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## **An assessment of the status of teachers and the teaching profession in Nigeria**

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The study attempted to obtain empirical evidence on the status of teachers and the teaching profession in Nigeria. To undertake this study, 400 post-primary school teachers were randomly drawn from 40 post-primary schools in Midwestern Nigeria. The teacher's status questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. Results of the study indicated, among others, that teachers are not well financially remunerated and that they are looked down upon because of delay in payment of salaries and allowances, thereby having a loss of sense of belonging. This situation has resulted in the low esteem and status of the teachers and the teaching profession in the society. Findings also revealed that poor conditions of service, wider negative influences and teachers' negative personal and professional behaviour are critical factors responsible for teachers' low status. Some recommendations to enhance the image and status of the Nigerian teachers and the teaching profession were made.

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## **Introduction**

Recent events in Nigeria show that the traditional respect and prestige enjoyed by teachers in the society have been eroded quite considerably (Awanbor 1996) and indeed, there has been a loss of interest in and attraction to the teaching profession. Consequently this situation, occasioned by low enrolment of teachers in preparation institutions, has become a source of worry to teacher trainers.

Awanbor (1996) reported that some teacher trainees in the College of Education did not appear to be particularly enthused by the training goal of teaching as they indicated that the teaching profession was really not an attractive profession to them. Recently, it was revealed that of the more than 700,000 candidates processed by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for admission into the various universities' courses, only about 10,000 (0.0147%) applied for education, yet teachers are needed to teach the far more than 20 million children in the Nigerian school system (Awanbor 1999). According to Nwaokolo (1993), the cause of this problem is traceable to the low status accorded the Nigerian teacher by the Nigerian public.

In a study by Taiwo (1980), he observed that the teaching profession had gone down on the scale of respectability and that was causing a number of teachers to drift into what were perceived to be more respectable forms of employment. In another development, Omoregie in 1994 reported that the attrition rate of teachers, particularly secondary school teachers, was attributable to the general poor attitude to the teaching profession. Similarly, Ojo (1971) stated that the university graduates who form the bulk of the teaching staff in the post-primary institutions were leaving the profession at an alarming rate, while Nwangwu (1997) observed that the crisis in Nigerian education system is traceable to lack of interest and low morale due to poor social status. Equally problematic, according to Nwaokolo (1998 & 1999), was the fact that teachers themselves were experiencing low

morale and poor self-esteem. Afe (1998) opines that the standing of the teaching profession is affected by social background, adding that the low status constitutes a problem in recruiting competent people into the profession. Therefore, one of the challenges facing the profession and teaching is to raise the status of the profession.

The teachers, as noted by Awanbor (1998), have become a shadow of themselves, having lost out in professional competence and social regard. The difficulty in recruiting and training teachers has been traced to the low status accorded the Nigerian teachers and the apparent loss of interest in and attraction to the profession. Nwaokolo (1993) broadly categorised the factors responsible for the low status to include poor conditions of service, teachers' negative personal and professional behaviours, teaching occupation's semi-professional status, and wider society negative influence. Therefore, the present study sought to obtain empirical evidence on the status of teachers and the teaching profession in Nigeria and propose a way to enhance the image of the Nigerian teacher and the profession.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a simple survey method to gather data on the status of teachers and the teaching profession. The target group for this study comprised 400 post-primary school teachers randomly drawn from 40 post-primary schools in Midwestern Nigeria. From each post-primary school, 10 teachers were selected through simple random sampling. Thus a total of 400 post-primary school teachers constituted the research sample for the study.

The major instrument for data collection was the teacher's questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument sought teachers' general attitudes towards teaching and rating of factors responsible for teachers' low status. The data were analysed using mean response and rank order.

## Results

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

*Table 1: Post-primary school teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession*

Item	Attitude	Mean response	Decision
1	I feel great about being a teacher	1.28	Disagree
2	Teachers are not well financially remunerated	3.09	Agree
3	I opted for teaching because of interest I have in children	2.76	Agree
4	Teaching profession provides opportunity for acquisition of wealth	1.14	Disagree
5	Teachers are looked down upon because of delay in payment of salaries and allowances	3.02	Agree
6	Teaching environment is poor	2.46	Agree
7	I became a teacher by accident	2.68	Agree
8	As a teacher, I have a sense of belonging	1.54	Disagree

The data in Table 1 showed that respondents considered that teachers are not well financially remunerated. They also agreed that teachers are looked down upon because of delay in payment of salaries and allowances. Respondents also agreed that they opted for teaching because of interest they have in children, that they became a teacher by 'accident' and that the teaching environment is poor.

However, respondents disagreed with the fact that as teachers they have a sense of belonging. They also disagreed that they feel great about being a teacher. Nor did they agree that the teaching profession provides opportunity for acquisition of wealth.

*Table 2: Mean response and rank order of the factors responsible for teachers' low status*

Item	Factors	Mean response	Rank order
1	Teachers' negative personal and professional behaviour	4.36	3 <sup>rd</sup>
2	Teaching occupation's semi-professional status	2.60	5 <sup>th</sup>
3	Poor conditions of service	6.08	1 <sup>st</sup>
4	Poor social image of the teacher and teaching profession	4.19	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Wider society negative influence	5.14	2 <sup>nd</sup>

From the results presented in Table 2, poor conditions of service represented the most important factor responsible for teachers' low status. It ranked first among the factors responsible for teachers' low status. This was followed by wider society negative influence and teachers' negative personal and professional behaviour, which ranked second and third respectively among the factors responsible for teachers' low status. Poor social image of the teacher and teaching profession and the teaching occupation's semi-professional status ranked fourth and fifth respectively.

## Discussion of results

Results of the study have shown that post-primary school teachers in Nigeria are not well financially remunerated and that they are looked down upon because of delay in payment of salaries and allowances. These findings corroborate earlier research findings by Awanbor (1996) who stated that government in different parts of the country finds it convenient to withhold or delay teachers' salaries sometimes for up to four months in arrears and that teachers' promotions are slowest to eventuate, among other debasements. He concluded that this state of economic dystrophy is also inevitably accompanied by

lack of social muscle or might and hence the low social rating of teachers and the teaching profession generally.

Results of the study also point to the fact that teachers opted for teaching because of their interest in children. This result agrees with Obanya (1978) who found that teachers opted to teach because they enjoyed working with children. However, Awanbor (1996) reported that teachers who opted to teach said they would do so because they needed the time after school hours to be with their families and to do extra jobs that would augment their income from teaching. Findings of the study also point to the fact that the teaching environment is poor. As a conducive working environment is desirable for any worker to perform their job effectively, the poor teaching environment may affect adversely teachers in the discharge of their duties and functions. Results of the study revealed that some of the respondents became teachers by 'accident', meaning that they originally would not have opted to teach but that circumstances pushed them into the profession. This situation, coupled with the fact that payment of their salaries and allowances are delayed and the public looks down upon them, leads them therefore to experience a loss of sense of belonging.

The results of this study showed that poor conditions of service and wider society negative influence are crucial factors responsible for teachers' low status. In Nigeria, poor conditions of service for teachers range between salary irregularity, salary insufficiencies, poor physical environment, poor promotional prospects and stagnation (Nwaokolo 1998). These poor conditions of service have adversely affected teachers' status in Nigeria and hence the low rating of the teaching profession. The Nigerian society as a whole has become materialistic and, since teachers are faced with poor conditions of service, and thus are not able to perform like other workers in Nigerian society, they are treated with disdain and lack of respect.

These results have pointed out that teachers' negative personal and professional behaviour and the poor social image of the teacher and

teaching profession are serious factors responsible for teachers' low status. These findings tally with those of Awanbor (1996) who reported that teacher trainees had a negative attitude towards teaching. He also stated that even those teacher trainees who had a positive attitude towards teaching had strong reservations which ranged from the poor social image of the teaching profession and the comparatively poor financial remuneration for teachers, to the general lack of encouragement by educational authorities.

Supporting the results of this study, Nwaokolo (1998) claimed that teachers have not done much to improve their image. He noted that teachers are perceived as stingy, guilty of an inferiority complex, always complaining, shabby dressing and inability to assert their rights or project their professional image when necessary. He concluded that in work ethics they are adjudged wanting and so their prestige is adversely affected.

The findings also indicated that the teaching occupation's semi-professional status contributes to teachers' low status. In the Nigerian context, research has made it abundantly clear that teaching has not become a full profession and this has lowered the occupation's status in society.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the image of the Nigerian teacher and the teaching profession.

The Nigerian government should provide teachers with a separate salary structure and allowances for such matters as teaching/research and examination supervision which should be incorporated into the separate structure. Teacher salaries and allowances should be paid promptly and promoted when due.

The teaching environment should be made conducive for effective teaching/learning to take place.

The teaching profession should resist the temptation and pressure to admit unqualified and under-qualified persons as teachers. Government should as a matter of urgency to set up the Teachers' Council as contained in its policy document. The Nigerian Union of Teachers and the Teachers' Council should ensure that the bachelor degree in education (B.Ed.) is made the minimum qualification to teach at both primary and post-primary school levels. The formal admission of teachers into the profession should be made by the Teachers' Council.

It is strongly recommended that cases of professional misconduct of members should be seriously dealt with by the Teachers' Council and the Nigerian Union of Teachers.

### Conclusion

Nigerian teachers, this study has revealed, have become a shadow of themselves, having lost out in professional competence and social regard. However, in normal situations, the teacher, according to Ema (1972), is the spark that can fix the whole development process – the key master in the drive to progress. From the village square to the city's roundabout, the teacher can remain a model, an epitome of knowledge and one whose opinion is highly prized.

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