

Why Teaching May be One of the Most Influential Professions in the World

By Evi Michael



Image Source: LEAP Africa

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the most impactful professions in the world. Despite its significance to nations' development and engineering, the profession still fall short of adequate compensation and other attractive benefits¹. Undisputedly, the influence of teachers is evident in the lives of young people, from cradle to beginner to primary, secondary, higher education and throughout lifelong learnings. Suffice to add, teachers have successfully championed the mandate of transferring knowledge from one generation unto the next. Indeed, not only are teachers directly involved in shaping the students academically, they are heavily invested in fostering and nurturing important life skills, useful for navigating the real world situations. This article aims to

¹ Sahara Reporters. Available on <https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/06/group-demands-improved-salaries-welfare-packages-nigerian-teachers>

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highlight the different ways teachers contribute to the lives of their students as well as some of the challenges in the teaching profession in Africa.

THREE WAYS TEACHERS HAVE BEEN INFLUENTIAL IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Teachers as Educators

While teachers have a variety of responsibilities in education, teaching is their main responsibility. In order for young people to succeed academically, teachers must be able to effectively teach and convey knowledge in a way that is simple to understand.

They do this by fostering a supportive and positive learning environment which enables the young people to exhibit good learning behaviors that support their educational needs.

Teachers as Mentors

In the course of working closely with young people, they learn more and identify each students' skills and limitations. As such, teachers are often placed in a position to offer mentorship and coaching to encourage and push these students.

Additionally, while helping these students gain critical life skills on leadership, communication, etc, they are also inept at identifying the strengths of these young people and exposing them to opportunities to harness their strengths. They provide the necessary inspiration and encouragement for students to work hard and to stay on track with their academic goals by setting high expectations for them.

Teachers as Role Models

An individual who serves as a role model is one whose actions, conduct, or achievements can be imitated by others, particularly by younger people. A good role model sets an example for young people by encouraging them to lead fulfilling lives. This is quite different from mentorship as it involves the teachers inspiring and teaching young people by example. With this understanding, the Transformative Leadership programme implemented by LEAP Africa was designed to engage the teachers in various secondary schools with knowledge and skills on leadership as well as classroom management to support their students². So, with the teachers imbibing the leadership principles, it is easier to influence the lives of the students.

² LEAP Africa. Available on <https://leapafrika.org/tlp/>

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CHALLENGES FACED IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Most people agree that education is essential for the growth and development of a nation. More or less, it is considered as a bridge to close the wide gaps of inadequacy seen across the globe. However, the educational system has changed over time, which has given rise to a new set of challenges for the teaching profession. These challenges are as follows:

- 1) **Poor Compensation:** There is a wave of underpaid wages among teachers in both the private and public sector across Africa. This is one of the greatest challenges in the profession as many of the teachers are underpaid despite their hard work and impact they deliver at the end of the day.
- 2) **Inadequacy of staff³:** The general challenges experienced in the profession has to a greater extent contributed to making the profession unattractive to many. Most especially as the welfare of existing teachers have been affected in recent times. Thus acting as a demotivating factor amongst potential teachers.
- 3) **Poor work environments and lack of infrastructure:** Many educational facilities do not possess necessities, such as textbooks, writing supplies, dilapidated and uncondusive classrooms . Poor school conditions make it difficult for the teaching-learning process to be successful for the teachers.
- 4) **Influx of unqualified teachers:** Anyone with a high school diploma or equivalent may pursue a career in teaching, although it has been noted that many unqualified individuals are still employed in the field especially with the high turnout of unemployed graduates.

CONCLUSION

For young people to get the best out of their education and for any nation seeking to advance the education system, then the teaching profession must be improved. There are different strategies to ensure that the profession is brought up to par compared to other professions. For one, increased compensation and benefits is greatly encouraged. While Head of States across the world periodically deliberate on making our education system, funding should also be extended to make wages and benefits commensurate. This will go a long way in motivating the teachers to continue to give their best to their students.

³ UNESCO. World Teachers' Day: UNESCO sounds the alarm on the global teacher shortage crisis. Available on <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/world-teachers-day-unesco-sounds-alarm-global-teacher-shortage-crisis>

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Capacity development and training should also be made available for the teachers to attend as this is paramount to their personal as well as career development. In doing so, they are able to garner more extensive knowledge which helps them speak from an informed perspective when interacting with the students. More than just academics, they are acquainted with relevant life skills which help to reinforce their responsibilities as role models and mentors.

Finally, strict screening of the teachers during the recruitment process should be prioritized. This can be done by ensuring the quality of teaching practices is maintained at all levels.