"I've Not Got a Job Sir; I'm Only Teaching": Dynamics of Teacher Identity in an Era of Globalisation

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1. Introduction

When compared with most other professions, teaching appears to have a low status even in some of the developed countries where it possesses most, if not all the qualities of a profession. Hence, as rightly observed by Yoloye (1992), The Webster New Collegiate Dictionary defines a "doctor" as one duly licensed to practise "medicine" but quite interestingly, the same dictionary defines a "teacher" as one who <u>teaches</u> or <u>instructs</u>, especially one whose <u>occupation</u> is to <u>instruct</u>. This concept or perceived identity of the teacher raises three inter-related questions:

- Is teaching a process of <u>instructing</u> or a process of <u>cultivating</u>, <u>facilitating</u> and <u>sustaining</u> desirable behavioural changes in learners?
- Is teaching supposed to be a profession or an occupation?
- How much education does a person need to become a teacher?

These questions have far-reaching implications for teacher identity and teacher development (Lawal, 2005). The current era of globalisation has ushered in new perceptions and new discourse motifs and symbols with considerable implications for the status of teaching and the public image of the teacher:

- Globalisation, as championed by the U.S, is an ideology of culture and development founded on the Neo-liberalist philosophy.
- Due to its individualistic orientation, Neo-liberalism places a premium on individual rights and freedom as opposed to the collectivistic pressures of society.
- Globalisation rests firmly on the tripodal structure of (i) Liberal (transnational) Trade (ii) Liberal Democracy and (iii) Liberal (trans-border) Communication (Lawal, 2009).

Relevant to the present discourse on teacher identity and teacher development are three key components of the globalisation process:

- The emergence of a new international division of labour in the context of a unipolar global economy seeking to integrate all national economies through trade liberalisation and deregulation, among other economic processes;
- The emergence of new patterns in the flow of people, culture, ideas and funds, all viewed as aspects of capital that can be invested to yield huge profits; and
- The increasing significance of knowledge and information for production, culture and, in

particular, economic prosperity.

As a result of the fundamental economic impetus, globalisation has invested educational discourse with a new phraseology, which is at once mercantile and materialist. In this materialist and consumerist conception of education, education is a mere commodity, teachers and learners are a crucial part of the human capital and the recipients of education are regarded as finished "products" packaged for and targeted at the so-called International Labour Market.

The primary tripartite goal of education as a process of ennobling the soul, liberating the mind and edifying the body is no more of paramount consideration. Within this ideological framework, the teacher is little or no better than a skilled labourer, a skilful technician or, at best, a technocrat, depending on his/her location within the educational industry and the vagaries of the socio-cultural context. In sum, the image or identity of the teacher is contingent upon the socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices as well as the dominant ideology within the micro and macro-societies in which the teacher operates.

2. Identity as a Multifaceted and Multidisciplinary Concept

In general phraseology, "identity" refers to peculiarities and idiosyncrasies that distinguish an entity from other entities. Personal identity may be described as the features or markers of a person's individuality, which subsumes consciousness of one's <u>self</u> or <u>being</u>. However, "identity" has nuances of meaning in different disciplines:

- Soren Kierkegaard has examined "free-will" as characterising identity or "self", which is defined by its own free choices, just as Arthur Schopenhauer has posited that "will" is the essence of "self".
- In theological philosophy, the ultimate will is the Divine will since God is the Ultimate or "Absolute Self" (cf. G.W.F Friedrich) and the essence of the human "self" is determined by the spiritual perfection of the self by moving as much as possible towards the "Absolute Self" (Microsoft Corporation, 2009). This ideal spiritual state is known as "Taqwa" (piety) in Islam, "Godliness" in Christianity, "Brahman" (The Ultimate Reality) in Hinduism and "Nirvana" in Buddhism.
- In psychology as well as sociology, Abraham Maslow and Thomas Hill Green have characterised the essence of the "self" (i.e. identity) in terms of the quality and quantity of the drive towards self-actualisation and self-realisation.
- The possibility, or feasibility perhaps, of losing this psychic will and the psychological drive is at the heart of Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "alienation" which refers to separation and loss of identity (or the self), a state of anomy.

From the foregoing exploration, "identity" has to do with one's "self" or "essence" in the specific terms of one's unique attributes in relation to one's social roles and responsibilities as perceived by oneself and others.

3. Teacher Identity as a Theoretical Construct

In theoretical discourse "teacher identity" has been explored as a construct, a nexus of inter-locking variables, through which the teacher can be understood and appreciated as a professional as well as a social and cultural being. Understandably, this orientation has been built upon theories in the social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics (especially sociolinguistics) as well as education. These theories include:

a) **Role Identity or Social Identity Theory (Zurcher, 1983)**
    This has gained acceptance in anthropology and sociology. Teacher identity is about the teacher's characteristics, social roles and responsibilities as perceived by both the teacher and others. Role identity is important because individuals come to understand who they are by occupying particular roles in society. In the structuralist versus the symbolic interactionist perspectives: roles are determined by social, political, economic and cultural values and forces in society or roles emerge from and are significantly shaped by interaction in specific social settings (Zurcher, 1983; Cohen 2008); i.e. identity is both transformational and transformative as individual teachers revalue, negotiate and re-construct their respective identities. Hence, the mutually complementary concepts of assigned versus claimed identity.

b) **Theory of Situated Learning and Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; in Varghese et al 2005)**
    Teacher identity is defined and characterized as a process and product of learning within particular situations and communities of practice. Individual teacher identities are formed especially at the pre-service and beginner-teacher or novice levels. It stresses the interactional and learning values of teaching practicum for student-teachers and internship as well as mentorship for neophyte teachers.

c) **Theory of identity as image text (Simon, 1995).**
    This views identity as pedagogy; the way an experienced or mentor-teacher creates, evolves and maintains a particular identity within a particular programme in which he/she teaches. It evolves, maintained and reconstructed through the teacher's interaction with students and other teachers, especially the less experienced ones. This connotes with the identity of the teacher as master/expert and model/mentor.

d) **Sociolinguistic theory of language as an instrument of identity creation, negotiation and reconstruction.**
    This is a purview of the ethnography of communication, which stresses the identity-defining potential of language (Hymes, 1981; Saville-Troike, 1989; Gee 2005; Cohen, 2008). Like all social meanings, teacher role identities gain significance from the ways discourse, a primary semiotic system, is used by the teacher, and non-teachers as well to define and enact

these identities. In the quoted statement in the title – "I've not got a job sir; I'm only teaching" -pragmatic principles and canons within the broad rubric of discourse analysis, can be deployed to unravel the identity issues implicated:

- The statement contains a self-negation: a trained teacher negates his professional "self" or identity ("I have not got a job").
- There is also a negation of teaching as a social practice and system ("I'm only teaching"). This is the illocutionary force of the hedge "only".
- Thus, pragmatic (as well as syntactic) focus is on "I" (the unwilling teacher) and "teaching" (the rejected engagement) as mediated by "job".
- Two instances of negation (i.e. "I do not have a job" (explicit) and "Teaching is not a job" implicit) combine to implicate alienation from himself as a teacher (i.e. self-alienation) as well as alienation from teaching as a socio-economic practice. This produces (or reconstructs) a negative teacher identity which is worse than the ambivalent image.
- This negative teacher identity (i.e. self-alienation) is but an implicit reaction to, and rejection of the social, economic and political values that undergird teaching in the Nigerian society.

The robustness of the social signification of the statement quoted in the title of this paper has implications for rethinking teacher identity theory, especially as regards a taxonomy of identities.

4. Towards Eclectic Models of Teacher Identity

A. The nexus of teacher identity

Teacher identity develops as a nexus of the ideal person and professional image (Campbell-Evans and Maloney 1998, Cattley, 2007).
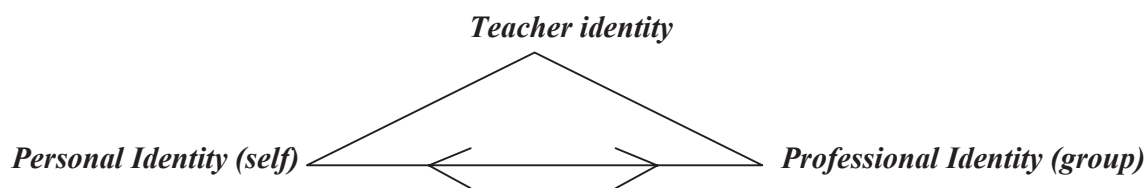

Figure 1: Duality of Teacher Identity

- **Personal identity:** Who the teacher is, based on what he/she knows, does and how he/she feels as well as his/her reconstructive reflection on his/her knowledge, actions and values.
- **Professional identity:** Teachers' (i.e. peers') beliefs, principles and practices in relation to their social roles and responsibilities (group dynamics). Intercourse between personal identity and professional identity produces teacher identity.

B. Identity as a life-long process of self-learning (Graham & Phelps, 2003; Walkington, 2005)

- Continuous uncertainty about self (a self-critical professional disposition)
- Fluidity of the professional "self" or identity.
- Transformational and transformative potential of identity (teacher identity is constructed by society and re-constructed by the teacher himself/herself)
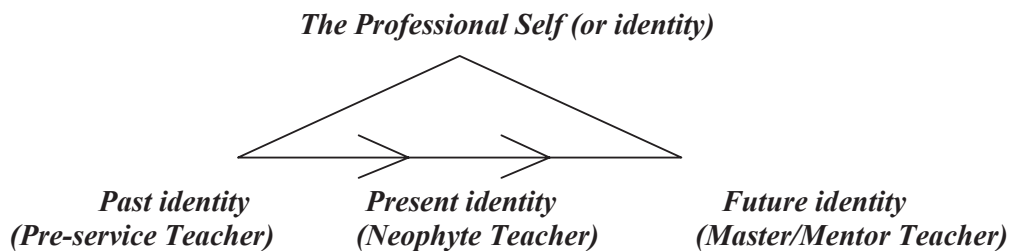
The Professional Self (or identity)

Past identity	*Present identity*	*Future identity*
(Pre-service Teacher)	*(Neophyte Teacher)*	*(Master/Mentor Teacher)*

Figure 2: The Professional Self in Historical/Developmental Perspective.

C. Teacher identity research as a cultural study of labeling

Investigating a teacher's identity entails a cultural study of the person (Olsen, 2008) in relation to the society with the possibilities of the teacher being over-valued, rightly valued, or under–valued. Through the political, economic, social and other cultural processes and forces in society, the teacher can be labeled (i.e. invested with an identity) as:

- Priest or prophet (e.g. "Teachers' rewards are in Heaven")
- Master or expert (e.g. "He's my ideal teacher"; see also Gibran, 1923).
- Model or mentor (e.g. "She's a teacher; that's why are children are well – behaved").
- Slave or underdog (e.g. "Apartment for rent; teachers need not apply", "Teachers to smile soon", etc).

D. Dynamics of teacher identity construction and re-construction

- Interactional nature of identity.
- Trans-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings.
- Developmental nature of identity.
- Sustainability question in teacher identity.
- Multiplicity of identities in psychological (intra-personal) and sociological (inter-personal) perspectives within a learning community of teachers and learners.
- Identity as a cultural process and product.
- Language as an instrument of identity formation and maintenance.
- The complex questions of teacher identity develop at the confluence of cultures and social practices (Varghese et al 2005).
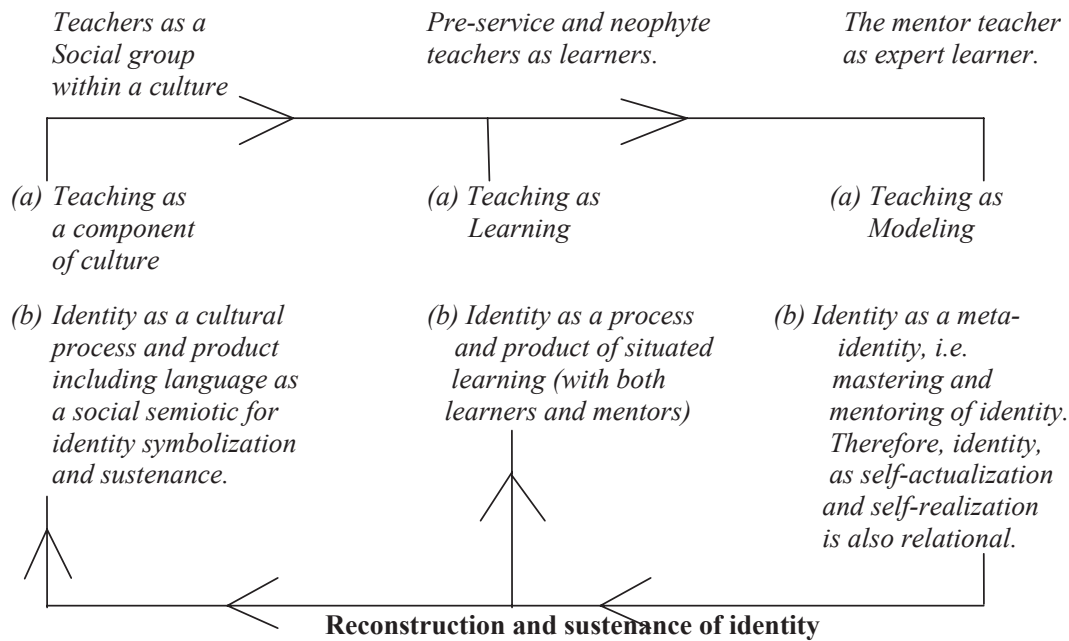
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Teachers as a                Pre-service and neophyte          The mentor teacher
Social group                 teachers as learners.             as expert learner.
within a culture


(a) Teaching as              (a) Teaching as                   (a) Teaching as
    a component                  Learning                          Modeling
    of culture

(b) Identity as a cultural   (b) Identity as a process         (b) Identity as a meta-
    process and product          and product of situated           identity, i.e.
    including language as         learning (with both              mastering and
    a social semiotic for        learners and mentors)             mentoring of identity.
    identity symbolization                                         Therefore, identity,
    and sustenance.                                                as self-actualization
                                                                   and self-realization
                                                                   is also relational.
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Reconstruction and sustenance of identity

Figure 3: The dynamics of teacher identity construction and reconstruction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The current shift of the research paradigm from the process–product view to the reflective, meta-cognitive learning perspective (e.g. Burns and Richards 2009; Johnson 2009, etc) should be approached with caution. Research and practices in teacher development should integrate theoretical and methodological training with exploratory teaching with a view to producing a more comprehensive, holistic and realistic model of teacher identity and professional performance. This would enable us to identify a robust set of teacher-identity indicators which fuse professional knowledge with reflective performance. In developing these indicators, the following basic questions, derived from Graham and Phelps (2003), are quite instructive:

1. **Questions about professional knowledge/competence:**
    i.   What am I supposed to know? (knowledge and understanding)
    ii.   What am I supposed to do? (skills and practices)
    iii. How am I supposed to feel? (attitudes and values)

2. **Reflective and meta-cognitive question:** How am I to think about my competence, i.e. about issues raised in the questions in (1.) i, ii and iii above?

In other words, teacher identity becomes a construct, a complex composite comprising what the teacher knows, does, and how he/she feels, as well as how he/she thinks about his/her knowledge, actions and values relative to the discharge of his/her social roles and responsibilities. As a corollary, quantitative methods can complement the current qualitative approach used in the analysis of teachers' narrative self-reports. There is a need to re-

conceptualize identity in a non-honorific sense to give room for the realities of ambivalent, negative and outright "alienated" identities, instead of a neat distinction between "weak identity" and "strong identity" used pervasively in the literature (e.g. Cattley, 2007). In tune with the multifaceted and multi-contextual nature of the phenomenon, there is the need for a more and more trans-disciplinary approach to teacher identity as:

- multiple, dynamic and in conflict (Johnson, 1992)
- closely related to social, economic, political and cultural context (e.g. socio-economic marginalization of teachers; poor status of teaching as a profession); and
- constructed, maintained and negotiated primarily through language as used not only by teachers in relation to themselves but also by non-teachers in reference to teachers.

Finally, it would be apt to end this analysis of teacher development and professional practice by aligning it with the following useful and stimulating suggestions by Holm and Stephenson (1994), urging us to:

i.   acknowledge pre-service and beginner teachers as individuals who retain sound control over their developing personal and professional identity;

ii. enhance the repertoire of professional knowledge by facilitating self-directed learning;

iii. enable them to make a conscious attempt to identify and study what is happening in classrooms (and elsewhere) and to learn from that;

iv. allow them to view education from different perspectives;

v.   require them to identify and address their own learning needs;

vi. facilitate self-analysis and self-evaluation of effectiveness in various situations and encourage personal and professional development through changes;

vii. foster responsibility and accountability; and

viii. encourage the developing teacher to dismantle dualist notions of theory and practice so that they can draw on both in a more praxis-oriented approach.

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