

IMPROVING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE IN AGUATA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: PROBLEMS & PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The problem of falling standards in the educational achievements of students, especially in external examinations has led to criticism of teachers and the teaching profession. This study therefore was designed to determine the problems that militate against proper admission, recruitment, training and retention of qualified teachers and the prospects for improved teacher performance in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study which adopted the descriptive survey design. The total population of this study consisted of seventy-two (72) educational administrators. There was no sample for the study because the population was small and manageable. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, while the mean statistical analysis was employed to answer the research questions. The result showed that entry into Teacher Education Institutions and recruitment into the Teaching Service were not regulated and that retraining of teachers for continuing development was not undertaken. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended amongst other things, that entry into the profession be regulated, the curricula of Teacher Education Institutions be reviewed and upgraded and that teacher's Mandatory Continuing Professional Development be institutionalized.

Keywords:

Introduction

Surveys have established that teachers are the key determinants of educational success and the quality of any educational system (Daren, 2010; Ukeje, Akabogu and Ndu, 1992). FGN (2004) corroborates this view that the validity of any educational system is naturally dependent on the quality

of teaching and the availability of competent teachers. Teachers are, therefore, the most important variable in any educational programme and no effort should be spared to ensure that the educational system employs the best brains in the profession and retains them.

Teaching is the direction of the learning process so that a desirable change of a relatively permanent nature is brought about in the learner as a result of instruction (Okeke, 2004). It is an interaction between the teacher and the learner in which the teacher pilots the process of helping the learner to acquire skills, attitudes, knowledge, ideas and abilities which is regarded as successful only when these desirable changes are realized in the learner (Sarasin, 1999). In other words teaching is an art as well as a science in which an efficient teacher uses his or her professional training to successfully bring about learning in the students. Adequate teacher training is very important in equipping the prospective teacher for effective professional career. Anadi (2007) posits that the methods used in teacher socialization and education include the theoretical methods of classroom instruction, practical methods of examination writing, research projects and practice of teaching. A good teacher training programme should ensure that just as the would-be teacher is receiving learning in the theory of education he/she is also undergoing practical professional training that enables him/her develop skills for efficient professional practice. In realization of the importance of teacher training, FRN (2004) prescribes that only professionally qualified and registered teachers shall be allowed to practice, at all levels of education, with the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) registering and regulating teaching profession and practice. The policy further recognizes the need for continuing professional growth and recommends mandatory in-service training by proprietors as an integral part of the teaching service.

Unfortunately, the teaching service is replete with a lot of non-professional and poor quality teachers and the initial teacher education is characterized by poor training at all levels (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012). Ukeje et al (1992) maintains that the most difficult problem facing the education system all over the world is attracting and retaining quality teachers. Most teachers went into the profession because they were not able to get jobs of their choice, a situation which has made the teaching service an all-comers affair and gives rise to a high attrition rate.

There have been arguments as to whether teaching is a profession, and which led to the question: what makes one a professional teacher? Obi (2004) defined a profession as any kind of work where members acquire a body of systemic knowledge on which their work is based. A profession must develop feelings of belonging and responsibility, have professional associations with professional ethics to which every practitioner must

belong, have strong emphasis on self-improvement and growth in service and have its own autonomy. Going by the above indices of professionalism, teaching is a profession. A good professional teacher is knowledgeable and uses training to inspire students and improve their learning while working with colleagues, parents, other professionals and the community. He or she interprets and communicates the curriculum to learners, ensures the efficient use of the nation's investment in education, acts as a role model to learners and transmits societal values from generation to generation (FGN, 2004). In realization of these vital and indispensable duties of a teacher, the Nigerian Government views the education and development of the teacher as paramount. There is need for a teaching service to be staffed with professional teachers who are committed to their job and take professional pride in being teachers. At the moment, this does not appear to be applicable.

The poor educational outcomes recorded in recent years are attributed to poor teaching as well as other problems which include negative role perception of teachers in the society, learners' lack of commitment, inadequate learning resources to support teaching, inadequate staff development, lack of motivation of the teachers, inadequate programme preparation and implementation, negative attitude of people towards the teaching profession, lack of professional attitude and commitment to work, irregular payment of teachers' stipends, etc. The four year Strategic Plan for the Development of Education (2011 to 2015) of the Federal Ministry of Education is of the same opinion and posits that the problem of poor teacher quality is more pronounced in areas of:

1. pre-service teacher education;
2. orientation and induction of new teachers;
3. continuing professional development;
4. recruitment, apportionment and training;
5. framework for teaching standards; and
6. incentives to attract and retain quality teachers.

Despite these policies and programmes of government which are for the most part not properly implemented, the education sector is under harsh public criticism and the teacher is particularly blamed for the perceived decline in the standard of education. The teacher is seen as effective only to the extent that the desired change in the learner is realized. The society believes that if the students did not learn, the teacher has not taught. The problem of this study, therefore, was to establish the educational administrators' perception of the problems and prospects for improving teachers' professional development in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the educational administrators' perception of the problems and prospects of improving teachers' professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area. Specifically the study did the following:

1. Determine the problems of regulating entry into the teaching profession in Aguata Local Government Area.
2. Determine the educational administrators' perceptions of the problems of providing training and retraining of teachers for continuing professional development in Aguata Local Government Area.
3. Determine the educational administrators' perceptions of the prospects/ strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area.

Research Questions

1. What are the educational administrators' perceptions of the problems of regulating entry and admitting quality students into the teaching profession for effective professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area?
2. What are the educational administrators' perceptions of the problems of providing training and continuing retraining of teachers for effective professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area?
3. What are the educational administrators' perceptions of the prospects/ strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area?

Method

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design which, according to Akuezulo and Agu (2002), observes subjects in their natural setting. It was considered appropriate for collecting data on educational administrators' perception on strategies adopted by the government to regulate entry into teaching and retrain teachers in the Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Aguata Local Government Area has fourteen (14) communities with twenty-one (21) public secondary schools. The population of this study was 72, comprising of all the twenty-one (21) Principals of the public secondary schools, their Vice-principals (21), seventeen (17) administrators at the Post Primary School Services Commission (PPSSC) and thirteen (13) administrators at the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board

(ASUBEB), all working in Aguata. No sampling was done as the total population of 72 was studied.

The instrument used for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire based on modified four-point Likert scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The respondents were expected to tick the appropriate scale indicating their levels of agreement. The instrument contained a total of 34 items and divided into sections A and B.

The questionnaire was subjected to face-and-content validation by two experts in educational measurement and evaluation whose corrections were used to make final copies of the questionnaire. The test-retest statistical measure was used to establish the reliability of instrument and gave a coefficient value of 0.98.

Seventy-two (72) copies of the instrument were administered by the researchers with the help of research assistants using face-to-face method. The respondents were given about 7 days to complete the questionnaire and out of the 72 copies, 50 were retrieved, indicating a 69.4 % return rate.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using the descriptive statistical measure of mean, \bar{x} to answer the three research questions. Mean ratings of 2.50 and above were judged as representing respondents' acceptance of an item while mean ratings less than 2.50 represented disagreement.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the problems of regulating entry into the teaching profession in Aguata Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean responses on the problems of regulating entry into the teaching profession in Aguata Local Government Area.

S/N	Problems of regulating entry into the teaching profession	\bar{x}	Remark
1	The government policy is to employ only professional teachers with teaching qualifications into teaching service.	3.60	Agree
2	Almost all teachers belong to professional unions such as NUT, ASUU, etc.	3.50	Agree
3	Through enhanced salaries and improved conditions of service for teachers, the best caliber of people will be attracted to the teaching profession.	3.80	Agree
4	There are many non-professional teachers in the system that are yet to acquire teaching qualifications.	2.74	Agree
5	The recruitment process includes interviews/ examinations and induction.	2.84	Agree
6	Due to shortage of professional teachers, auxiliary teachers are employed in vital areas such as Mathematics, Physics, etc.	2.80	Agree

7	Teachers must be registered by TRCN before employment.	2.14	Disagree
8	Most students admitted in faculties and colleges of education consist of those with low JAMB scores.	3.42	Agree
9	Regulating entry into and practice of teaching by employing only competent professional teachers will improve teachers' performance.	3.62	Agree
10	Faculties of education and teacher training colleges are viewed as dumping grounds for low grade students	3.52	Agree
GRAND MEAN		3.19	

Table1: Out of the ten (10) items the respondents agreed on nine (9) with mean ratings of above 2.50, showing that those items constitute problems of regulating entry into the teaching profession in Aguata Local Government Area. On the other hand, respondents disagreed with item seven (7) which states that teachers must be registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria before employment; with a mean rating of 2.14. The grand mean of 3.19 from all the respondents indicated there is a strong acceptance of the items concerning regulation of entry into the teaching profession in Aguata Local Government Area.

Research Question 2: What are the problems of initial teacher training and continuing professional development of teachers in Aguata Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean response on initial training of teachers and continuing professional development of teachers in Aguata Local Government Area.

S/ N	Training of teachers and continuing professional development of teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Remark
11	The minimum qualification for employment into the teaching profession has been upgraded to National Certificate in Education (NCE).	3.92	Agree
12	Teachers are still not given adequate practical training and their skill training is basic and limited.	3.76	Agree
13	Teachers are not often retrained after they are employed.	3.92	Agree
14	Teachers don't get enough professional training at colleges and universities.	3.12	Agree
15	Emphasis is placed on teachers' professional training only while they are undergoing regular programmes in schools	2.43	Disagree
GRAND MEAN		3.43	

Table 2 reveals that respondents agreed strongly with four (4) out of the five (5) items (11-14) with mean ratings ranging from 3.12 to 3.92, showing that though NCE is the minimum requirement for a teaching job, teachers don't get adequate initial training in colleges and universities, as well as continuing professional training after employment. They however disagreed with item 15, giving a mean score of 2.43. The Table further

showed a grand mean of 3.43 which indicated strong acceptance of items on student teachers recruitment and training.

Research Question 3: What are the prospects/ strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance in Aguata Local Government Area?

Table 3: Mean response on strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance.

S/N	Strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	Remark
16	Teaching is viewed as a profession.	3.70	Agree
17	The public, parents and government see teachers as a special group of workers who perform a special service.	3.96	Agree
18	Teachers' professional status has risen through membership of professional unions and registration of all teachers by TRCN.	3.82	Agree
19	Teachers' developmental needs are met by regularly sending them on in-service training after one year of service.	1.55	Disagree
20	Teachers' continuing developmental needs are not encouraged by principals through awards and other incentives especially in rural areas.	2.07	Disagree
21	Teachers should be given their promotion as and when due.	2.60	Agree
22	The public perception of the teaching profession has not equaled that of doctors, lawyers etc.	4.00	Agree
23	Salaries should be improved and a new career structure for teachers be developed to make teaching attractive and encourage retention of teachers.	3.56	Agree
24	Teachers tend to contribute to low status given them due to negative job-perception.	2.04	Disagree
GRAND MEAN		3.03	

The results in Table 3 above indicate that respondents agreed with six (6) items of nine (9) as strategies for enhancing effective teacher professional performance; with mean scores above 2.50. They disagreed that items 19, 20 and 24 are not strategies for enhancing effective professional performance. The grand mean of 3.03 by respondents showed a strong acceptance of the items on strategies for regulating entry into the teaching profession.

Discussion

From the findings of this study, the respondents agreed that though it is the government policy to employ only professionally trained teachers with a minimum of the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE) into the teaching service, many non-professional teachers are still in the system. The analysis of data further revealed that although most teachers belong to teachers'

professional unions (such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) etc., they disagree that all teachers must register with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). This finding is significant in the sense that the FGN (2004) prescribes that TRCN shall continue to register teachers and regulate the teaching profession and practice and that only qualified and registered teachers shall be allowed to practice at all levels of education. By this provision it becomes expedient that entry into the teaching profession should be regulated and regularized for better service provision.

The respondents agreed that if entry into the teaching profession is regulated, as is done in other professions, the professional performance of teachers will improve. This will also include other measures that entail developing a new career structure for the motivation of teachers and addressing of issues to do with attracting and retaining the best personnel into the teaching profession. The result of this work corroborates the views of Ukeje et al (1992) and FGN (2004) that the major problem facing the educational system is the issue of employment and retention of good teachers.

On the continuing training and retraining of teachers, the respondents were of the view that trainee teachers are not given adequate professional training while in school and the professional skill given during their training is still basic/ rudimentary and limited. Observation shows that out of the four years spent in higher education, only about eight weeks are spent on teaching practice. Teachers are not given further training after recruitment and newly recruited teachers are simply deployed to schools and classrooms to resume work immediately, without formal induction. This goes against the FGN (2004) prescription that newly qualified teachers should serve a period of one (1) year internship. Career-long development is very important for teachers' professional development, considering that one can only give what one has, in effect the teachers can only impart knowledge they themselves have. Also, the nation cannot rise above the level of its educational system and no educational system can outgrow the quality and status of its teachers (NLC, 2008). Teachers must continue to be skillful and resourceful in order to meet the needs of the nation.

On the strategies for enhancing the status of the teacher, respondents agreed that teaching is viewed as a profession by the public, parents and government and that teachers are a special group of workers who perform specialized service, but that the public's perception of the status of teachers does not compare favourably with that of other professions like medicine, law, engineering, etc. They however agreed that membership of professional teachers' unions and registration of all teachers by the TRCN will go a long way to enhance teachers' pride in the practice of their profession. They also

agree that new career and salary structures be developed to make teaching more attractive at the secondary school level. This will in effect enhance the status of teaching as a profession and lead to the retention of academically qualified staff. The respondents also perceive that the negative or poor job perception of the teaching profession contributes to the low status accorded teachers. In actual fact the teaching profession is a noble profession and it is time the public, as well as the teachers themselves, are made to appreciate the important roles and responsibilities of teachers in nation building and development.

The result of this study also showed that teachers are not motivated by their principals through merit awards and other incentives, especially those teachers posted to schools in rural areas.

Conclusion

Although teaching is viewed as a profession which provides a vital service in national and personal development, the method of admission into it, lack of provision for continuous training and development of the teachers, poor remuneration, poor/ deficit curriculum content during teacher training, negative perception of the role of teachers and many other unwholesome professional practices such as recruiting the wrong personnel, give rise to poor teacher professional performance as evidenced by this study in the Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for the success of all educational programmes at the secondary level of education and beyond. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. In line with the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) and FME (2012) prescriptions, a new career structure and better conditions of service should be instituted to enable the best brains to be attracted into teaching. This will help the educational system to recruit and retain quality teachers.
2. The mode of entry into the teaching service and admission into Teacher Training Institutes should be reviewed to ensure that only people with requisite qualifications and calling are admitted into the teaching profession.
3. In the area of initial training of teachers for certification, the curricula for Teacher Education Institutions (Faculties of Education, Colleges of Education, National Teachers Institute, etc.) should be reviewed, updated and expanded to make them globally competitive.

Similarly, physical facilities in Teacher Education schools should be improved to retool the teacher for more effective performance.

4. The government must institute the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (MCPD) of teachers in line with the 4-year Strategic Plan for the development of the education sector: 2011-2015 (FME, 2012).

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