

AN INVESTIGATION ON THE SOCIETAL PERCEPTION OF TEACHING AS A PROFESSION AND AN OCCUPATION IN KENYA.

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are an important asset and tool in the society. Teaching is therefore the core profession, the key agent of change in today's knowledge society. Though they occupy the perceived bottom hierarchy in the society's perception, teachers are highly organised and educated professionals. Teachers play a very crucial role in the human resource development in any country. The quality of all other professions depends on how well they have been prepared for their various roles in the society by the teachers. The teaching profession which was once respected is now considered an occupation of people who have failed to achieve success elsewhere. Many teachers are seeking greener pastures in other jobs outside the classroom. However, teaching as a profession and occupation is still revered by many parents. Teachers also play crucial roles in the society where they work. Many teachers have also engaged in further professional growth and development.

Key words: Teaching, profession, teachers, occupation, perception, society

1.0 Introduction

A profession is an occupation of a special kind. It requires highly skilled training and intellectual abilities obtained through a course of study of an academic subject. The teaching profession is characterized by freedom of practice. A profession among other things gives a sense of pride to those who practice it. That sense of pride is totally missing as far as teaching is concerned. This is a serious lag (Vashist, 2002). Teachers enjoy some freedom in the practice of their profession and are free to conduct their lessons in a manner that they think is best for the students. According to Martin (1999), teaching is the process of imparting knowledge through a variety of teaching techniques like explaining and modeling to people who want to acquire knowledge because they believe that, either

now or later it will add quality to their lives. The teaching profession is characterized by specialization and competence in a defined field. The primary role of teachers is to ensure that students are able to learn in an environment that is friendly and such a function can only be enhanced by those teachers who have developed their professionalism (Sushila, 2004). In addition, this profession is characterized by professional codes of conduct whose purpose is to guide teachers when practicing their profession as well as pinpoint to teachers the offences under which they may be disciplined.

The school plays an important role in the socialization process both formally and informally. The school exists to meet the demand of the society. A school influences the community by providing citizens of tomorrow. A school is set up to educate and help young people to develop to their full potential and prepare the pupils for the changing world ahead. Learning is at the heart of what schools must be about. The quality of students produced will largely determine the quality of the community. If the society is broken, then the school is a perfect tool for making the much needed repair. According to (Gordon & Hargreaves, 1996) in Martin & Geoff (2005), teaching is today increasingly becoming a complex work requiring the highest standards of professional practice to perform it. It is the core profession, the key agent of change in today's knowledge society.

According to Hughes & Hooper (2000), schools are news for other reasons. Any large or small daily newspaper can be expected to have daily stories about the school system and teachers. Nearly always, additional school stories will be reported elsewhere in the paper, further on in the front section, because these stories command the highest interest, are inflammatory and exciting to read but are not complimentary. A teacher who fails to pay for a bill of a kilo of roast meat will make headlines in the local daily news and seven o'clock news while a chief who abets unlicensed liquor brewers or a politician who embezzles millions of shillings will not hit any headline.

A local chief earns basically the same pay with that of a P1 teacher, yet some of the chiefs have not gone to any formal training save from having the minimum basic primary education level or secondary education. In Kenya, a primary school teacher has undergone a minimum of two years college training and a secondary school teacher between two and four years. However, a local chief is more respected and acknowledged in the community than a teacher under whose hands the chief had passed. Why the discrepancy? According to the *Teachers Service Commission Work Place Counselling Policy for its Employees (2005)*, teachers who are its employees are faced with many challenges such as family issues, substance abuse, increased stress and burn out, poor morale, poor financial and time management among many others. Some of these challenges have forced teachers to resort to survival techniques like operating businesses, tuition, coaching and strikes as ways of supplementing their meagre income which the respective governments have continued to resist with abandon. Others have resorted to alcoholism and substance abuse to escape from their miseries. *The Teachers Service Commission Code of Conduct and Ethics for Teachers (2014)* cautions teachers against engaging in any other gainful employment. Most teachers consider themselves a neglected lot.

As public figures, the conduct of teachers is increasingly and regularly being monitored and closely watched by the parents and the members of the community. Similarly, teachers have clearly spelled out and prescribed conditions of services like salary scales and grades that have become synonymous to various cadres of teachers within the teaching profession. According to Vashist (2002), school teaching is often seen as a refuge for mediocre people who are industrious but unimaginative and uncreative, lacking independence and social courage but with lots of love for children.

There is therefore need to bestow back the honour and respect to teachers by stopping the blames and contempt that befell the teaching profession so that the teaching profession can resort to its revered past as of being a choice of profession for many.

2.0 Statement of the problem

Traditionally, teachers enjoyed relatively high status and prestige in the community and society because they opened doors that lead to the world of literacy. The high esteem accorded to them in the past is no longer there. The teaching profession which was once respected is now considered an occupation of people who have failed to achieve success elsewhere. In addition, the majority of those who became teachers did so as their last resort after failing admission from all other lucrative professions, pitying teaching as having many people who are less interested in the profession.

3.0 The objectives of the study

The research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate the societal perception of the teaching profession as a profession and an occupation in Kenya.
2. To examine the societal roles played by teachers and the teaching profession as an occupation in Kenya.
3. To investigate whether there are benefits for teachers who have pursued their professional growth and development in the teaching profession in Kenya.

4.0 Research questions

1. What are the societal perceptions of the teaching profession as a profession and an occupation in Kenya?
2. What are the roles played by teachers in the society and the teaching profession as an occupation in Kenya?
3. What benefits are teachers getting after pursuing their professional growth and development in the teaching profession in Kenya?

5.0. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of the society on teaching as a profession and as an occupation in relation to other professions and occupations in the job market.

The study strived to shed more light on what the society perceive teaching to be as a profession and as an occupation for their sons and daughters. Whether the society is comfortable with sending their sons and daughters to be teachers or not and what makes them do so will be focused in the study.

6.0. Significance of the study

The research study was a useful tool for reference by all the stakeholders in the pre-primary schools, primary schools, secondary schools and the larger education sector. It is teachers who shape the children in the society to be whom they will be or are being. Many parents have abdicated their responsibilities as parents, entrusting their children blindly to schools and teachers. What happens to their children does not seem to matter anymore to many parents. However, despite the good work teachers are doing, a number of reasons have continued to invalidate and discourage many of our societies in believing in the teaching profession as an occupation for their sons and daughters.

Of significant importance too is the fact that for quite sometimes teachers have continued to be involved in strikes as they seek for better terms making the society to believe that the teaching profession is an unsuitable occupation for their sons and daughters as it is not well paying. The

society has continued to depict teachers as strike hungry and beggars. It is the dream of every individual to have a well paying job. It is the dream of every parent to have his son or daughter in a well paying and revered profession. This research study therefore tried to shed more light on how the societies view the teaching profession as an occupation in relation to other occupations.

7.0. Literature Review

7.1 Teaching as a profession and an occupation

Teachers are probably the most important resources that any country can have. The quality of all other professions depends on how well they have been prepared for their various roles in the society by the teachers. Unlike doctors who are treated with respect by all segments in the community and are much in control of what they are allowed to do, teachers have always to struggle with students who are much more resistant than patients. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in the human resource development in any country (Okumbe, 2007). As a result, for a long time teachers have continued to be used as the mirror in the society.

A teacher is always proud of the students who have passed through his/her hands, of the products he has nursed (he who is now what he is). One will enjoy the teaching profession especially when one joins it not because one has failed to gain admission anywhere else but because one has made up his mind as a duty and is willing to carry out ones work to serve faithfully and whole heartedly without undermining the teaching profession. Teaching is a calling, the mysterious voice that shouts your name and you respond. It is always important to make up your mind before joining the teaching service.

Teaching may not be revered as being a professional occupation career choice by many pupils and students in primary and secondary schools due to its perceived lost glory. The following issues may have contributed to the once revered profession losing its glory. First, all measures of school failures that are widely reported are the result of students/pupils failing to expend their effort to do quality work. Teachers do the hardest work of consistently persuading students to do quality work which is not an easy task. Teachers have also continued to manage huge numbers of students/pupils who actively and passively continue to resist what they are asked to do. Students/ pupils achievement has become more and more a political issue in the schools. Teachers are being asked more and more to justify their work. Teachers' achievements are being measured on the basis of national examination results. As a result, most teachers feel threatened, hence resort to holiday tuition, coaching and remedial teaching –all these aimed at raising the mean score and consequently the academic performance in schools. But what has the government done? It has banned all forms of extra teaching further frustrating teachers' efforts in salvaging their lost honour and respect in the society.

According to Farrant (1980), pupils come to school because they have to and teachers teach because they are paid to. Teachers mourn that their profession is not respected and complain that they are inadequately paid for the duties they are required to do. Teaching is not only the hardest job in the school, but the hardest job there is or you can get in the market. When a teacher is therefore blamed for what he/she believes is impossible for example teaching academically unmotivated students, the blame becomes unfair, making teaching even harder. Let us face the facts, a large part of what makes a job easy or hard is the pay. Teaching has never been a high paying job, but low pay makes teaching much harder than need be (Martin, 1990). One of the festering grievances that have for quite sometimes continued to cause teachers to strike is poor pay. According to Joyce & Showers (2008), teachers in Britain are on the verge of exiting the profession and almost half of them are likely to leave in the next six years due to frustration on the pay and working environment.

7.2 The societal perception of teaching as a profession and an occupation

According to Okumbe (2007), most teachers in both primary and secondary schools in developing countries have been recruited into the teaching profession due to their inability to gain entry into other professions. It is on record that many individuals shy away from the teaching profession due to several reasons one being the teaching profession lacks the luster that it used to enjoy there before. In addition, the teaching profession has been taken by many as a last resort when they could not get vacancies to other professions like law, medicine and engineering which are perceived as well paying and hold high esteem. Therefore, a good proportion of them enter the teaching profession with low morale and as a last resort. In primary schools, teaching has continued to be considered as more suitable for women. Primary school teachers have continued to be accorded inferior professional status and recognition. According to Ngaroga (1996), primary school teachers have a status roughly comparable with those of skilled manual workers, while secondary schools teachers are placed slightly higher than this.

Traditionally, the public thought that teachers needed to know only a little more than the little children they taught (Vashist, 2002). Most societies have believed that men are superior to women so an occupation that involves children is more suitable for women. On the contrary, secondary school teachers have continued to enjoy a much higher status than primary school teachers, thus pitying and implying that they cannot claim a full professional status. Suffice to that, primary school teachers often find themselves in a rather lonely situation as they are posted to remote areas where they do not know or are not known.

Years of naming and shaming teachers for real or imagined problems in the performance of schools and the education sector at large have made the teaching profession very unattractive to many teachers who are currently teaching and also for those potential would be teachers in the making. As Ronald (1995) pointed out, learning rarely takes place at constant rate; rather it fluctuates according to the difficulty of the subject matter or skill to be learned and the ability of the learner. But how many people put that into consideration before throwing condemnations to teachers? The attractiveness of teaching as a profession has faded fast among potential new recruits (Martin & Geoff, 2005). Teaching has thus presented itself as a relatively un-staged and unstable career. Teaching is not seen as a highly professional field because the success of the education process goes to the pupil when compared to the success for example of a surgical operation that goes to the doctor (Ngaroga, 1996).

Ngaroga (1996), further laments that teaching as a profession has continued to lack the mystique and reverence associated with other professions. Teachers are being looked upon as ordinary workers with common skills. As a result teaching skills are viewed as common sense knowledge that any literate person can exercise to control children, that is why we have untrained teachers but no untrained lawyers, nurses, doctors or pilots!. William (1990) further asserts that, almost everyone in the society shares a huge misconception about teaching. 'Everyone' means the general public, parents, school board of management members, politicians, educational news and reporters including college and university professors. What almost all fail to understand is that being an effective teacher may be the most difficult job of all in the society.

7.3 Roles of teachers in the society

Teachers play a crucial role in our society. The teaching profession is unlike other professions simply because its impact is felt throughout an individual's life (Vashist, 2002). The teaching profession has come a long way. First and foremost, teachers act as guides as they identify areas and guide our children by establishing a close relationship with them. Secondly, teachers act as disciplinarians; maintain good discipline and self discipline in each child. In order to maintain

discipline, the teacher himself must be disciplined. Thirdly, to facilitate learning, the teachers need to play the role of an administrator by maintaining laws and orders and managing resources such as such as text books.

Teachers are also evaluators as they provide feedback to students about their weaknesses and strength in addition to providing feedback to administrators about the progress of the schools in their respective classes or subjects. In addition to that, a teacher serves as an instructor in a school. The teacher is the only adult who has better knowledge and capacity to give instructions to the students.

Teachers are the midwives of knowledge in the society. Without them or their competence, the future of many children born and unborn will be one that is malfunctioned, malformed and unborn. According to Okumbe (2007), a teacher joins the teaching profession because he/she supports the aims of education in general and the goals of the educational organization where he/she is posted. Teachers are the most important and probably the most expensive resource in a school (Sushila, 2004).

Schools have eminent responsibility of preparing learners for the challenging world once they are through with schooling. According to Okumbe (2007), a school is the functional unit of the education system through which the education system meets the aspirations of the society. Learning is therefore at the heart of what schools must be all about (Gerard, 1993). But a major point of concern involves the frequent bombardments of schools with circulars on changes, policies and new requirements on almost daily abandon from the Ministry of Education, national government, county government, TSC, NGOs, parents, and the community at large all focusing on education on one side and then teachers on the other side.

Suffice to that, many schools are most often located in the most isolated areas, where facilities of the new world are not available. Some of these schools lack the basic necessities such as houses for teacher, water and the road net work is very poor. Okumbe (2007), equated a school to a unique industry whose products quality cannot be judged from its external appearance, but by the way its past students perform in the society. The workers in this unique industry (school) who perform the arduous task of shaping the students to be who they are aspiring to be in the society are none other than teachers.

Though they occupy the perceived bottom hierarchy in the society's perception, teachers are highly organised and educated professionals. Most of the major Savings and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) in the country belong to teachers. The local banks can tell you that a share of the billions they post in profits each year comes from loans taken by teachers. The best houses in the villages, you will be told belongs to teachers. In the past, the only bicycles and motorcycles found in the villages belonged to teachers. Not because it was a show off or a luxury, but it was their only means of transport to those remote and inaccessible rural schools. Where else can you find a government employee riding or driving his motorbike or car into the interior to go to work apart from the teaching profession? A school therefore does not exist as an island since it is founded within a society for the noble cause of serving the society. As a matter of fact, the only people 'belonging to the government' or 'outsiders' in the local peoples' view apart from their local chiefs are the teachers. Even when a locality has the advantage of having a health dispensary in its midst, the clinical officers only visit such a facility may be two or three days in a week to offer services, but teachers have always contented to live and stay amidst the communities where they work.

7.4 Professional development and growth of teachers

Professional development has been defined by Seyfarth (2008) as any activity or process intended to maintain or improve skills, attitudes, understandings or performance of professional and support

personnel in present or future roles. Seyfarth (2008) further denotes that professional development has long been viewed as a means by which teachers are able to “keep up” with new development in their fields. Many teachers are concerned about their professional learning and development status so as to be able to shape the education in both public and private schools.

The teaching profession is in a crisis. There is a demographic exodus of teachers from the teaching profession as a result of low pay, low job morale, terrorism, favoritism, and cronyism, stagnation in one job group, rigid promotion criteria, nepotism, and tribalism among others. According to a research study done by Kasau, Kaloki et al (2016), they cited teacher attrition as being influenced by a plethora of reasons which they classified as demographic factors, personal factors (age, discipline, HIV/AIDS, level of education), institutional factors (working environment, policies on discipline and transfers, work load etc) and push and pull factors as well as dissatisfaction with the teaching career leading to teachers seeking other alternative employment opportunities. The education standards are falling and a lot of complaints about the shortages of teachers in schools continue to dominate the airwaves within the country. This begs several questions: are teachers being encouraged to improve professionally? If yes, is the Teachers Service Commission in Kenya effecting promotion of teachers who have acquired higher education? Are the criteria for effecting promotions being adhered to by the Teachers Service Commission in Kenya? How effectively teachers pursue their own professional growth and development largely depends on their interest, initiative, funds, time and support from the relevant bodies.

Teachers who engage in professional development opportunities do so by going back to colleges and universities to acquire higher education. After completion of their studies, some (not all) are upgraded to higher job groups which translates to a higher salary, self-esteem and confidence (Seyfarth, 2008). But the recent freezing of promotions for teachers who have acquired higher professional and academic papers has added to the misery facing the already over burdened, demoralized Kenyan teachers. Most teachers who want to change their career in pursuit of other “greener pastures” and have not gone back to school have found out how difficult and frustrating it is because they are considered unsuitable as a result of having remained for a long time in their present post that of a classroom teacher. Teachers who have acquired higher level of education add more value to their credentials hence accounting for the biggest number of teachers leaving teaching to join other job opportunities (Kaloki, Kasau et al, 2016). Teachers acquire knowledge about teaching from a variety of sources, of which professional development is one of them.

8.0 Research methodology

The study employed the quantitative and qualitative methods of research to collect data. The researched adopted the con-current research design. Questionnaires and interview guides were used. Questionnaires were for teachers and interview guides for parents respectively. The researchers employed purposive sampling to get the required number of parents and simple random sampling technique for teachers.

9.0 Results and discussion

The researchers issued 50 questionnaires. 42 questionnaires were returned signifying 84% percent. Participants were mainly primary school teachers and parents. The study focused on the societal perception of the teaching profession as an occupation in Kenya. The first objective involved investigating the societal perception of the teaching profession as a profession and an occupation in Kenya. The results are presented in table1 below.

Table 1: Societal perception of parents towards teaching as a profession

| Response | Frequency | % |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| High status | 7 | 43.75 |
| Very high status | 6 | 37.5 |
| Low status | 2 | 12.59 |
| Very low status | 1 | 6.25 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Results from the above table shows that 43.75% of parents gave teaching as a profession a high status, with 37.5% of them saying teaching as a profession has a very high status. Only 6.25% of them said that teaching as a profession has a very low status.

Table 2: Perception of parents towards teaching as an occupation for their children

| Response | Frequency | % |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Very high | 7 | 43.75 |
| High | 5 | 31.25 |
| Low | 4 | 25 |
| Very low | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Results from the above table indicated that most of the parents pointed out that the chances for them to accept their children to be teachers in future are very high at 43.75%. Only 25% of the parents gave their expectation as low in regards to teaching as an occupation for their children.

Table 3: Perception of teachers towards teaching as a profession

| Response | Frequency | % |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Good | 12 | 46.15 |
| Very good | 8 | 30.77 |
| Bad | 6 | 23.08 |
| Very bad | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 26 | 100 |

On analysis, 46.15% of the teachers said that teaching as an occupation was 'good', 30.77% said it was 'very good' while 23.08% said it was 'bad'. The high number of teachers saying that the teaching profession is good can be attributed to the fact that many of the teachers are not in a position to change to other profession.

The second objective was about examining the societal roles played by teachers and the teaching profession as an occupation. The results are discussed in the table below.

Table 4: Societal satisfaction with roles played by teachers

| Response | Frequency | % |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 32 | 76.20 |
| No | 5 | 11.90 |
| Not sure | 5 | 11.90 |
| Total | 42 | 100 |

According to the above table, it was evident that most of the teachers and parents (76.20%) were satisfied that teachers play a significant role in the society. 11.90 % of the respondents were not satisfied, while 11.90% of the respondents not sure as to whether they are satisfied with the roles played by teachers in the society.

Table 5: Societal satisfaction as to whether teachers are meeting their expectations

| Response | Frequency | % |
|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| Yes | 32 | 76.20 |
| No | 7 | 16.66 |
| Not sure | 3 | 7.14 |
| Total | 42 | 100 |

Results from the above table shows that majority of the respondents at 76.20% were satisfied that teachers were meeting their expectations. 16.66% responded that teachers were not meeting what is expected of them in the society.

The last objective was concerned with investigating whether those teachers who have pursued further professional development and growth have had any benefit after completion of their studies.

Table 6: Teachers responses to benefits after engaging in Professional growth and development

| Response | Frequency | % |
|-------------------|------------------|------------|
| Agree | 13 | 50 |
| Strongly agree | 8 | 30.77 |
| Disagree | 3 | 11.54 |
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 7.69 |
| Total | 26 | 100 |

From the results in the above table, it is clear that majority of teachers at 50% agreed that teachers have benefitted after going back to school for further education. An additional 30.77% strongly agree that teachers have benefitted after engaging in professional growth and development. 7.69% of the teachers strongly disagree.

Table 7: No. of teachers who have gone professional growth and development

| Response | Frequency | % |
|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| Yes | 11 | 42.31 |
| No | 15 | 57.69 |
| Total | 26 | 100 |

According to the table above, majority of the teachers (57.69%) have not gone for further professional growth and development courses. Only 42.31% of the teachers have pursued further studies.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, teaching as a profession and occupation is still revered to by many parents despite many teachers leaving the profession for greener pastures. Teachers as professionals also play a vital role in the society.

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