need to employ trained teachers and train all teachers, the issue of morale and how the teacher's morale could be raised. Finally, the role of the teacher in nation building and his ordeal at the close of the last millennium was also in focus.

It therefore goes without saying that considering the contributions of creative Arts to the development of our contemporary society, trained personnel in the field of creative arts would definitely be in short supply. This situation will go a long way in creating negative attitudes in the minds of prospective students of creative Arts. It was observed that creative arts teachers who left Nigeria for studies overseas deliberately prolonged their stay abroad while others did not return. As a result of the low state of teacher's morale, parents/guardians who did not see a bright future for their children/wards did not encourage them to

pursue programmes that did not appear dignifying. These included, programmes leading to teaching and the arts especially. Such parents/guardian preferred their children/wards to study Medicine, Law, Engineering and others which they perceived as prestigious.

The low level of morale resulting from inadequate instructional facilities in art institutions handed down a tradition of pretending to teach and learn without adequate instructional facilities. The teacher and learner are used to coping in the absence of adequate teaching and learning materials; instructional resources; inadequate learning environment and infrastructures. In fact, teachers and students could adjust in make-shift classrooms. Oloidi's observation (1987) is pertinent when he advocated for proper atmosphere for instruction.

This abnormal adjustment and maladjustment imagery has continued to create a world view of art being one of those sedentary crafts that can be taught anywhere in any condition. Consequently, standards have been compromised with the situation created in our institutions. The resultant effect is that the practice of creative arts which includes the Visual and the Performing arts could be practiced by any interested group of persons or individuals anywhere without necessarily being restricted to the academic institutions. Consequently, a number of creative outfits or studios sprang up in major cities in Nigeria during this period.

It would also be pointed out that, the low level of morale resulting from poor incentives and remuneration made teachers of creative arts to look in-ward with the result that the teachers devoted a good percentage of their time to private practice thereby spending a small amount of their time for the learners. The result of this experience is obvious. This observation is in consonance with Nwagwu (2000) when he stated that "there has been apathy, negligence and indiscipline among many lecturers because of their perceived inequity in their conditions of service".

Having painted a vivid picture of the situation during the period under review and its corresponding side effects, the contemporary society would have no choice than to be inundated with sub-standard products. The society thus has no opportunity to appreciate good quality productions.

Professionals will alternatively be confronted with the task of re-orientation, enlightenment and re-training to win back the society to its expected position in the scheme of things. This rescue mission will require the efforts of selfless professionals who may not be popular in our art markets, city centres by virtue of their un-adulterated quality of productions (uncompromising standards). Huge sums money will be required to equip our institutions of learning to standard; professional associations will be required to place all hands on deck to sanitize the system.

Conclusion

This article was not intended to proffer solutions to our present educational crisis, rather, it addressed particularly the place of the teacher and his morale in society at the close of the last millennium. However, appropriate authorities

concerned should take advantage of this opportunity to arrest the ugly situation in Nigeria. From the foregoing discussion, therefore, the teacher is seen as an indispensable factor in creativity. The teacher is seen as fulcrum for national development. The teacher is the one involved in meeting the manpower training needs of the country.

As a result, his role in national development must be appreciated by a commensurate incentive and motivation. Creativity must not be endangered by relegating the teacher to the background. It is the belief of well-meaning people of Nigeria, that as soon as the teacher's position is fully appreciated, the spirit of lack of dedication to duty, lack of commitment; incessant strike actions, and Brain-drain will give way to a favourable and effective classroom interaction that gives birth to creativity and the advancement of creative arts in contemporary society. Nwagwu(2000) commenting on staff morale at the tertiary level however gave a ray of hope for the new millennium when he observed some improvement in the universities as a result of allowances from Government and a few internal honorarium from University Administration. But much stressed that more needs to be done to sustain better morale and job satisfaction among staff..

It would be recalled that the Obasanjo led administration came up with a pay rise for workers in Nigeria in 1999. In consonance with Nwagwu's Observation therefore, Government should further empower teachers to ensure that they are repositioned for maximum performance. The Government has a crucial role to play in restoring the teacher's lost glory in society. It is time to correct the wrong impression that society has about teachers. Teaching has long enough been a bye-word in our society.

We must not allow the teaching job to be seen as a taboo in our time. It is ridiculous for any society to dread the word teaching, much more to hear that a child wants to train as a teacher. An end must be put to embarrassments teachers have been receiving in our very unfriendly contemporary society. Enough of "HOUSE TO LET, TEACHERS NEED NOT APPLY". Enough of "you be teacher?" ("You be teacher" was a byword in some markets in Benin City for those who attempted to bargain beyond the expectations of market women). A positive step must be taken before even the committed few, decamp to other areas where they have no calling.

The teaching profession is a noble one and should be held in very high esteem for sustainable development to take place in the country. Any attempt to under-rate the teaching profession, at this time of our socio-political stress, when the nation counts on creative ingenuity among Nigerians to move forward, national development will continue to be a mirage.

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