



RECOVERY BEGINS WITH TEACHERS

BY

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Protocol

Preamble

I would like to begin this address by appreciating the organizers of this programme for the honour of inviting me to give this keynote address. I consider this as my singular opportunity as a teacher to participate in today's celebration. I congratulate every teacher in this gathering for setting aside today to celebrate his/her self and accepting to be celebrated by government and the public. It is a noble assignment to be a teacher working in partnership with God to create knowledge and facilitate learning. During my inaugural lecture in the University of Uyo early this year, I attempted to celebrate all teachers and my Ultimate Teacher, the Holy Spirit (Ekpo, 2010). I said, "If you can read thank a teacher; if you cannot, look for one". That was my attempt to summarize the significance of a teacher in ones life. I also took time to appreciate all my teachers from primary to the university. I am glad to have another opportunity to say this again, **"If you can read thank a teacher; if you cannot, look for one"**. If any of my teachers is in this audience, I salute you.

Teachers play integral role in the development of children. They control the destiny of many people and the growth rate of nations. They are regarded as individuals that must create an interest in students to develop, progress and achieve whatever goals they set for themselves. **The power of wealth and peace is in the tongue of a good teacher.** It is therefore expedient for good teachers to be celebrated and professionally trained teachers to constantly assess their roles and exploit other components in the education industry to ensure that they are living up to expectation.

This theme calls for an overview of what is expected of the teacher and the teaching profession as well as what is obtained in reality.

The choice of this year's theme for the Teachers' Day celebration is thus very topical, progressive and apt. It is very relevant to the developmental aspiration of contemporary Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular. There has been of late, a consistent cry by education stakeholders in the nation and among Akwa Ibom State indigenes to see the state transformed into a prosperous, highly educated and technologically driven one. It is unfortunate that Akwa Ibom State has been judged with the parameters of "educationally advantaged state." In actual fact we are educationally disadvantaged considering the number of educational institutions in the state, our student's population, primary school enrolment, relative past rates in West African Senior Secondary School and National Examination Council (NECO) examinations. The best that has however happened to us as at date is the Governor Akpabio's policy of free and compulsory education in the state. With this, a 'universal schooling' has been achieved and quality has to be added to the educational provisions. During the last regime this state hosted education summit where the decadence in the system was critically analyzed. Experienced educational administrators and teacher trainers proffered solutions that hinged on provision of qualitative education at the three levels of our educational system. Some weeks ago, exactly on Monday, the 23rd August, 2010, Akwa Ibom State government mounted two significant workshops for primary school teachers on Mental Arithmetic System (ABACUS) and a fast track reading strategy (jolly phonics) tagged, 'the Read and Write Now initiative'. The gains of these two programmes on the

primary school system are better experienced than imagined. Again, of late the state governor is contemplating establishment of industries in each of the local government areas. Such venture must be powered by products of qualitative education; every well groomed teacher would passionately want to see primary and secondary schools in the state going back to adopt the fundamental principles in pedagogy. A well trained teacher at the tertiary level would also love to see a higher institution that is situated in aesthetically pleasing and peaceful environment, free of cult activities, free of all forms of sharp practices and the teachers imparting knowledge that is research-based.

Introduction

Permit me therefore to start this discourse by examining the concepts of **recovery** and the **categories of teachers**. The Encyclopedic world dictionary defines **recovery** as the act of regaining something that was lost or taken away; a restoration or return to a former state, position or condition. To recover has to do with obtaining again what one has lost possession of; it is to bring back from error or wrong doing or from an underdeveloped state. The international dictionary of education defines a teacher simply as one who teaches. A teacher is a facilitator of learning, one who trains another. Pa Obanya (2004) broadly regards teachers as professionals who are directly involved in the task of promoting teaching and learning. Such individuals fall into five distinct categories as follows:

- Classroom teachers whose major role is to interact with the learners and resources daily. They also interact frequently with

the grassroots societies. They form the bulk of the teaching force in most nations,

- Head teachers and their assistants including subject or sectional heads. Their field of operation is the entire school and their major task is administrative,
- Zonal Inspectors whose field of operation goes beyond any single school. Their task is monitoring and control of schools within a cluster,
- Ministry-based teachers whose field of activity covers the entire education system. They could operate within specific units or departments like planning, curriculum development, examination and certification etc., and
- Teachers who are scholars and researchers based mainly in tertiary institutions. Their responsibilities include teacher education and the promotion of research in education.

The first category of teachers is the largest group of educators and the group that is commonly referred to as teachers. They will also be given due prominence in this discourse.

The development of any nation depends to a large extent on the quality of education it provides to its citizens. The value placed on education globally is inestimable and the provision of quality input to the system is the only assurance for quality output. A greater part of Nigerian leadership has failed to see the link between quality education and national development. As a result, education at all levels is not accorded the required priority attention to make the system desirable, functional and impactful on the society (Baikie, 2002). What any nation or state should seek to achieve is qualitative education because every aspect of development depends

on it. A high quality education provides the recipients personal fulfillment, better social skill and more diverse employment opportunities. A poor quality education on the contrary is a bane of any society. It produces certificate holders who are unemployable and frustrated youths who are restive and vulnerable to clandestine activities. For such reasons, many great nations do not toy with or politicize their education. **Similarly, teachers as the facilitators of learning are the key components for development and they are crucial in providing qualitative education to the citizenry. If there is any standard to be fixed or altered, it has to be done by the teachers.** This concept is vividly expressed in Section 8, sub section 70 (a) of the national policy on education. It reads,

Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis, (FRN, 2004).

For this same reason, the European Commission Policy paper on education and training 2010 refers to teachers as the key players in the way education system evolve and in the implementation of the reforms, (Europa, 2005.) It is therefore a statement of fact that recovery in the school system or even in the society begins with the teachers. The five categories of teachers earlier mentioned must all be involved in the recovery process.

The Emerging Instructional Role of a Teacher: The Teaching Task

The classroom teacher occupies a vital position in every teaching and learning event. He/she is expected to teach in the classroom, mobilize community skills and resources to enrich school learning.

The emerging instructional role of a teacher as a facilitator of knowledge demands that the learners be part of the teaching learning event. Presently, the burden of transferring knowledge has shifted from the teacher to the myriad of resources. **Teachers' task is not information dissemination which may or may not be useful in the provision of learning experiences in ones later life. Rather, it is on how to help the learners think for themselves in a rapidly changing environment such as ours.** As a matter of fact, Nigeria like any African country is under pressure by accelerated globalization. She is facing a dramatic dilemma of establishing a high quality system of education quickly or face development regression. Information and communication technology (ICT) offers a rapid remedy. Teachers must therefore be resourceful enough to access these myriads of materials (Ekpo, 2010). Resourcefulness is a virtue that is developed over time through training and experience. Teachers should be trainable before they can make recoveries.

The teaching task has to do with teachers' extraordinary ability to generate "sparks of learning" even in the most inauspicious circumstances. **Teaching is not talking and chalking as many have erroneously viewed it. It is an organized social interaction that is purposeful and directional.** In regaining lost position, a teacher has to critically look over the pattern of interaction experienced in schools viz – a – viz his instructional role. The public keep talking about the 'fallen standard' of education even when they can not fix what the standard was. Be that as it may, since the products of our educational system have not been able to adapt themselves to their socio-economic environment, their

training is not functional. A contemporary teacher is expected to work hard to give more attention to the unique human aspects of education namely;

- understanding of learners' unique needs,
- helping them set and realize their learning goals,
- stimulating them to use all available information from the accessible educational media, and
- Nurturing of the learners' creative responses.

How much of these do teachers do in reality? Often, the humanistic aspect of teaching is neglected and the actual teaching is poorly handled. Rather, there are hardly any public primary or secondary school in this state one fails to see 'teacher-traders'. They come to school with their wares and occasionally engage the students to hawk them. One wonders when such teachers will find time to do the professional lesson preparation when they are busy replenishing the stock of their wares. Or, when will the endearing quality of a teacher towards the students be exhibited knowing that the teachers are more occupied with locating customers. This 'business boom' also ushered into secondary schools a very damaging examination malpractice tagged, 'special centers', where certificates are marketed. Thank God with concerted efforts (from the senate of the University of Uyo and the supportive administration of His Excellency, Governor Akpabio) the incidence of examination malpractice in Akwa Ibom state has greatly reduced. Schools need to be sanitized of this caliber of teachers, and provide adequate reward for professionally good teachers instead. A top- down sanitization process will take ages to make impact. Teachers should be in the vanguard of the process for effectiveness.

The Profile of an Effective Teacher

Great teachers are not difficult to identify when sought for. They possess certain qualities that the public, government, parents and even the learners themselves expect to find as they interact with them.

To the learners (pupils/students) an effective teacher should be one that;

- encourages them even when they seem weak, disorganized and unmotivated,
- loves teaching and uses a variety of instructional approaches to arrive at the instructional goals,
- has a deep knowledge and passion for the subject at hand,
- considers himself/herself as the learners' parents, listens patiently to their needs and makes efforts to help even if unsuccessful,
- respects students and does not humiliate them before their peers,
- does not exact on them or extort from them, and
- Is a model in great values and punctuality (Ekpo, 2010).

Teachers are therefore expected to be patient, persuasive and to possess strong faith in the capabilities of their students. The parents and the general public also expect the best from their wards as they expect from the teachers even if they fail in their duties. **It is a great responsibility to be a teacher.** Teachers should rise up to their responsibility. **Any teacher who does not want to take responsibility of his or her pupils, should have no business standing in front of them and if any teacher gets paid for a**

job he/she has not done , such a person is a swindler. How can this be enforced bearing in mind that the commissioner or the school inspectors only visit the schools periodically? It is the teachers and head teachers who work closely at the school levels who can monitor their colleagues better and thus maintain standard. Teacher-traders and swindlers are all over the schools. It takes professionally trained teachers who have integrity and are dedicated to their jobs to identify them and counsel them out of the habit.

Teachers' Status

Teachers' status is one of the areas that need restoration.

Teachers are among the most ridiculed and easily castigated by both the society and government. Certification and pecuniary considerations are often the indices used in assessing a professional status. In 1989 I came across one demoralizing advertisement. It was a notice on "Houses to Let", and it read, 'Rooms available, Teachers need not apply'. As a young professionally trained teacher, I felt humiliated. The landlord must have had his reasons for the content of that advertisement but it spoke volumes. This was in the era when payment of salaries and allowances to teachers were political issues. Some state governments owed teachers for as much as six months salaries at a stretch. Others who managed to pay regularly cited it as part of their achievements, as if payment of teacher's salary was a favour and not their right. When funding situation is poor, it is the category 1 teachers' salary and allowances that will not be paid. They are the only civil servants that can be deployed to rural schools and expensive cities without much consideration. Dike (2002) reported of teachers' engagement in various non- academic moonlighting activities to sustain themselves

because of such tendencies thereby neglecting to carry out their instructional functions.

The second angle to promoting the teachers' status is the value teachers put on themselves. When teachers extort money desperately from the students and parents, they have lost self respect. When they leave teaching and research for trading, they have lowered their self worth as teachers. The task of controlling these tendencies lies with the teachers. The ministry-based category of teachers has to help in raising the status of teachers in this regards.

Teacher training programmes and certification issues must be given due attention in the recovery process. The selection and recruitment for any profession is crucial to the attainment of its goal. The recruited student-teachers should show evidence of commitment, intelligence, empathy, patience, courage etc which are all attributes of a good teacher. When residue from 'admission screening board', individuals who could not get into medicine, law, pharmacy, accounting or engineering are admitted into teaching profession, the system is encouraging the use of intellectually and socially incapacitated individuals to facilitate learning. In effect, 'fools' and mediocre are recruited to train our future scientists, lawyers, doctors, architects, engineers etc. What out-put does the system really expect from such inputs? It was not so in the past; grade one students with proven character were encouraged into teaching. **Let teaching be made as noble as any other profession.** If teachers are given decent salary and service conditions as enjoyed by their counterparts with identical or similar qualifications and experience, the perennial problem of scarcity of

good teachers will be a thing of the past. Lack of teachers have driven policy makers to unwittingly lower the status of teaching profession. Nieme (2004) proposed the adoption of high entrance requirements into teacher education instead as a strategy to raise teacher's status.

The teacher of the past was knowledgeable and highly respected by the society. He/she was able to dispense socially useful and relevant knowledge and skills. Such knowledge and skills were not acquired through a one-shot-teacher-training programme. These were acquired systematically through training, re-training and continuing learning processes. For quality control, every newly employed teacher should be **mentored**. They need adequate and periodic supervision by their superior or experienced professional colleagues, (the head teachers, their assistants, subject or sectional heads). These should be persons of high integrity. Teacher development requires both a professional education as well as professional development and these must be provided as a holistic package of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Induction, Internship and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Using un-trained and incompetent teachers in the education industry has helped to erode the status of the profession.

The Teaching Profession

The qualities of an effective teacher as earlier enumerated are not unattainable. A teacher has to have both natural and acquired characteristics to be able to perform satisfactorily. The natural qualities are inert and the acquired qualities come through learning (training and experience). In order to meet these expectations, every teacher needs both professional and academic training. Many

people without training and aptitude for teaching have found their ways into the profession and they are addressed as 'teachers'. All teachers at the three levels of the nation's educational system should be made to undergo an appropriate course in pedagogy be they doctors, engineers, lawyers, physicists etc. Teaching is a legally recognized profession with a regulatory office- the Teachers Registration Council. The onus of monitoring teachers training programmes, their professional practices and development lies with the teachers. Any teacher who expect financial or other forms of inducement to make him undertake his professional duty or does not care how well he performs his duties as long as he is paid his due remuneration, is unprofessional. It is the responsibility of the trained teachers to protect their profession.

Teacher Education Curriculum which aims at producing qualitative teachers makes adequate provision for acquisition of newer and relevant knowledge and skills. The teacher education curriculum is much criticized because of increased expectations. The critics are of the opinion that the curriculum does not adequately equip the student teachers with skills in;

- self evaluation,
- leadership,
- communication,
- problem solving,
- computer application,
- Research and individualized learning techniques.

It effect, the teacher education curriculum appears not to be related to the needs of the 21st century teachers in the field. Majority of the teachers appear not prepared for new challenges and new roles that

are apparent in a dynamic world such as our. Professionally, teachers are inadequately developed. Teaching and learning in a knowledge based society have gone beyond reading of old notes by any teacher to a group of frightened and passive learners. These gaps in their training were anticipated. Item 74, section 8 of the National Policy on Education made provision for it. It is stated that, "teacher education shall continue to take cognizance of changes in methodology and in the curriculum. Teachers shall be regularly exposed to innovations in their profession", (FRN, 2004: 40). In section 11, item 102 of the policy it states further,

A network of educational services centres in Nigeria (NESCO) shall be set up to promote a forum for change of ideas on the development and use of innovative materials for improvement of education. All States' Teachers Resource Centres, Universities, Institutes of Education, and the other professional bodies shall belong to the network of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), (FRN, 2004; p. 54).

By this policy, Akwa Ibom State is expected to have a Teacher Resource Centre where teachers meet periodically to re-define their needs. It takes the teacher to identify their training needs and find alternative means of filling the gaps. A typical case study is the development of Jolly Phonics as a fast-track reading strategy by Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernham. They reported how they came in contact with a group of children who had problems remembering words and coping satisfactorily with reading and writing at Woods Loke Primary School, Lowestoft in England. They experimented on teaching the letter sounds first and the pupils reading ability was

significantly improved. Today, Jolly Phonics strategy has been adopted globally as a thorough foundation for teaching reading and writing. It all started with two elementary /primary school teachers who refused to give in to the challenges they came across in their classes.

Teachers Need Empowerment for Recovery

Every credible profession is empowered to function. Teachers as individuals and as organized group need empowerment. They need knowledge, awareness, capacitation and will power. The task of empowering the teachers is both that of the teachers themselves as well as that of the society.

Self Empowerment

Teachers need sound general education. The better educated the citizenry is, the greater the likelihood of its contributing to overall societal development. Teachers who neither read newspapers, novels, and tune to broadcast media or attend conference/workshop will soon check themselves out of the profession. These sources of information are important for the construction of knowledge and acquisition of relevant skills. Harvey Ullman observed that;

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether this happens at the age of 20 or 80 years. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young, but becomes consistently more valuable regardless of physical capacity, (In Mason, 2003).

Teachers were associated with reading and writing in the past and in meetings they were always called upon to rapporteur. Today, this is fading away because some teachers can hardly write. It is often at self development workshops or seminars that vital recovery is

made. If these workshops and conferences are top-down, money will merely be expended without much impact but when the workshops and seminars are teacher- induced, they are impactful. Teachers should be placed in the centre stage of all educational decision making, but they must be empowered to be useful. It must be borne in mind that no serious minded government will involve persons who lack knowledge, skills and awareness of contemporary issues. These are foundations of empowerment.

Union Empowerment

It is said that a tree does not make a forest no matter the size of its stem and number of branches. Individual teachers no matter how well educated, skilled and professionalized need to belong to a powerful group. The union can be a voice for the teachers in many issues affecting education generally and in national issues. This voice becomes the union's ultimate strength.

Societal Empowerment

Education industry is one of the few organizations where non-teachers and at times non-educators are put in charge of its operations. It is often said that education is too serious a business to be left in the hands of teachers alone. Ironically, it is not too serious to receive 50% of the national budget. The society should give teachers enabling environment to function. Teachers, including the category 1 teachers should be empowered to have a say in what happens to education as a sector after all they are the ones that interact most with the grassroots. They should have a say on who should be classified as teacher, on how teachers are to be recruited, educated and trained and on how their professional respect and integrity can be safe guarded.

CONCLUSION

Your excellencies here present, respected Akwa Ibomites and distinguished members of the noble profession, I have in this short address given a profile of an effective teacher, his/her instructional roles in an era of accelerated globalization. I have listed and discussed extensively areas bothering on teachers' characteristics, teaching tasks, teaching profession, teachers' status and empowerment as aspects requiring restoration. I pray and believe that the effort put in to organize this forum will not just be left to go down the drain. Recovery begins with teachers from the classroom as they teach but implementation of their discoveries involves all stakeholders in education industry. I expect that opinion expressed in this address will be noted or revisited by stakeholders and policy makers to give education sector a purposeful restructuring or "rebranding" essential for fitting into the current speed of transformation after 50 years of 'crawling and toddling'.

God bless all my teachers wherever they are.

God bless the Education Industry!

God bless Akwa Ibom State!!

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria!!!

Happy jubilee cerebation and

Thank you for your listening.

Prof. Comfort M. Ekpo.

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