

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM IN ZAMBIA: PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN THE POST-2015 ERA

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Abstract- This article discusses the concept of teacher professionalism in the Zambian context. The aim of the article was to highlight the current strides that newly established Teaching Council has put in place in its quest to professionalise teaching. Since Zambia attained her political independence in October, 1964, there has been a great desire to see a teacher acquire a professional status, that is, an occupational status symbol. Most school teachers, college and university lecturers, the parents and many educationists look forward to a day when the teaching profession will have this status. Against this background, the Government of the Republic of Zambia in conjunction with other stakeholders in the education sector has made strides with the view to professionalise teaching. Particular efforts point to the enactment of the Teaching Profession Act no.5 of 2013 and the development of a Code of Ethics and Conduct to regulate the teachers' practice and professional conduct in government and private schools. Despite having made some strides in this direction, many structural challenges have made it difficult to actualise this status. The practices and structural challenges associated with teacher professionalism are discussed in this article and we conclude this by highlighting some prospects in Teacher professionalism in the post 2015 era.

Key words- Teacher, Professionalism, Practices, Challenges, Prospects.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Teaching profession in Zambia, like many other countries in the region, has been under constant pressure to be more effective and responsive to the needs of the nation. The pressures have been in existence for a long time and have thus necessitated the development of an Act of Parliament in 2013 to improve the teaching profession and enhance the quality of education services. On 21st March, 2013 the government through Parliament enacted the Teaching profession Act No. 5 of 2013. This Act, among other things, provides for the establishment of the Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ). The Act is primarily intended to provide for the regulation of teachers, their practice and professional conduct. It also provides for the accreditation and regulation of Colleges of Education through approval of teacher training programmes. From 2013 onwards, prominent activities leading to teacher registration, certification and accreditation of Colleges of Education has been spearheaded by the Teaching Council of Zambia. Among the major breakthrough in this initiative was recent development of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for teachers and the development of subsequent legal documents such as The Teaching Profession Regulation No. 2 of 2016. Underpinning the range of initiatives that ensured was the desire to attain teacher professionalism and consequently to improve quality in the education system.

1.1 The Concept of Teacher Professionalism

According to the Teaching Council of Zambia (2015:5), a Teaching profession means "a job that requires specialised training in teaching and instruction". On the other hand Musaaazi (1988) sees a

profession as being intellectual and carrying with it great personal responsibility. A profession, therefore, is learned and is based on knowledge and not merely routine. It is also practical rather than simply academic or theoretical. In both definitions above, the techniques can be taught; in fact this is the basis of professional education. A profession is strongly organised internally and is motivated by altruism. As such professionals see themselves as working for the good of society. Thus a professional person is one who knows 'why' and 'how'. He is someone with specialised knowledge and skill in a specific occupation which he regards as a life-long vocation because of the nature of his special training and the satisfaction he derives from doing the job.

There are many characteristics of a profession. Firstly, a profession is based on a body of specialised knowledge and skill to apply to the specific needs, tasks and problems which he meets in the performance of his daily work. Thus teachers require a high degree of intellectual ability and skill which are prerequisites of a profession. For instance, if he is a teacher of Civic Education, neither his knowledge of Civic Education, nor his methods and skills of teaching it must be questioned.

Another feature of a profession is that it always seeks competence in its members. The degree of competence which can be found in the profession is determined by the qualifications, training and experience required and the special provisions for in-service development. For example, teachers in Zambian secondary schools are for the most part university graduates. However, some of these teachers are diploma holders and their classifications are mainly determined by the type and length of

training laid down by the government. For instance, a secondary school teacher who holds a degree qualification in Zambia must have gone through four years of university education (Manchishi, 2015). While those who qualify to teach at junior secondary school level must possess at least two-year teacher's diploma.

Professional organisations to which teachers belong also play an important role in improving their qualifications and requirements. There are several ways in which practising teachers can improve their competence in their respective teaching areas and in education generally; for example through in-service teacher training programmes, seminars, workshops, conferences and also through school monitoring by standards officers. Education standard officers conduct school visits for practical information and on-the-spot observations and discussions with teachers. The school monitoring or field visit, in Zambia, is seen as a way of increasing teacher competence.

Another characteristics feature of a profession is that it serves the needs of its members. The teacher, for instance must have a satisfying job, an adequate salary, retirement benefits, the opportunity for advancement, and status among his colleagues and in his community. A profession also influences public policy in its field. Teachers in their various unions should be in a position to influence government policies concerning education, such as curriculum changes, the organisational structure of the school system and professional training. The changing nature of our society dictates that the profession will always have goals that will need implementation through nation policy. This is evident in the *Zambian National Policy on Education, Educating our Future* of 1996.

Thus, a professional contributes to the well-being of society and is convinced that he is not only beneficial to himself but also helpful to other people. He derives personal satisfaction from doing the work. In this regard a profession is practical, and hence it can benefit society in practical terms.

Another characteristic of a profession is that it has group solidarity that comes partly through the members' own association or organisation. For example, in Zambia we have the *Zambian National Union of Teachers (ZNUT)*, the *Secondary School Teacher's Union (SESTUZ)*, the *Professional Teacher's Union of Zambia (PROSUZ)* and the *Basic Education Teacher's Union (BETUZ)*. These unions give the profession the strength, respectability, prestige and protection it deserves. These professional bodies have the duty of educating their members and the public, and keeping people aware of new developments and ideas in the profession, thus

professional literature has to be produced periodically in order to carry out that obligation. In producing professional literature, each of these unions have a research department which carry out research and disseminate findings at national and international fora.

Finally, a profession has ethical standards or a code of moral behaviour of every member. For instance a profession carries a responsibility for a member to act in a manner required of a professional person. The behaviour of each member is a concern for all. In the case of schools for example, the conduct of any teacher influences the attitudes of the students and the public toward the profession and education in general. The code of conduct is always designed to inspire a quality of behaviour that reflects the honour and dignity of the profession. It is not intended as an inflexible set of rules, but serves to measure the propriety or a member's behaviour in his working relationships. The *Code of Ethics for the Teaching profession in Zambia* spells out broad principles of basic values and behavioural standards that call for high level of conduct by teachers (TCZ, 2016: iii)

1.2 The Status of the Teaching Profession in Zambia

The above discussion gives a general picture of what constitutes teacher professionalism. However, the list is not exhaustive. From our description of the profession in general, we safely say that teaching is a profession. It is a profession because it has the characteristics described above. But can we say that teaching is profession in Zambia? It is not easy to answer this question because, by our definition, many of the attributes of a profession are lacking. For example, there are a number of teachers in *Zambian public, private and community schools* without any teaching qualifications. Some of the teachers are semi-illiterates and are not much better than those they teach (Simuyaba, Falconer-stout and Mayapi (2015).

This is particularly the case in a number of *Community school*. Community teachers have little education and have no professional backing or training to enable them teach efficiently. (Simuyaba, Falconer-stout, and Kalimaposo (2014). A good teacher must have professional knowledge and skills and these can only be acquired through training in various professional and academic subjects. With the teacher registration exercise that was launched on the 3rd February, 2016, by the Hon. Minister of General Education in Zambia, the general belief that 'anyone can teach anything' shall come to pass. The Teaching Council of Zambia has now embarked on a nationwide sensitizing programme advising the nation that only qualified teachers will be allowed to practice in *Zambian schools*. This message is in accordance with the provisions of the *Teaching*

Profession Act No. 5 of 2013, which defined a teacher as;

a person who is qualified, registered and teaches or instructs, a head of a school, a principal or lecturer of a college of education, a technical education instructor, head of department of education or an education unit at any other educational institution other than a university.

Going by this legal document an individual shall be considered to be a teacher if one has studied content courses in areas of specialisation, foundations of education and methodology courses. Once one possess such qualifications, then this teacher is qualified to teach learners at different levels of the education system and shall be registered with the Teaching Council of Zambia in accordance with the Teaching profession Act No. 5 of 2013. Upon registration, the teacher can now apply for a Certificate of Practice which will be renewable every three (3) years.

After the implementation of this law in the post 2015 era (TCZ, 2016: 2-4), it is envisaged that anyone who does not fall in the above definition of a teacher shall not practice as a teacher in Zambian schools. This authority for the Teaching Council is clearly articulated in *Section 26 of the Teaching Profession Act (Act No. 25 of 2013)* which states that: *A person shall not, unless the person is a teacher and holds a practicing certificate under the Teaching Profession Act:*

- (a) *Practice as, be employed as, offer teaching services as or hold out to be a teacher.*
- (b) *Adopt, use or exhibit the titles “registered teacher” or any other title or abbreviation of like description, or*
- (c) *Do anything likely to lead persons to infer that the person is a registered teacher.*

Section 4 of the same Act further states that that “ *a person who commits an offence is liable, upon conviction, to a fine not exceeding three hundred thousand (300,000) penalty units or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three (3) years, or to both.* This therefore, means that the notion among some academics that: ‘once someone has a university degree, then he/she can teach’ will be dismissed in the post 2015 agendas. As educators we know that academic knowledge alone is not enough to make a good teacher (Musaazi, 1978). Some preparation in a teacher training college or a as a profession is necessary. The special skills acquired in a college of education or University College of education distinguish the professional teacher from the non-professional and hence the Teaching Council of Zambia will ensure that all those without qualifications will not be issues Certificate of Practice as teachers and consequently, will be prohibited by law to practice as teachers.

1.3 Structural and Policy Implementation Challenges

Though plans are underway to implement the provisions of the Teaching Profession Act no. 5 of 2013, as well as the Teaching Profession Regulation of 2016, many unqualified persons still teach in our Zambian schools, both public and private. Thus it is fair to argue that teaching is not yet a profession in Zambia. Other challenges obtaining in the teaching profession in Zambia include “increase in examination malpractices, teacher misconduct, poor pupil performance and work culture” (Teaching Council of Zambia, 2016). This development can partly be attributed to the absence of the professional teacher’s regulatory body and a Code of Ethics prior to the enactment of the Teaching Profession Act No. 5 of 2013 and its implementation.

Furthermore, teaching in Zambia lacks the prestige of other professions such as medicine and law. In many advanced countries like Britain and the USA no one is allowed to teach in a primary or secondary school, however learned they may be, unless they have completed a period of professional training. In these countries there are minimum standards for entry into the teaching profession. It is therefore in such countries that teaching can be considered a profession. The situation is not like this in Zambia. This can be explained by the fact that the post-independence education policies provided that anyone who had basic qualifications at secondary school level could attend in-service teacher training and by then that person was allowed to practice as a teacher.

Another explanation given to the presence of unqualified teachers in the system emanates from the time when the provision of education among the communities was legalised by the Ministry of Education in the 1990s, following the liberalised education policies. In Zambian community schools, anyone who had a grade 9 Certificate qualified to teach including those who completed grade 12 school level but without sufficient O’Levels to enable them attend a teacher training college. The third category of unqualified teachers come from private colleges of education. These, have been enrolling teachers who do not meet the prescribed minimum entry requirement for profit gains. This has been going on for some time and hence, the current situation is such that Zambia’s education system has both qualified and unqualified teachers. The prospect for teacher professionalism, however, lies in the implementation of the Teaching Profession Act No 5 of 2013. For example on classification of members to be registered as teachers, the Act has this to say;

Pursuant to part III section 9 subsection (1),(2) and (3) of the Teaching Profession Act No. 5 of 2013, the classification of members to the teaching profession shall include qualified

teachers or education practitioners and other personnel who are associated with the Teaching Profession.

This therefore implies that the Teaching Council of Zambia will eliminate all those masquerading as teachers without the stipulated minimum requirements for teaching. Once this happens, the Zambian ministry of education will be moving towards teacher professionalism.

1.4 Ways of Strengthening Teacher Professionalism in the Post-2015 Era.

Having identified the policy gaps and structural challenges that do not promote teacher professionalism in Zambia, we join the call by the Ministry of General Education for the need to turn teaching into a respectable profession by providing professional training for all teachers from pre-primary to university level. Such training can be given in colleges of education, faculties of education and institutes of education. Those people who are unqualified but are already teaching should not be given practicing certificates during the teacher certification phase later this year (2016) by the Teaching Council of Zambia. Instead, they should enrol for in-service teacher training programmes so that they can upgrade their qualification.

The minimum entry requirement into teaching at primary level should be raised to at least three-year diploma level. At the community school level, several programmes of in-service training should be organised for Community School teachers. At the end of such programmes certificates of competence should be given. A further full-time professional training should be devised to enable Community Teachers acquire academic certificate which will enable them register as teachers in the various categories prescribed by the Teaching Council of Zambia. This is not easy, for it requires a lot of money to finance the necessary programmes at each educational level. In spite of the educational cost that go with the suggested reforms, there is need to take punitive measure in implementing them as 'quality always go with cost'. Once these measure are implemented, Zambia will begin moving towards improving teacher professionalism in the Post 2015 era.

With regards to poor attitude towards work, each registered and certified teacher should be served with a copy of the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Teaching Profession in Zambia. All teachers should read that document and adhere to its provisions. Furthermore, a new orientation towards work must be created among teachers. This means that teachers must develop a healthy attitude to teaching and good discipline towards work. Additionally, teachers should be well remunerated in order to boost their morale. We must remember, however, that

improvements in teachers' salaries and conditions of service alone are no guarantee that we shall get better teachers who will be intellectually and professionally equipped to carry out the important task of educating the Zambian youths.

It is further worth noting that the educational system in Zambia has been expanding rapidly since independence in 1964. The main structural challenge facing the nation's educational system now and in the foreseeable future is how to match quantity with quality. In response to the above challenge, the educational system must be in a position to cope with the current needs of the country. Thus the graduates of the education system must be fully equipped with the values, knowledge and skills necessary for development. This means also that if teacher professionalism is to be realised, the Teaching Council of Zambia must ensure that those who teach in schools and colleges are thoroughly prepared for the tasks ahead of them in their teaching profession. To match quantity with quality, it is within the mandate of the teaching Council of Zambia to accredit Colleges of Education and to ensure that what is taught in these institutions is within the confines of the revised National Curriculum Framework. Once both public and private Colleges of Education are monitored by this regulatory body, there will be improvement in the efficiency and delivery of the educational system and thus teacher professionalism will be felt at all levels of the Zambian society.

In concluding this article, we strongly envisage that the newly established Teaching Council of Zambia will facilitate the professionalization of the Teaching Profession in Zambia. This will be so because this Council has just developed and publishing the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Teaching Profession (TCZ, 2016). The Code of Ethics, which was a missing link, is an important document as it stipulates the do's and don'ts for all members in the teaching profession. Any member's breach of the Code results in a penalty depending on the gravity of the offence. It is expected that by the end of 2016 all colleges of Education will be accredited to the Council and that the more than 130,000 teachers from both the public and private sectors will register with the Teaching Council of Zambia. By so doing, the Teaching Council hopes to place professionals in appropriate levels which will bring about quality service delivery and ultimately quality education. Once this process is done, it is hoped that teacher professionalism will be realized in Zambia. Thus the dream of realizing teacher professionalism in Zambia lies in the mandate of the Teaching Council of Zambia.

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