



## **Teachers Opening Doors To a Better World: Implications For The Nigeria Union Of Teachers In Rivers State, Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract:***

*This study reviewed contributions of teachers world-wide to the educational process, human and national development. Also, the functions of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), the recognized professional body encompassing all teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria were examined. For instance, NUT helps, as part of its duty to teachers, to make contributions towards policy formulation and implementation of educational programmes through its membership in national and international organizations. In the National Development and/or political process, the teacher plays a key role. His actions are leadership actions which influence the activities and behaviour of individuals or groups in an effort to attain goals in given situations. Government at different levels, Federal, State and Local have argued that other sectors in the economy compete with education and as such, there is a limit to what the country can spend on education. However, government should realize that no building could be stronger than its foundation. Thus, no other sector in national development effort in Nigeria should be greater than education (the spring board to the future). There should be consistency in the formulation and implementation of educational policies affecting teachers in Nigeria.*

**Introduction**

Human and national development are interrelated, and both are, in turn, related to people's level of education and literacy. The achievement of education and literacy can only be realized through learning in either formal or non-formal settings, which cannot completely dispense with the services of teachers. Teachers therefore, have always been, and will continue to be a fundamental asset in all forms of the education process. Teaching is directly linked with the education process; thus teaching and teachers are, and must be regarded as the greatest asset in the march towards national development.

The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) is the recognized professional body encompassing all teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria. It is known that some teachers at the tertiary level of education have shown interest in the efforts of the NUT to realize its objectives in education. For instance, NUT helps, as part of its duty to teachers, to make its contribution towards policy formulation, and implementation of educational programmes through direct interaction with Local, State and Federal Governments or by serving in various bodies set up by Governments such as Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), National Teachers Institute (NTI), Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE), Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Book Development Council (NBDC), Nigeria National Committee on UNESCO among others which affords her the opportunity of participating in taking decisions concerning education in the country (Oruge, 2003). This implies that the Nigeria Union of Teachers is the largest body of organized professional teachers in Nigeria, which has the responsibility to champion the cause, and make guided, and professionally oriented contributions to the development of the education industry in Nigeria and of the overall development of the country.

Thus, the Nigeria Union of Teachers is in every little corner of the country, contributing its fundamental quota to the development effort and growth of Nigeria. This may not seem obvious to many people, but let us get the concept of development clear in a relevant perspective. Gbosi, (1993) and Nwabisi (1992), authorities in sociological and human development, tend to agree that development is an achievement that represents not only material, but also cultural or psychological upliftment of a people. In all developing countries of the world like Nigeria, the term development denotes an approach, or a course of action that has been adopted to enable people conquer their environment, become masters of it and, consequently rid themselves of all stigma of back-wardness, ignorance, disease, poverty and squalor. The attainment of this would



enable them get uplifted and graduated to a better quality of life, commensurate with averagely acceptable norm of modern times. Such an achievement will facilitate Nigeria's emergence as a truly dynamic and independent nation politically, economically, socially, educationally, scientifically and technologically. This is the ultimate dream of Nigeria in her craving for development, and, of course, the individual and group expectations from development efforts of Teachers in Nigeria.

### **Teachers Opening Doors To A Better World**

Most people in different parts of the world accept that the primary concern of any educational policy of a nation should be built around carefully considered objectives, which should aim at: (1) Promoting the welfare, usefulness and happiness of individuals within the society, and (2) promoting the socio-political and economic development of the nation. (The extent to which schools become instruments of social, political and economic policy depends mainly on the history and tradition of each community, and on the level of its development). For instance, in a stable and settled community, schools tend to reflect the lives of the people.

Where illiteracy predominates, it is necessary to teach people how to farm, how to work on machines, build houses and appreciate the basic ways and means of living a community life. In this kind of community, the educational pattern addresses how to establish the necessary minimum standards of literacy and skills. An advancement in knowledge is secured by building as quickly as possible, upon what is achieved.

Usually, four levels of organization and control exist in the national development process, namely: the Federal, State and Local Governments and the individual school or groups of schools. The extent of control exerted by these organizations depends basically on the constitutional provision of the nation. In addition, it is important that individual schools or groups of schools should be allowed to have an effective and vigorous life of their own to enable them develop as communities whose leaders and teachers have initiative, imaginative and innovative abilities. That this be allowed does not imply that the schools should get out of step from the general pattern of administrative organization and control mapped out by the authorities above them. Principals and headmasters should always be encouraged to be persons of dignity and status, and should be so accepted by their colleagues and superiors.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), stated that goals and objectives of teacher education are to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom

teachers for all levels of the educational system. It further sought to provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignments and to make them adaptable to any changing situation, not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world. These are utopian policy statements as Nigerians are never short of expectation at the implementation stages. In reality, teachers' welfare is either neglected or treated with levity, as Nigerian teachers are characterized by financial discrimination, poor conditions of service and job dissatisfaction (Gbosi, 1993).

It has been argued that other sectors in the economy compete with education and, as such, there is a limit to what the country can spend on education. However, government should realize that no building could be stronger than its foundation. Thus, no other sector in national development effort is greater than education (the spring board to the future). There should be consistency in the formulation and implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Educational policies should not be matters of trial and error, with each Government assuming and leaving office on how to implement existing educational policies in the country. This singular practice has contributed a lot to stunt education in Nigeria, and, thus has always put Nigerian teachers in serious distress. The education sector should be accorded a very high priority in the nation's budgetary management in order to reduce the sad plight of teachers in Nigeria. The researcher is optimistic that all the objectives discussed above would be realized if a safe and healthy environment is maintained in the educational system particularly in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Whenever the word "teacher" is mentioned in any part of the world, most people think of a man or woman who stands or sits in a square room in front of a blackboard surrounded by either thirty or forty boys and girls; who uses verbal communication and a piece of white chalk in an effort to make these children grasp what he or she is talking or chalking about. Only very few persons, if any, remember to include the numerous activities which the teacher undertakes outside the classroom, such as researching and reading for preparation of materials, correcting pupils' work and preparing manuscripts. It is even less likely that when people think of the word "teacher", they would think of other people like mentors, who also make contributions to effective teaching and learning.

The teacher has also the following responsibilities:

- 0 Preparing young persons with skills to be able to earn a living.
- 0 Selecting and moulding an elite class who would carry the society's heavy responsibilities at National and international levels.



- o Moulding character and building the personality of young persons and equipping them to fit into the society as responsible and disciplined citizens.
- o Raising people's level of awareness of government's self-help projects, and widening their scope of perception beyond parochial level as world citizens.

In the National Development and/or political process, the teacher plays a key role. For instance, his actions are leadership actions which influence the activities and behaviour of individuals or groups in an effort to attain goals in given situations; his behaviour, attitude and the expectations of people in the social setting (all these combine to mark the teacher out from the crowd). What he does and how he behaves affect thousands of tomorrow's leaders in all walks of life (Nwafor, 2012).

The teacher, so conceived, is a problem-solving agent in the specific area of national development and political process. Without him, all the efforts of the other players in the hierarchy of roles would yield no fruits. Thus, he is at the operational level in the development hierarchy (Adefemi, 1999). Presently, the nation depends on the teacher directly or indirectly to train and supply skilled manpower such as accountants, doctors, engineers, lawyers, scientists, among others, to the various sectors of the economy. It is important to note that the education of the lawyer or medical doctor does not start from the law or the medical school, but from the hands of trained and competent teachers at the primary and post primary schools.

In a sense, the teacher designs, fashions, and shapes his product into a final form, which consummates public expectation in the process of National Development. It is this final product (skilled manpower), which stands in the gaze of members of the society, acclaimed globally, and continually attaining greater heights in academia, commerce, industry, government and politics. The education system can hardly attract public praise or condemnation without the teacher who is the nearest person to the people. These people are aware of rapidly developing knowledge, not only about what is important to learn, but also about how people seem to learn what they learn.

Our time is a time that grumbles about the soaring cost of education. At such a time when concern about education and its cost is general, when evidence of effectiveness of current programmes is inadequate, when segments of the population and everything surrounding the education enterprise changes almost overnight, the task of making decisions about education is complicated. At such a time, it is the question of who takes what decisions; it is with this dimension in view that the crucial relevance of the role of the teacher in the development process can be measured. In the past, a traditional role

**expectation of the teacher** has been characterized as “source of information”, as agent in “socializing” the deprived children who have been “desocialized” by slummy habitat, as speech and language therapist for children rendered inarticulate in “monosyllabic homes”, and generally as a man or woman who tries hard to civilize his school community. The public also accepts the teacher as the conservator of national traditions and customs and as exemplar of acceptable moral values. (Oruge, 2010).

Today, more than ever before, the teacher may still have all the above as his role, but such a narrow view of his role is myopic and can hardly stand the test of change and challenge. Lindsey (1991) gives us a stringent but apt answer as to what the role of the teacher should be in an age that is in continuous change: “the job of the educator (the teacher) is not simply to build on existing wants, but to present what is worthy wanting in such a way that it creates new wants and stimulates new interests and ideas.”

**The role of the teacher in the national development process can therefore be operationally stated as:**

- 0 Being sure of what he knows.
- 0 Grasping thoroughly what his students (pupils) must know.
- 0 Exploring from time to time the perimeters of the unknown, and
- 0 Raising his students’ (pupils’) horizon to that fringe of the unknown in order to share in what may be found as new ideas.

Castle (1985), revealed that: “We can see this kind of thing happening in the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions or in classroom discussions when the teacher is in touch with the common ideas of his time”.

### **Conclusion And Recommendations**

It must be recognized in words and in actions that on the teacher depends the ultimate realization of the aims of education in Nigeria, and that, in the process of social change and in nation building, teachers are, as it were, the builders of builders. Nigerians can all agree with a segment of the Ashby’s Report (1960) which asserted that “Only the teacher can lay a foundation for national development”. or, as Fafunwa (1967) stated, “the demands for more and better schools in all parts of the continent; the need to relate curriculum to the child’s environment; the desirability of training in vocational and technical skills, and, indeed, the overall problem of preparing the future citizens of Africa who will be fully oriented to their environment, cannot be effectively accomplished without the aid of teachers. Okebukola (1996) sums up the whole situation

in his crisp statement that a World without teachers is a world without hope and progress, in fact, a world without teachers is a world that is doomed.



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