

## **Toward an Internationally-Informed Social Contract: The Strategic Necessity of Valuing Teachers' Voice in Nigeria's Education Reform**



Author(s)

**Sunday Moses  
Adebayo Aloko,**  
[asma@nda.edu.ng](mailto:asma@nda.edu.ng)

&

**Ibrahim  
Danmaraya (PhD)**  
[Danmaraya77@yahoo.com](mailto:Danmaraya77@yahoo.com)

Affiliation:

**Nigerian Defence  
Academy (NDA),  
Kaduna, Nigeria.**

**Kaduna State  
University (KASU),  
Kaduna State,  
Nigeria.**



JHMS

### **Abstract**

*The Nigerian education system faces numerous challenges, some of which include poor funding, low enrolment rates, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to quality education. These challenges are compounded by the marginalisation of teachers' voices in policy-making and decision-making processes. This paper assesses the significance of teachers' voices in educational reform in Nigeria and proposes a new social contract that prioritises teacher empowerment and participation. It employs a qualitative research methodology, which draws on existing literature, case studies, and expert views to explore the importance of teachers' voices and the challenges inhibiting its application towards a new social contract. The study finds that valuing teachers' voices is critical for improving educational outcomes and creating a more inclusive and equitable education system in Nigeria. The research outcome is predicated on the fact that teachers possess unique insights and experiences that can inform effective policy-making, and enrich classroom experiences and learning outcomes. It however argues that factors such as bureaucratic structures and longstanding cultural attitudes that belittle and relegate teachers to the background within the Nigerian educational system have impeded their participation and denied Nigeria the benefits that accrued from their voice. Thus, the paper concludes that Nigeria is in dire need of a paradigm shift that prioritises teacher involvement in policy development, professional development, and decision-making processes. This is necessary given the experiences of other countries, where the recognition of teachers as essential partners and their empowerment enabled policymakers to create a more responsive and effective education system.*

*Key Words, Social Contract, Valuing Teachers' Voice, Education Reform, Nigeria, International System*

## **Introduction**

Education is a multifaceted process that encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. It occurs through formal and informal means and plays a crucial role in personal and societal development. Philosophically, it is a means of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning, helping individuals navigate and contribute to a complex society. Formally, it is a structured process of teaching and learning, typically occurring in institutional settings, aimed at imparting knowledge, skills, and values to individuals. Broadly speaking, education encompasses the transmission of culture, knowledge, and skills through various means, including formal schooling, informal learning, and socialization, facilitating personal development and social cohesion. The role of teachers, the life wire of the educational sector, cannot be over-emphasised in this strategic project.

A teacher is a person who imparts knowledge, skills, and values to others. He/she also facilitates learning, guides development, and shapes the minds of future generations. Hence, teachers are essential to the well-being and progress of societies. As a matter of fact, teachers play a fundamental role in our societies by educating the next generation. In other words, they are responsible for equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life, and also stimulate critical thinking and effective communication abilities toward problem-solving. As role models for students, teachers shape moral character and values, while influencing their moral and ethical development. Important values such as honesty, respect, and empathy, are, for instance, instilled in learners in the course of their learning experiences.

Furthermore, teachers play a vital role in fostering innovation and creativity. By educating students, they help to develop the talent and skills necessary for societal advancement, which in the long run, stimulate development in the society. It is instructive to note that the teaching profession also contributes immensely to the realisation of social equality. The reason is that teachers can help to break down barriers of inequality by providing educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their background. This, in turn, promotes diversity and inclusion in the classroom and society at large. Equally important to note is the fact that the teaching profession is one of the most reliable means by which the cultural heritage and traditions of a society are preserved and transferred from one generation to another, for continuity and the sustenance of national identity.

Therefore, the quality of education in any nation is inextricably linked to the quality of its teaching profession. Teachers, as the primary architects of learning, play a pivotal role in shaping the future of students and by extension, the nation. However, in many countries, including Nigeria, teachers' voices often remain marginalised, leading to suboptimal educational outcomes. This paper argues for the imperative of valuing teachers' voices and proposes a new social contract for education that places teachers at the centre of the educational reform process.

## **The State of Education in Nigeria**

No one is likely to dispute the fact that Nigeria's educational system faces a complex array of challenges, including persistently high dropout rates and inadequate enrolment ratios. This situation has led to UNESCO classifying Nigeria as one of the countries with the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally.<sup>1</sup> Despite policies aimed at making education compulsory, many children, particularly those in rural areas, continue to lack access to educational facilities. There is also a pronounced disparity in educational access between urban and rural regions, with Northern Nigeria often experiencing notably lower enrolment rates. Additionally, in conflict zones such as the Northeast Region, ongoing insecurity has severely disrupted educational activities, resulting in school closures and displacement of students.<sup>2</sup>

The quality of education in Nigeria, particularly within public schools, is further compromised by several systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited support for both teachers and students. The shortage of qualified teachers, exacerbated by insufficient training programmes, has detrimental impacts on the effectiveness of teaching in the majority of Nigerian schools. A critical challenge facing the Nigerian education system is the issue of inadequate funding, which has resulted in under-resourced schools and a deterioration in educational standards. The curriculum in many schools has been frequently criticised for being outdated and not reflective of contemporary global standards or the needs of the local economy.<sup>3</sup> Although there have been efforts to integrate technology into education, many schools still lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to fully benefit from digital learning tools.

It is important to note that several initiatives have been undertaken to address these issues and enhance the quality of teaching and learning within the Nigerian education system. These initiatives have primarily focused on increasing enrolment, particularly at the primary level. Despite some progress over recent decades, the persistent insecurity across the nation has reversed many of these gains. Government efforts have included policy reforms such as the establishment of the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) and the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), which aim to improve teacher training programmes.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, there has been a push for greater private sector involvement in education to foster increased enrolment and more effective learning environments. Partnerships with international organisations have also provided technical assistance and funding to support educational improvements in the country.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Education 2030: A Global Framework for Education Beyond 2015* (Paris: UNESCO, 2019), 23.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), 12.

<sup>3</sup> S. O. Afolabi, "'Teacher Professionalism and Quality Education in Nigeria,'" *Journal of Educational Policy Research* 8, no. 1 (2018), 1–10.

<sup>4</sup> National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), *Teacher Professional Development Guidelines* (Abuja: NERDC, 2018), 21.

<sup>5</sup> S. O. Oni, *Educational Policy Analysis in Nigeria: A Critical Perspective* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2014), 8.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian education sector continues to confront significant challenges. Addressing these issues effectively requires not only sustained government commitment and increased funding but also the implementation of policies that prioritise the contributions of teachers as well as their wellbeing, which are critical to the realisation of high-quality education for all and the all-round development of Nigeria. However, there is often a gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes. The lack of a coherent vision and strategic approach to restructuring the education system to compete globally remains a significant barrier.

One critical aspect of the challenges faced by the Nigerian education system that is frequently overlooked is the role of teachers. As frontline educators, teachers' insights and experiences are crucial in shaping educational policies and practices. Therefore, it is imperative to consider how valuing teachers' voices can contribute to developing a new social contract for education in Nigeria. It is the position of this paper that if teachers' perspectives are integrated into policy-making processes, it is possible to address some of the systemic challenges and advance toward a more effective and equitable educational system at all levels.

### **The Significance of Teachers' Voice**

The concept of valuing teachers' voices in the context of education reform in Nigeria involves recognising and incorporating the insights, experiences, and needs of educators (teachers) into policy-making and educational practices.<sup>6</sup> In the realm of educational reform in Nigeria, acknowledging and integrating teachers' voices into policy-making and educational practices is indispensable. This is because teachers possess a distinctive and direct understanding of students' needs, the intricacies of classroom dynamics, and effective instructional strategies. Their insights into curriculum development, pedagogical methods, and student requirements are essential for crafting educational policies and practices that are both practical and impactful. Also, teachers' perspectives offer critical feedback on what strategies are effective and which are not, thereby providing a grounded basis for informed decision-making.

Undoubtedly, therefore, empowering teachers to participate in decision-making processes—such as curriculum development, policy formulation, and resource allocation—can significantly enhance their engagement, motivation, and overall effectiveness. Our submission is based on the widely held proposition in educational discourse in the world that when teachers are

---

<sup>6</sup> M. O. Adewale, "Teacher Empowerment and Educational Quality in Nigeria," *International Journal of Educational Research* 85 (2017), 1–10; O. A. Adeyemi, "Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of a Teacher Professional Development Programme," *Journal of Educational Research and Development* 14, no. 1 (2016): 1–17.

involved in shaping educational frameworks, they contribute to creating a more responsive and effective educational system that better addresses the needs of students.<sup>7</sup>

But despite the evident advantages of including teachers' voices in educational reforms in countries with proven track records, several barriers have continued to impede this process in Nigeria. For instance, bureaucratic structures often restrict teachers' participation in decision-making, with some policymakers perceiving teachers' input as unnecessary, and perhaps, irrelevant. Cultural attitudes in some contexts have further devalued the professional contributions of teachers while underestimating their potential impact on policy discussions. Additionally, the lack of robust support systems, such as strong teacher unions or professional organisations, hampers teachers' ability to articulate their views effectively and build cohesive networks for collective action. Consequently, these challenges inhibit the full integration of teachers' insights into educational reform efforts, limiting the potential for meaningful improvements within the Nigerian education system.

### **Towards a New Social Contract for Education in Nigeria: An Enhanced Framework**

A social contract is an agreement among individuals within a social group to abide by certain rules and laws. As a social concept, it focuses on how societies organise themselves for mutual benefit.<sup>8</sup> The imperative to reconstitute Nigeria's educational landscape calls for the establishment of a transformative social contract, which is foundational to developing a more inclusive, effective, and equitable educational system. This proposed social contract must be underpinned by the principles of mutual respect, collaborative engagement, and shared responsibility.

A pivotal element of this new social contract needs to be the proactive inclusion of teachers in the formulation and refinement of educational policies and curricula. Teachers, given their direct and daily interaction with students, possess unique and critical insights that are indispensable for crafting policies that are both pragmatically effective and contextually relevant. Their experiential knowledge of classroom dynamics, pedagogical challenges, and student needs ensures that educational reforms are grounded in empirical realities and address the nuanced complexities of teaching.

Furthermore, the continuous professional development of educators is crucial for adapting to evolving pedagogical methodologies. Therefore, investing in sustained training and development initiatives enhances teachers' instructional proficiency and ensures they remain conversant with the latest advancements in educational theory and practice. Such investment

---

<sup>7</sup> M. O. Ogunyemi, "The Role of Teachers' Unions in Educational Policy-making in Nigeria," *Journal of Educational Policy Research* 9, no. 2 (2019), 117–132; M. O. Ogunyemi and O. A. Adeyemi, "Teacher Participation in Educational Policy-making in Nigeria: A Case Study of the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC)," *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning* 10, no. 2 (2020), 123–140.

<sup>8</sup> Ogunyemi and Adeyemi, "Teacher Participation in Educational Policy-making in Nigeria", 130.

not only amplifies their effectiveness but also positively correlates with improved student outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond reasonable doubt, equitable and competitive remuneration is essential for sustaining teacher motivation and job satisfaction. The reason is not far-fetched; adequate compensation directly influences the performance of educators, and by extension, the educational achievements of their students. This implies that ensuring that teachers receive fair salaries and comprehensive benefits is fundamental to maintaining a committed and effective teaching workforce. In addition, the improvement of physical and emotional working conditions within educational institutions is vital for maximising teacher performance. Hence, tackling issues such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and substandard facilities can significantly enhance the educational experience, and foster a supportive environment that contributes to greater teacher efficacy and improved learning outcomes.

The recognition of teachers' dedication and contributions through various forms of acknowledgment, including awards and public honours needs to be considered and vigorously pursued like never before. The establishment of formal recognition programmes and supportive structures not only elevates teachers' morale but also reinforces their professional pride and commitment to their roles. It is also important to note that effective feedback mechanisms are essential for facilitating communication between teachers and educational policymakers. These mechanisms should be designed to ensure timely and constructive responses to teachers' concerns and suggestions, thereby fostering a collaborative and adaptive policy environment. Engaging teachers in ongoing dialogue ensures that their perspectives are integral to the decision-making process, leading to more responsive and effective educational policies.<sup>10</sup> Strengthening collaboration among educators, parents, and local communities is in no small amount critical for creating a supportive and responsive educational ecosystem. This is because active community engagement helps address specific local educational needs and challenges, promoting a more inclusive approach to education.

To effectively integrate teachers' voices into educational reforms, it is the view of this paper that several strategies need to be employed. First, it is imperative to strengthen teachers' unions and professional organisations. Enhancing the role of these entities provides a significant platform for teachers to advocate for their interests and influence educational policy and practice collectively. Secondly, implementing collaborative governance frameworks, such as school-based management committees or teacher advisory boards, can empower educators to participate actively in decision-making processes. These structures could go a long way in promoting a more inclusive and democratic approach to governance and policy development.

---

<sup>9</sup> D. O. Olaniyan, "The Impact of Teacher Professional Development on Student Achievement in Nigeria," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2018), 1–15.

<sup>10</sup> Olaniyan, "The Impact of Teacher Professional Development on Student Achievement in Nigeria," 1–15.

Additionally, investing in teacher leadership development is equally germane in this regard. The reason is that targeted development programmes hold the potential to equip educators with the necessary skills for effective advocacy and leadership, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to educational reforms and policy discussions.<sup>11</sup> By fostering teacher leadership, Nigeria, and Kaduna State in particular, can better harness educators' insights and expertise to drive systemic improvements within the educational sector.

### **Policy Lessons from the World and their Implications for Nigeria**

To illustrate the potential benefits of valuing teachers' voices, it is imminently important to examine case studies of successful initiatives in other countries. These examples highlight the positive impact of teacher involvement on educational outcomes and student achievement.

Finland, for example, is renowned for its highly effective education system, which places a strong emphasis on teacher autonomy and collaborative policy development. Teachers are integral to the policy-making process, participating in decision-making through various committees and professional forums.<sup>12</sup> Their insights are valued in shaping educational policies, leading to high levels of teacher satisfaction and effectiveness. Little wonder why Finland consistently ranks among the top countries in educational performance, with high student achievement and teacher well-being. The system's success is attributed to the active involvement of teachers, who bring practical insights and hands-on experience to policy development. The fostered collaboration in the system ensures that policies are grounded in real classroom experiences and meet the needs of students effectively.

Japan also has a teacher-led curriculum development process, which is highly structured and emphasises teacher input. Teachers play a major role in developing and refining the national curriculum, adapting it to local contexts and specific classroom needs.<sup>13</sup> Their involvement in periodic curriculum reviews and feedback on educational materials and teaching methods has contributed to Japan's educational excellence, particularly in mathematics and science.<sup>14</sup> The teacher-driven approach ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and practical, addressing diverse student needs and adapting to educational advancements.

Canada exemplifies teacher-driven professional learning communities. Its decentralised education system, while granting provinces significant control over educational policies, emphasises teacher engagement in professional development. Many schools and districts have implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) where teachers collaborate to share best practices, develop instructional strategies, and address educational challenges.<sup>15</sup> These communities encourage teachers to voice their insights and work together on professional growth, leading to improvements in teaching practices and student outcomes.

---

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), 31.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, "Reimagining Our Futures Together", 29.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, "Education 2030", 59.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, "Education 2030", 59.

<sup>15</sup> Adeyemi, "Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development in Nigeria", 1–17.

Teachers report higher job satisfaction and a stronger sense of professional community.<sup>16</sup> The collaborative nature of PLCs promotes continuous improvement in teaching methods and enhances the overall educational experience for teachers and students.

New Zealand's progressive education system also values teacher input in educational policy. The country's Ministry of Education engages teachers through advisory groups that provide feedback on educational policies and practices. These groups include representatives from various regions and school types, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered<sup>17</sup>. The involvement of teachers in advisory roles has led to more nuanced and effective educational policies. New Zealand's education system benefits from policies that reflect the practical experiences of teachers, contributing to high student engagement and achievement. The approach also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among educators.

Singapore's highly competitive education system focuses on innovation and excellence. The government established the Teacher Innovation Fund, which supports teachers in developing and implementing innovative teaching methods and educational projects.<sup>18</sup> This initiative has encouraged teachers to experiment with new approaches and share successful strategies with their peers, leading to improvements in teaching quality and student engagement. The focus on innovation has enhanced Singapore's strong international standing in education.

These case studies demonstrate that valuing teachers' voices and incorporating their insights into educational policy and practice can lead to significant improvements in educational outcomes. They show that the involvement of teachers in decision-making, curriculum development, and professional growth, have enabled countries to achieve higher levels of educational quality, teacher satisfaction, and student performance. The global evidence supports the position of this paper that a collaborative and inclusive approach to educational reform that amplifies the voices of teachers can enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of the Nigerian educational system.

## **Conclusion**

This paper posits that the establishment of a robust educational system in Nigeria hinges on the recognition and amplification of teachers' voices. A new social contract for education that will work for Nigeria must be grounded in the principles of mutual respect, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Central to this contract is a redefinition of the teacher-policymaker relationship, wherein educators are acknowledged as indispensable partners in educational reform. By implication, policymakers must actively solicit and integrate teachers' insights into policy development to ensure the creation of effective and practical solutions to the longstanding challenges of development in the Nigerian educational system. Furthermore, the

---

<sup>16</sup> Adeyemi, "Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development in Nigeria", 1-17.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO, "Reimagining Our Futures Together", 17.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, "Education 2030", 65.

paper contends that investing in the well-being and professional development of teachers is paramount. By providing ongoing professional development opportunities, fair compensation, and supportive working conditions, the government can enhance educators' effectiveness, sustain their motivation, and foster job satisfaction. To achieve this, adequate remuneration and equitable working environments are critical for retaining skilled teachers and ensuring their continued engagement in the educational process.

Furthermore, the paper observes that the enhancement of teachers' voice as the examples of other countries have shown, fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among educators. This means that when teachers feel heard and valued, they are more likely to be engaged in their work and dedicated to their students' success. This empowerment contributes to a more dynamic and responsive educational environment. By implementing the strategies outlined in this paper and fostering a new social contract that values teacher contributions, policymakers can significantly enhance the quality of education in Nigeria. This approach not only improves educational outcomes but also contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society. Such a contract aligns with the broader vision of education as a fundamental human right and a common good, as articulated in international frameworks such as those proposed by UNESCO. Through collaboration, continuous improvement, and a commitment to teacher empowerment, an educational system that effectively meets the needs of students and communities, paving the way for a brighter future for all can be developed.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Adeyemi, O. A. "Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of a Teacher Professional Development Programme." *Journal of Educational Research and Development* 14, no. 1 (2016).
- Afolabi, S. O. "Teacher Professionalism and Quality Education in Nigeria." *Journal of Educational Policy Research* 8, no. 1 (2018).
- Adewale, M. O. "Teacher Empowerment and Educational Quality in Nigeria." *International Journal of Educational Research* 85 (2017).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education, 2013.
- National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC). *Teacher Professional Development Guidelines*. Abuja: NERDC, 2018.
- Oni, S. O. *Educational Policy Analysis in Nigeria: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2014.
- Ogunyemi, M. O. "The Role of Teachers' Unions in Educational Policy-making in Nigeria." *Journal of Educational Policy Research* 9, no. 2 (2019).
- Ogunyemi, M. O., and O. A. Adeyemi. "Teacher Participation in Educational Policy-making in Nigeria: A Case Study of the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC)." *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning* 10, no. 2 (2020).

Olaniyan, D. O. "The Impact of Teacher Professional Development on Student Achievement in Nigeria." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–15.

UNESCO. *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2015.

UNESCO. *Education 2030: A Global Framework for Education Beyond 2015*. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.