

What is happening to the ‘noble’ profession? Concerns about and threats to the teaching profession in high school in Zimbabwe – The Way forward

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Abstract

The teaching profession in this country used to be regarded as a ‘noble’ profession. It was a profession that most school-leavers wished to be associated with and happily joined after completing their Standard Six, Form Two (Junior Certificate) or Form Four (‘O’ Level). However the situation on the ground currently points to the possible ‘extinction’ of the profession, as there appears no one is willing to join the profession and those who have joined did it as a ‘last resort’ and are always looking elsewhere for ‘greener pastures’. Explanations ranging from historical to economic reasons have been advanced to explain the present predicament of the profession. This paper is therefore informed by a desire to contribute towards the preceding, regarding the ‘demeaning’ or ‘debasement’ of the teaching profession and suggest possible solutions. We therefore argue; if this situation is not addressed as a matter of urgency, Zimbabwe risks ending up with no teachers or with the ‘wrong type of teachers’, who, if they happen to be there, are merely ‘mercenary teachers’. We also argue for a paradigm in the shift in the manner prospective student teachers are selected and enrolled to train as teachers in colleges of education. We concede; while premium attention should be placed on academic excellence per se as seems to be currently the case, we think equal emphasis should also be placed on the character (hunhu) of prospective candidates so that we not only have high school teachers who are skilled and competent but more importantly committed and have good character (hunhu hwakanaka).

1. Introduction

The paper interrogates the current state of the teaching profession in Zimbabwe particularly at high school. This interrogation is premised on the declining patterns of college and university graduate students enrolling for Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) and Post – graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to study to be qualified high school teachers. It is considered important to note at the onset that, these qualifications are considered vital for anyone to qualify to teach in high school in Zimbabwe. What has become apparent is that, the number of college and university graduate students registering for this qualification is steadily on the decrease, yet; more high schools are being established in the country. The question begging an answer is: Who is teaching these students at high school? We are aware that, there are other colleges of education offering qualifications to students to teach at high school. However, even if that be the case, the question still remains why is that; college and university graduates are not coming to enhance their profession yet most of them, seem comfortable to teach without this qualification and losing the corresponding benefits and status. For instance some of the students interviewed in this paper indicated that they have been teaching without this qualification for 10 – 15 years. We argue; the fact that someone can teach for this long without considering taking this qualification can be construed as a sign, firstly; of indecision and secondly, lack of commitment to the teaching profession. We put it that, it can therefore be argued; most of the teachers who are currently in the profession joined it as a last resort. On that basis; we argue such teachers currently teaching in high schools in Zimbabwe are not committed to the teaching profession and hence should be considered as ‘mercenary’ or ‘transitory’ teachers. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to interrogate this apparent indecisiveness and intransigence by most

college and university graduates to become qualified teachers in our Zimbabwean schools. This is despite the fact that teaching has been for quite some time considered as a respected and noble profession. Whilst this paper focuses on high school teachers, however given its scope that it cannot cover the entire teaching profession in Zimbabwe, we argue; the observations of this paper have implications for the entire teaching profession in Zimbabwe. Accordingly, the question informing this paper is: The fundamental question informing this paper is: What is happening to the teaching profession in high school in Zimbabwe?

2. Background

Historically, teaching is the oldest profession in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, that was made accessible to the indigenous people. It is important to note that; the teaching profession in Zimbabwe and elsewhere used to be regarded as a 'noble' profession. In colonial Zimbabwe, it was a profession that most school-leavers wished to be associated with and happily joined after completing their Standard Six, Form Two (Junior Certificate) or Form Four ('O' Level). In this era, it was primarily provided by the missionaries in their various stations to the Africans (Zvobgo, 1994). The objective was not so much the desire to educate the Africans but more so, the desire to evangelize and to convert them to Christianity (Zvobgo, 1984; Makuva, 1996a). It should be noted that; initially, in the colonial era, teachers were not trained in the present formal sense but were school-leavers selected from their communities on the basis, firstly; of outstanding academic performance in Standards 3, 5 and 6 and secondly; good behaviour (*tsika dzakanaka*) (Makuva, 1996b; Mutumbuka, 1981). It needs to be pointed out that, at the time, 'good behaviour' hinged on whether or not one was a Christian. This is because to the missionaries, who were in charge with provision and monitoring of education, there was no other religion apart from Christianity. In view of the fact that, their main interest in providing education to the natives was to convert the heathen Africans to Christianity, we think it was only logical that the 'teachers' they chose, necessarily has to be Christians. The dimension of training for the teachers in colleges of education and universities was a later development.

However, what is of interest to this paper is the selection process for those who were to teach. Thus, in addition to the selected candidates being outstanding academically, they also had to be outstanding or exemplary in character and behaviour as well. In other words, they had to be *vakomana ne vasikana vane hunhu*. To this end, the selection was done in close liaison with the headmasters who had an in depth knowledge of the academic performance as well as character or '*hunhu*' particular candidates. In addition and of great importance to the missionaries, the prospective candidates/teachers had to have a proven record of being active Christians. However, because all schools, both primary and secondary were administered by missionaries, teachers operated under a strict religious professional ethical code (Harber, 1989; Peresuh & Nhundu, 1999). Teachers had therefore to abide by this code lest they risked being dismissed or blacklisted from teaching for any behaviour deemed unprofessional. Unprofessional behaviour according to the missionaries included among others, beer drinking, falling in love with female students, being known or reported to be indifferent to the church and being known or reported to be critical of the political climate prevailing at the time. In view of the strict religious and professional code as well strict political environment they operated under, the teachers portrayed a picture of being upright, 'educated', noble and being *vanhu vane hunhu* (people who are well behaved). It is on this basis, that teaching came to be known as a noble profession. Teachers considered themselves as teachers, not only while at work but even after, for their behaviour was supposed to be professional and exemplary at all times. Thus, if their behaviour was reported to be unbecoming, either to the community, the headmaster or mission authorities, they risked being disciplined. Accordingly, the teacher had to be a professional, well disciplined and exemplary all the time.

Consequently, the teacher commanded great respect in the community he/she operated in. This was because firstly; of his/her known academic record and, secondly; he/she was regarded by society as someone *akadzidza*, someone who is educated. It needs to be pointed out that the Afro – Shona

conception of educatedness (*kudzidza/kufunda*) went beyond the narrow Western notion of educatedness that likened it to some form of specialization and specialism. The Africans have a holistic and comprehensive view of educatedness that goes beyond academic knowledge acquisition or specialization to include the character (*hunhu* and *tsika*) of the person as well. It is vital to note that; from an Afro – Shona perspective, an educated person - *munhu akadzidza*, was expected to know not only what everyone else knew but also even much of what everyone else did not know. *Munhu akadzidza* was supposed to be an ‘all rounder’ – literally *munhu anoziva zvose* (one who has knowledge of everything). His/her expertise was not confined to the classroom alone but even to life issues in general where he/she was supposed to give advice. Thus, the teacher was regarded as a ‘resource’ person and model in the community he/she worked and stayed. Accordingly, society had great respect for teachers who reciprocated this by reasonably behaving professionally all the time. Teachers were many things in one, apart and in addition to imparting book knowledge; he/she was a father, mother, preacher, advisor, counsellor and model. Teachers were warmly and heartily welcomed in people’s homes to the extent that special food like chicken was prepared for teachers if they happened to visit the homes of the children they taught. For those not familiar with African etiquette, slaughtering a chicken then and even now, for a visitor is a sign of great welcome, respect and love for the particular visitor. Teachers not only imparted ideas and knowledge but they also **lived** those ideas. They were not only foundations of foreign knowledge but even indigenous/traditional knowledge as well.

The question which comes to mind and which needs immediate answering is;

- Why were teachers held with such great respect by society?
Several answers can be suggested but the contention of the paper is that; teachers were held in high regards by the society and community they worked in because ‘*vainge vari vanhu vane hunhu*’ (they measured up to the *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy) both as ordinary citizens but more so as professionals. Thus, their ability to interpret and impart Western foreign knowledge coupled with the fact that ‘*vainge vari vanhu vanoremekedzeka*’ (they were respectable) made them to be celebrities in the communities they worked and lived in. Teachers were thus professionals ‘*vane hunhu*’ (good mannered) who did not restrict their professionalism to school work only but lived it even after. The teacher was a professional on his/her way to church services, funerals, ‘*misangano yedunhu*’ (village gatherings), on the bus, on his/her way to do shopping at the local township even during school holidays. Because teaching produced such highly respectable individuals, it came to be regarded as a ‘noble’ and ‘humble’ profession. By **humble** with reference to a person in Shona is meant a person ‘*akatyoka, akapfava, akanyarara kwete akapusa*’ (one who is soft spoken but not stupid) and it needs to be admitted that these are virtues in African culture (Rukuni, 2007; Gelfand, 1973).

Thus, teachers were symbols of such esteemed values and more, and indeed deserved the high respect accorded them ultimately. Teaching was a profession that school leavers then, yearned to join with great excitement and zeal, notwithstanding of course the limited number and variety of professions to choose from at the time. It was such a highly regarded profession that parents with children who were teachers automatically changed social status upwards. Indeed, one can say without hesitation that these were the ‘golden’ days of both the ‘noble’ profession and teacher. However, the era of the ‘golden’ days of the profession extended but started systematically waning in the mid – 80s to a terrible state it is now. The question, which needs asking and answering for the sake of the future of our children, and which also is the basis of this paper, is:

- What is happening to the ‘noble’ profession?

The Teaching Profession and the present context in Zimbabwe

The preceding discussion presented what can be considered as the ‘golden’ days of the teacher and the profession colonial Zimbabwe. Teaching as has already been mentioned was considered as a noble profession and the teacher as a highly respectable member of the community and society, who was both a

model and a resource person. Unfortunately, the picture painted above regarding the status of the teaching profession and the teacher in contemporary Zimbabwe seems no longer to obtain. The profession is no longer being considered as a noble and popular occupation which school – leavers are anxious to join. However, even those who have joined it (*The Sunday Mail*, 2011) are not eager to remain in. Thus, teachers no longer command the same high respect and status they enjoyed previously. Sadly, school – leavers, who ‘end-up’ taking teaching as a profession, do so as a last resort. This is because most of them would have failed to meet entry requirements to other ‘better’ professions due to poor entry grades or just stiff competition. Accordingly, that teachers and prospective teachers are so courageous as to say that teaching was their last option, has serious negative implications for the whole profession and the entire education system in the country.

The preceding views and sentiments came out vividly from three surveys carried out on the 2010 Graduate Diploma in Education (Grad. D.E.) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students, and First year students that were randomly interviewed from Belvedere Teachers’ College (for secondary or high school teachers).

Grad. D.E. programme comprises of students who are university graduates who have spend a minimum of 2 years teaching without training now wish to become professional, therefore enrol for a one year full-time programme. The following table gives a full picture of the enrolment trend experienced from the years 1998 – 2013 when Graduate Diploma in Education (Grad. D.E.) was then known as Graduate Certificate in Education (Grad. C.E.).

Table 1: Grad C.E. and Grad D.E. enrolment by year

Year	Number of students enrolled
1997	201
1998	219
2000	190
2001	151
2002	Statistics not available
2003	98
2004	78
2005	99
2006	96
2007	44
2008	0
2009	0
2010	8
2011	9
2012	8

The 2010 - 2012 intakes had record low numbers of an average number of eight students from record highs of 219 and 201 students in 1997 and 1998 respectively. It is quite disturbing that the Grad. C.E./Grad. D.E. programme which used to be very popular with students wanting to turn professional, had such low numbers of prospective teachers with 2008 and 2009 having no students at all. It must be pointed out that in previous years the Faculty of Education at the University of Zimbabwe had problems of turning huge numbers of students away because it could only handle a limited number. In spite of this, what is disturbing is that in the year 2010 there were only eight students and no students at all in 2008 and 2009. Surely such a trend is quite disturbing in view of the expansion in high school education during the corresponding periods. It becomes more disturbing to note that the other university programmes, that should complement Grad. D.E. in producing graduate high school teachers, are equally affected.

For instance, the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Arts and Science programmes also reflect a similar disturbing trend in student enrolments. The following two tables (Table 2 and Table 3) depict enrolment trends in B. Ed Arts and B. Ed. Science subjects respectively. B. Ed. Arts provides specialised academic knowledge and skills in the teaching of Arts subjects at high school level, while B. Ed. Science gives the same skills in the teaching of Science subjects at high school level respectively.

Table 2: Enrolment figures for B. Ed in Arts Subjects by year

Period	Number of students by subject					Total
	English	History	Ndebele	RE	Shona	
1997-1998	30	30	30	-	30	120
2000-2001	26	29	27	-	29	111
2002-2003	29	36	29	-	32	126
2004-2005	25	29	18		26	98
*2004-2008				*24		*24
2006-2007	Statistics not available but there was a group					
2008-2009	9	7	0	-	5	21
*2008-2012 (Part-time)	-	-	-	*6	-	*6
*2010-2014 (Part-time)	11	6	0	5	9	*31
2012-2013	21	9	0	5	10	45
2013-2014			8			8

The Bachelor of Education Degree is intended for teachers who hold a two/three/four-year certificate/diploma in teaching qualification (Certificate in Education/Diploma in Education) from a teachers' college and wish to advance their qualification in education by specialising in specific subjects taught in high schools in Zimbabwe. Once again, in previous years the University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Education used to be overwhelmed by large numbers of applicants wishing to enrol for the B.Ed. programme but for the past years the numbers have been steadily dwindling.

Because the numbers continued to go down, there was an attempt by the Department of Curriculum and Arts Education, at the University of Zimbabwe, to go part-time in 2010 (figures with asterisk) but this did not help much in attracting prospective students. That being the case with Arts subjects, one would naturally have interest in what is happening with the Sciences. Table 3 below answers to that.

Table 3: Enrolment figures for B. Ed in Science Subjects by year

Period	Number of students by subject					Total
	Biology	Chemistry	Geography	Maths	Physics	
1997-1998	20	21	24	19	6	90
1999-2000	16	26	22	25	18	107
2001-2002	The programme failed to attract students					0
2003-2004	11	13	16	19	6	65
2005-2006	The programme failed to attract students					0
2007-2009	4	2	5	5	0	16
2010-2012	9	6	0	5	0	20

Again the numbers are not that encouraging as some years failed to register a single student in all the five subjects offered by the Department of Science and Mathematics, University of Zimbabwe. In fact having noticed the decline in numbers, the department decided to go the Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) way as from the year 2007. Still the output of high school teachers with degrees is not very encouraging. And if this is the situation in both the Arts and Sciences one then wonders as to what has and will become of the historically 'noble' profession.

Since the B.Ed. programmes in both the Department of Curriculum and Arts Education and Department of Science and Mathematics Education draw students from teachers' colleges, it became imperative for this study to interview students from teacher education institutions. Consequently, the third category of students interviewed in this study was seventy (70) first year students from Belvedere Teachers' College in Harare. Forty (40) students were randomly selected from Belvedere Teachers' College and the remainder from Seke Teachers' College. Of interest about the students from the college was that most of them were in their mid-20s meaning that they had spent over five (5) years doing either temporary teaching or some odd jobs after finishing their 'O' or 'A' levels and probably waiting to get a chance into a Teachers' College to train as a teacher!

Identical questions were orally asked to the three different categories of respondents at different times and locations notably:

Question {1}: Why did you take teaching as a profession?

Question {2}: Why did it take you this long to come for training?

Question {3}: What are your prospects for the future?

Question {4} was for the M.Ed. students only and it was:

After finishing your Masters studies what's next?

In response to question {1} more than 80 % of a total of 83 students said they had joined teaching as a last option after other options had failed especially in industry due to stiff competition.

Question {2} was specifically for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education and those enrolling for the Diploma in Teacher Education at the two colleges mentioned above. Altogether they were eighty –three {83} students and of these, 85 % said they had taken this long to join the profession because they were hoping that other options elsewhere would work out. Others indicated that they had enrolled for this course because Zimbabwean teachers are in high demand in the 'diaspora' and therefore hoped to go there after completing the programme. The remaining others gave mixed answers for instance others said they were still busy supplementing their 'O' Levels.

Question {3} was for all the three categories. Ninety–five percent {95%} of the 83 students openly said that they would leave the profession after completion. On being reminded of the bonding period they are expected to serve in Zimbabwean schools, some said if they found somewhere to go with better conditions, they would just go. The remaining five – percent {5 %}, about eight {8} female students, said they would stay in the profession for they liked the profession with its long holidays.

As has been alluded to, Question {4} was for the Masters' students and all five {5} of them said they hoped to get lectureships in colleges and universities and leave the teaching profession.

Assuming these responses represent the general sentiments and feelings of certified teachers, students in training and prospective ones, the future of the teaching profession in Zimbabwe is very grim. In fact, the above sentiments seem to threaten the existence of the entire teaching profession as well as the entire education system since teaching by qualified teachers is critical for the success of any formal education provision. What it might mean is that if practicing teachers had their way, they would leave teaching immediately and if school-leavers had their way, most of them would not take teaching as a profession. A

grim picture for the profession and indeed, for our children, who have to be taught by teachers, and naturally something needs to be done to avert a situation where there are pupils but no teachers.

The above sentiments, if they can be taken to be true of the generality just for one minute, should disturb most level-headed people who have something to do with education in the country. The above revelations have far-reaching negative implications for the teaching profession and there is thus, urgent need to contain the situation before we end up without teachers. Even if we happen to have them, they will be the wrong ones having joined the teaching profession for the wrong reasons altogether. In fact against this background one can argue that; the teaching profession in Zimbabwe particular in high schools is characterised by ‘mercenary’ teachers. Teachers who are in, because they cannot get something better, and who would leave the profession at any time should an offer presents itself elsewhere. What we are saying therefore is that; Zimbabwe teaching profession especially in high schools is characterised by professionals waiting to leave. Against this background, we think it is fitting to say; Zimbabwe has a serious problem which needs urgent attention.

Where is the Problem?

Rather than ‘*what is the problem?*’; we think it is proper to say; ‘*where is the problem?*’ The problem, as revealed by the mini-survey, seems to arise from the fact that it is becoming apparent that no one wants to be a teacher anymore at least for the moment in Zimbabwe. Could it be that, the services of teachers are no longer required in our society? Far from it, on the contrary, it can be argued that, in fact Zimbabwean society needs teachers more now than ever before. It should be emphasised that; Zimbabwe needs not only trained teachers, but highly qualified and skilled teachers. This is especially in view of the breakdown of the family unit and the demise of the extended family and also the impacts of ICTs and globalisation on our youths. We argue; these two used to perform vital roles in the socialization and upbringing of the child, functions which have now been loaded to the teacher and the school. A latest development in our society which is making the need for teachers more pressing than ever before is the recent trend by most parents to seek greener pastures in the ‘diaspora’.

Consequently, most of these parents leave their children at boarding schools where their children will be looked after by teachers. Also, even those who continue working here, the pressures of work make it imperative and inevitable that they require the services of teachers in one form or another. Therefore, it seems apparent that the services of teachers are needed, but ironically, the providers of that service are not required. Rather odd, is it not!

The problem is not with whether or not the services of teachers are required for that is incontestable; the issue is with the status that has been accorded to the teaching profession in very recent times. Teaching is now ranked very lowly on the scale of professions, notwithstanding the fact that all the other professions are products of the teaching profession. In fact, just as philosophy is traditionally regarded as the *mother* of all knowledge, so is teaching the *mother* of all professions. Ironically, some critics of teaching as a profession argue that teaching is a semi-profession or low profession. These critics proceed to maintain that teaching ‘is a refuge for modern people who are industrious but unimaginative and uncreative, people with average brain power.’ Thus according to these critics ‘he who can does, and he who cannot, teaches’.

These and similar sentiments probably explain the low regard that teachers themselves, teachers-to-be and society has of the profession and its professionals. According to this perspective, teaching is for ‘failures’ in life or for people who because of their average or low mentality could not make it to the top or into more challenging professions. This attitude has resulted in society having a very low opinion of the teaching profession and its professionals. This has had the effect that; even some qualified teachers do not want people in their neighbourhoods to know that they are teachers. Those who are in it would therefore want to leave as fast as they can, so that they do not continue being part of the negative labelling.

Another factor that seems to contribute to the present low status of teachers is that the profession has become a profession for everyone. In other words, anyone who can read and write and has proof that he/she did and passed Form 4 or 6 is considered a teacher and therefore, *can teach*. In this regard, we are referring to the phenomenon of the 'untrained teacher' or the 'temporary teacher' within the teaching profession. This phenomenon, started way before independence when the colonial system recruited untrained teachers to man their few African schools. At independence and in realisation of the centrality of education to national development, African governments and Zimbabwean government in particular, made educational provision top priority. However, there was a challenge of a shortage of qualified teachers to meet the high demand of education then. As a stop-gap measure amongst other measures, governments recruited school-leavers as teachers, to alleviate the problem of qualified teacher shortage in the country (Makuvaza, 1998). Unfortunately, the problem seems not to have been solved, thus, almost 30 years down the line, government is still requiring the additional service of these untrained teachers. We therefore argue; it was unfortunately this inclusion of the untrained teacher into the profession as a temporary solution that is being used by critics to say that teaching is a profession for everyone and anyone. This stop-gap but justifiable measure, has had the negative effect of having teaching being downgraded to the level of a semi-profession since untrained people were and are still being recruited to teach. We think, it is this noble move by government which has had the adverse effect of undermining the credibility of teaching as a noble profession.

The other possible reason and a very important one leading to the current low status of the teaching profession and invariably its professionals is the low remuneration or poor working conditions for teachers internationally but more so here in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, teachers are amongst the lowest paid professionals now. Because of their miserable salaries, they feel unappreciated despite the fact that they offer a vital service to society. Unfortunately, there is a tendency by society to mistakenly equate remuneration with value of the particular service. Society confuses higher remuneration with value of that particular profession. Accordingly, because teachers get shamefully low wages as evidenced in their style of living, society proceeds to conclude that, that is because their services have little relevance to society (*The Herald*, 2011). Teachers' salaries are such a shame to the extent that very few teachers can afford decent accommodation of their own, a second-hand car, and decent meals or to send their children to good schools (*The Sunday Mail*, 2011). Teachers salaries are such a shame considering the time taken and resources expended for one to become one. These days it is possible to hear kombi assistants (*mahwindi*) bragging saying 'Nhasi ndakachona sateacher' (Today I am as bankrupt as a teacher). A story goes that a lady teacher staying in the up market suburbs of Harare (on the strength of the husband with a good job) recruited a domestic worker through the Ministry of Labour. The lady teacher asked the domestic worker how much she would want to be paid as a salary. Her reply was indeed a shocker to her employer. She answered very innocently, without knowing that her employer (the lady) was in fact, high school teacher: "Mazuva ano vasikana vebasa vazhinji vanenge vasina experience vari kutangwa neinotangwa nayo maticha, zvino ini zvandiine 5 years ndiri **neni** pamurungu chaiye handizivi kuti mungandiisawo pakadii?" (These days the salary scale for many inexperienced housemaids is equivalent to that of teachers therefore I would like to find out your offer to a person like me who has five years experience of working for a white boss).

Indeed, the reply was shocker, because little did the domestic know that her prospective employer was a teacher. Accordingly, what she was asking for was a salary equal to or more than what her employer was getting from her teaching. This is notwithstanding the fact that her employer is a Senior Teacher with a B. Ed degree and she (the domestic) only has poor 'O' Levels, and boasts of 5 years experience *achishanda sa'neni' pamurungu chaiye* (working for a white person as a baby-sitter). This explains why it was mentioned above that teachers' salaries are indeed a shame. This could be taken as an over-exaggeration but then as people say there is no smoke without fire. According to the reasoning above the services of a teacher are being matched with those of a domestic worker since their salaries are the same. Ridiculous! Is it not?

Additionally and unfortunately, teachers have nothing to show for in the present society characterized by high consumerism and high conspicuous consumption habits. The teacher, to say the least, can be said to be suffering from hunger and miserability in their various manifestations. Thus, teachers already in the field are always regretting and looking for 'greener pastures' elsewhere. School – leavers shun the profession and those who might end up for some reason joining the teaching profession, do so as a last resort or as stop – gap measure. Students and pupils, for they are products of the mentality where one who has money in its various forms is respected, will look down upon their teachers similarly, as people with mediocre minds who did not have what it really takes to do real professions like real people. Apart from the fact that the teacher knows 'something' that the learner needs there is nothing else the student can emulate from the teacher apart from probably feeling pity for the teacher.

Another contributory factor towards undermining the status of teachers in society has to do with their character (*hunhu hwavo*) that leaves a lot to be desired for some. It is not being suggested here that; all teachers *havana hunhu*, far from it. Indeed, there are some really good teachers out there. What seems to have tarnished the image of the profession and its teachers is the behaviour *isina hunhu* by some members of the profession. For instance, some have been accused of flirting with pupils, impregnating them, drunkenness, public fighting and misuse and abuse of school properties especially headmasters (*The Herald*, April 17, 2007). These sentiments were also echoed by the Nziramasanga Commission respondents who;

Expressed concern about the fact that in some instances teachers were not leading by example. Instead they were involved with students in drinking, smoking, as well as indulging in drugs and sexual relationships. This has led to the loss of respect for teachers, people were particularly distressed about situations where teachers were intimate with school girls” (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999: 65).

The above accusations, bad as they are themselves, are not unique to teachers and in fact this is the argument of teachers that: why is it that society seems concerned about both their private and public lives. Teachers are arguing that they need to lead a private life like any other professional. It is unfortunately, because of these few unscrupulous and unprofessional teachers who have tarnished the image of the entire profession that society ends up blaming everyone including the innocent.

The age of current teachers also plays some part in undermining their status in society. Teachers are being recruited into the profession at a rather very young age for them to be able to command and earn the respect from society. School-leavers are becoming qualified teachers after leaving college and university at 20 years of age, notwithstanding that this age is beyond the majority age of 18. What society seems to be insinuating is that; these teachers are too young by African standards, to be, among other things, role models in their various communities where they will be working. Since old perceptions like habits die hard, society's view of a teacher are still influenced to a large extent by the traditional view where a teacher was mature and a resource person for the community who knew not only how to teach in the classroom but even in life in general – literally a 'Mr. Know All'. Such is the professional, the young teacher of today is being compared with and unfortunately failing to match hence one often hears these young teachers being referred to as *twumaticha* (teachers who are not respectable).

Implications for the teaching profession and education in Zimbabwe

The issues raised above have serious negative implications for the teaching profession and education in general in Zimbabwe. Precisely, because the profession is being regarded very lowly among other professions it means it cannot attract some of the best brains among the school – leavers to join it. Those who join it are mediocre people who lack initiative and creativity and are only happy to have something to do to earn a living after a long and gruelling academic career. Even if the 'above' average join the profession, as they will ultimately do given the nature of our economy, they are like mercenaries who are in it just for the money. The bigger part of their time, they are busy thinking of leaving the profession or finding other means of enhancing themselves academically so that they leave the profession. No time is

given to enhancing themselves professionally because they are not committed and motivated to the profession. The net result of the preceding is that we have a profession being manned by the wrong type of a professional; one who is neither motivated nor committed and hence will not give his/her best. Like 'mercenaries' they always go to the 'master' who pays the most.

The issue of poor working conditions impinges negatively on the level and degree of commitment from the professionals. Because teachers cannot make ends meet due to poor salaries they are found engaging in other activities to supplement their salary and thereby not giving complete attention to the profession (*The Sunday Mail*, 2011). In fact, some teachers have been found engaging in activities that put the profession into great disrepute. Unfortunately, those caught have been prosecuted yet what needs prosecution is not teachers, but 'society' which is responsible for the predicament the teachers find themselves in. Society is failing to put the teaching profession and its professionals in their proper place in society.

The education system in general has also its share of problems emanating from the problems being faced by teachers. The education that depends for its quality and development on the initiative, creativity and innovativeness of the teachers is likely to remain unresponsive to new demands for a very long time for teachers will be lacking the motivation and drive. Even when changes come from the top to be implemented by the teachers, the changes if implemented it will be done grudgingly for the teachers are not happy and motivated in their work. The result of this resistance by teachers is that the system will suffer but mostly, the learners who are being caught in 'crossfire'. In fact, when teachers are not happy, it is children who suffer for they are likely not to get the best out of the teachers' capabilities and potentials. Teachers who on failing to have their concerns solved by authorities will direct their frustrations on the learner, and they will use learners as sacrificial lambs. In this war, teachers unfortunately use learners as 'soft targets'. It is anticipated that, in all fairness to the learners, the profession realizes that failing genuinely or otherwise to address the teachers' grievances, much as the teachers' suffer, it is the learner who suffers most.

From the above it has become apparent that the low status being accorded to the teaching profession and its teachers coupled with poor conditions of services have far-reaching negative implications for the profession, the quality of the teacher as well as the quality of education to be imparted to the learner. It is being posited that; if the issues raised above are not addressed urgently, the teaching profession in Zimbabwe risks further de-listing and having professionals who are always 'part-timers and mercenaries' in the profession. Such are likely not to give their best to the profession and would not like to be identified with the profession. We therefore conceded that; solutions must be sought to address this situation before the 'noble' profession goes extinct due to failure to attract the best teachers and hence, the goal of government to provide quality education to the people will remain nothing but a pipe dream.

The Way forward - Proposals for consideration

The proposals for consideration are intended to address the issues raised above as they negatively affect the teaching profession, the teacher and the education system but above all the learner. They are intended to address the problem of the status of the teaching profession that invariably impacts rather negatively on the morale of the teacher as well as his service delivery and thereby compromising the learning of the student. It must however, be noted that, in submitting these recommendations due regard must be taken of the socio- cultural, socio-political, socio-economic climate obtaining at the time but above all ensuring that the interests of the learner remain paramount and should not be compromised.

One obvious recommendation that comes to mind in efforts to ameliorate the problem of the low status of the teacher is simply to improve their working conditions so that they compare favourably with other professions of the civil service in the country and beyond the borders. There is great need to invest more in the human factor for a pedagogical renewal to take place through attraction and retention of a competent teaching force (Dembele and Miaro-II, 2003). What teachers want are not unrealistic packages

but such packages that take into account current economic forces and pressures on the wage earner. Teachers want a salary that shows that they are being recognized and appreciated for their unique contribution to society. Teachers want a salary that makes them *live* and not just *survive* or *exist* as is the case currently obtaining. Thus, the government must make the issue of improving teachers' conditions of service a priority if it is not only to attract but to retain the best quality teacher, one who is motivated and committed to the profession and not *passer - byes* and *mercenaries*. It is anticipated that, if the government addresses teachers' concerns genuinely, the teaching profession can regain its lost glory and traditional status of being a 'noble' profession.

It needs however, to be submitted that this traditional status was not exclusively derived from the fact that teachers were highly paid. On the contrary, teachers were not paid highly but still they commanded a lot of respect in the communities they worked and were regarded as educated- *vanhu vakadzidza* and in addition *vanhu vane hunhu* (Makuvaza, 1995). Teachers in those days were considered as mature, self - motivated and committed to their profession. They were 'resource persons' in society where people would turn to, with literally all their problems and concerns and the teacher was always found ready and available. Thus, the teacher was associated with wide 'knowledgeability' and '*hunhu*'. In view of the preceding, it could be contented that what made the teaching a respectable and noble profession was not so much the working conditions but rather the quality of the teacher, one who had integrity and *hunhu*. By extension and deduction, it can further be argued that, if it was the quality and nature of the teacher that commanded the kind of respect and authority from society in the past, the reverse could probably be the case in the present situation. It can be argued in the same vein that, it is probably the quality and type of the current teacher that is responsible for his/her demeaning in society. It can therefore be posited that; current teachers are responsible for their debasement and it is only themselves who can improve this negative perception, society has of their profession.

What appears to be at stake here is the issue of quality? The preceding submissions seem to be implying that the traditional teacher was qualitatively different and better than the current teacher, as the former managed to consolidate their credibility and integrity in society even years after they have left the profession, a fit the present teacher is failing in. This is, notwithstanding the fact that the present teacher has better entry academic qualifications ('O', 'A' Levels & university degrees) and better professional training (2-4 years). This is opposed to the traditional teacher who at first had very low academic qualifications with poor training but ironically, they managed to earn the respect from society unlike the present teacher. What then is amiss in the present teacher that is making both the profession and the professionals so degraded in society?

Firstly, it is being argued that the first problem with the present teacher concerns the age of the teacher. The present teacher is joining the profession at a rather tender age from the perspective of the African world – view. Most of them become qualified teachers at 21 years of age. According to African traditional mindset, they are still young and immature to command respect. Because of their age and immaturity, some if not most of them are unable to execute their professionalism to the satisfaction of a society whose basis of evaluation of a teacher, is still informed by the old tradition. According to this traditional perspective, a teacher is a teacher both at 'work and after'. Unfortunately the new crop of teacher partly due to age has a rather 'technical' as opposed to a 'vocational' interpretation of their profession. According to this perception; 'You are a teacher when you are at school' after that you are just like any other citizen only controlled by the constitution of the country. The young teacher of today, is claiming that his/her life after work (characterized by drinking and flirting around with young girls some of whom might be his pupils, in the case of male teachers) (Nziramanga Commission, 1999) should not be linked to his profession. This is because, they argue; some of his age-mates from other professions do drink and fight publicly and do flirt around with young girls and no one seems to notice or to bother. The young teacher is demanding unmonitored 'life' after work like anyone else. Unfortunately, society does not seem to have come to terms with this type of a teacher and his/her demands, that are quite legitimate. Thus, teachers end up being derogatively referred to as '*twumaticha*' resulting in them

losing respect in society. In any case, the teachers' argument notwithstanding, society does not condone the above behaviour for they regard it as behaviour '*isina hunhu*' that is not consistent with the behaviour of an educated person, to which the teacher by virtue of his profession belongs. According to society, such teachers are not educated and as such they cannot be models for their children, since apart from their academic and professional knowledge they have nothing else to offer to society.

The problems that have been identified above are firstly that of conflict of interests and expectations between society and the teacher and secondly pertaining to age and behaviour '*yaticha isina hunhu*' (a teacher's indecorous behaviour) according to society's expectations and so what can be done to address these two issues. It must be submitted that selection to go for teacher training was traditionally not exclusively dependent on educational qualifications as is the case unfortunately now. It is not that academic qualifications were not important, they were, but these were considered in conjunction with the behaviour/character, *tsika* (morals) of the applicant (Samkange & Samkange, 1980), basing on recommendations from the headmaster and local religious leader where the candidate was going to school and church. This ensured that the right candidate with both academic and behaviour aptitude was selected for training. This exercise was also done to candidates who wanted to join the then British South African Police (B.S.A.P.) force. If the behaviour and '*tsika*' of the candidate was found to be wanting he was not offered the place. We think this selection practice relating to both the teaching profession and joining the police force was good and should be considered even now. We think because of its absence, some criminal elements *vasina hunhu* have found themselves being enrolled into the profession. Regrettably; these have had the effect of tarnishing the image of the teaching profession.

What is being suggested in view of the above observations is that current recruitment methods for prospective candidates into training require re - visiting, as they seem to rely exclusively on academic qualifications and nothing more about the candidate. Admitted, currently colleges of education do contact selection interviews for new intakes. Experience with these interviews is that apart from a fund raising exercise by colleges, the interviews seem to be meant to test how well the candidate is conversant in English. In any case, apart from testing English proficiency, one wonders what else the interviewers can get from a mere five- minute interaction with the candidate. The crucial element of behaviour/character/*tsika* is never an issue as part of the interview process. In any case, there is no way one can objectively and meaningful establish the character of a person from simply talking to him/her over a short interview period. From the interview, it is difficult to establish the suitability or otherwise of a candidate from a '*hunhu*' point of view. Little wonder, our teachers are not concerned about their '*tsika*' outside work for that was not part of the recruitment criteria.

What is being recommended is something similar to the above procedure in the recruitment of prospective candidates for whatever profession. The candidate should not only have the proper academic qualifications but should in addition also be a person of character – '*munhu ane hunhu*' (Makuvaza, 2010). For selection purposes colleges for instance would closely liaise with the candidates' former headmasters as well as traditional leaders from where the candidate comes, in order to get information pertaining to the candidate's character and '*hunhu*'. Both the church leader and the traditional leader would be asked to vouch for the candidate. This way it is hoped the best and balanced candidate – one with the right academic qualifications as well as character will be recruited and would not be a shame to the profession on completion and after.

It has also been alluded above that, the rather immature age of the college graduates entering the profession nowadays seems to be a contributing factor to why society has a very low regard for the teacher and the profession. Because these teachers are still considered immature and young, some of them are probably still in the 'seeking stage', where they are still trying to discover themselves and their intended 'stations' in life. Consequently, some might lack the required commitment in and aptitude for the profession. Since they are still young, some might find the profession too demanding and might not even care for they might believe that even if dismissed, they may still join other professions. In any case

some joined the profession as last resort and some do not even like to be identified with the profession and it would not be surprising that they display the minimum commitment and interest in the profession. In light of this, it is being proposed that the age for entry into colleges of education to train as teachers by school-leavers be revised upwards in view of the essential service they render to society. Thus, it is being suggested that the responsibility of moulding minds of tomorrow's society should not be compromised by being left in the hands of immature minds but should be in the hands of mature and responsible people. One way of getting mature minds into the profession is to reconsider the practice of giving preference to temporary/untrained teachers to train as teachers in colleges. In fact not any temporary teacher would be considered but those who have served for a particular period in the system. The assumption is that these have been 'tried and tested' and are probably more committed and determined to maintain and uphold the standards of the profession, as all other avenues are likely to have been unsuccessful.

3. Conclusion

The impression one gets from the preceding discussion seems to point to the fact that both society and teachers of today are responsible for the present debasement of both the teaching profession and its professionals. Admittedly, both have a role in the debasement, and equally, both have a role to play in correcting the present distortion and perception. Society needs to adjust its conceptions and perceptions of the teacher both as a professional as well as a citizen. Society should desist from the tendency to view current teachers using the barometer of the late 70s and mid 80s. Society should desist from comparing the two types of teachers and if they do, they should accept that they are different as they should be. Not only are the teachers different but even the profession has changed in fundamental ways as it should and continues to do. The two, i.e. the teacher and the teaching profession if they are to be relevant, have necessarily to be different because they are products of, and are meant to serve two different societies existing at different times characterized by distinct concrete existential conditions. Of the two i.e. society and the teacher, one seems to be taking too long to change while the other seems not to have the patience and preparedness to take the other along in the process of change. Society should realize that teachers are "more than mere bundles of knowledge, skill and techniques" (Poulard, et. al. 1994: 67). It should understand and appreciate that teachers are people too with feelings, ambitions and needs. Thus, one cannot fully understand the teacher or teaching without understanding the **person** the teacher is. Accordingly, one cannot change the teacher as a profession in fundamental ways, without changing the person the teacher is. The society should change its current attitude towards the teacher characterized by confrontation and hostility in which teachers are derogatively referred to as *twumaticha*. Notwithstanding the rather derogative reference to the teacher, we do not think that society's demands are unreasonable, what it is simply asking from the teacher is for him/her to have '*hunhu*'. However, despite the preceding, society should adopt a more accommodative attitude towards the teacher bearing in mind that a hostile attitude towards the teacher, makes the learner to realize very minimal benefits from the teacher.

Teachers on the other hand need to change in fundamental ways regarding how they perceive their profession and how they relate to society. They should realize that the society they find themselves working in now, unlike in the past is more informed, concerned and would like to be more involved in the learning of the children. They need to realize that, for there to be harmony and unity of purpose especially for the benefit of the learner, society and the teacher should compromise and dialogue their differences and interests for the common benefit of the learner who is the major concern to both. Conclusively; we argue; if society does not redefine its perception of the teacher, Zimbabwe risks ending up without genuine teachers but 'mercenary' teachers in the teaching profession.

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