

Wither Teaching in Zimbabwe? Teachers' and Secondary School Pupils' Views on the Teaching Profession

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***Abstract:** This study sought the views of teachers and secondary school pupils on the current status of the teaching profession in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out on the backdrop of massive exodus of qualified personnel into the diaspora as well as endless industrial actions and resignations by teachers. The objectives of the inquiry were to unearth the underlying reasons for the views of teachers and pupils towards teaching, with a view to proffer recommendations to the government and other stakeholders, on how best the profession could best be improved. In depth interviews were used to gather data. A total of 40 teachers and 60 pupils were purposively sampled for interviewing. The inquiry established that teacher training colleges and universities are facing problems of recruiting trainee teachers as signalled by the falling enrolment figures. The study has thus concluded that while a few teachers and pupils still have confidence and hope in teaching as a career, the majority of them are disillusioned and view teaching as a profession to be shunned. The reasons proffered for the teaching profession's lack of appeal include poor remuneration, lack of respect from society, heavy workloads, poor/unavailability of teaching-learning resources and others. The study contends that if the current trend is not arrested, then, Zimbabwe runs a risk of one day having to import teachers from other countries. The study, thus, recommends concerted efforts from the government, politicians and society at large, directed at reviving this now seemingly unpopular but indispensable profession in Zimbabwe.*

Background.

This paper seeks to unearth teachers' and pupils' perceptions of the teaching profession, which can help illuminate the current debate on the future of the education system in Zimbabwe that has engulfed the country (*The Sunday Mail*, January 24-30, 2010; August 8-14; September 5-11). Media reports have continued to query the endemic nature of problems bedevilling the teaching profession, with some even relegating the teaching profession to the unpopularity of menial and unskilled jobs as exemplified by a report in *The Sunday Mail* of August 8-11, 2010. Endless industrial actions by teachers which have resulted in loss of valuable teaching time, high staff turn-over, school closures for prolonged periods, low pass rate and migration of teachers en-masse to neighbouring countries and abroad now characterise this once noble profession.

It would appear that the staff haemorrhage that presently characterises the Zimbabwean education system has spilled over geographical boundaries, as Zimbabwe is not alone in this predicament that has besieged the teaching profession. For instance, in South Africa, Africa's largest economy, Harris (2010: c-1) in *The Sunday Times* reports how "teachers are making the news because they are striking for higher wages." Harris shows how, even in better economically placed South Africa, the "teaching profession hardly seems a sought-after one", an indication that problems besieging teaching are not limited to Zimbabwe alone but know no political or geographical boundaries. It is against this backdrop that the researchers were encouraged to investigate why there seems to be turbulence in the teaching profession in Zimbabwe, from the viewpoint of teachers themselves and also from secondary school students.

The researchers' interest in investigating teachers' and pupils' views on the teaching profession is justified and rooted on the premise that the teaching profession has a bearing on what kind of products will finally man the country's industries, factories, politics and other institutions. The viability of any industry rests on the quality of students produced by schools and the quality of teachers who have prepared these students (Mpofu, 1997). It is assumed that any problem that affects the school setting eventually cascades to all corners of the country insidiously affecting its economic, social and political well-being. This research is, therefore, interested in investigating the teachers and pupils themselves, on how they perceive the teaching profession in Zimbabwe. From these perceptions, it is likely that policy makers and administrators can find a way of particularly arresting the personnel haemorrhage in the Zimbabwean education sector as well as improve education in general.

Despite the current problems confronting the education sector as seen above, evidence of statistical data reveals that after independence in 1980 teaching became the single biggest employer of Form IV school leavers in Zimbabwe (Chivore, 1990). That the teaching profession was the career of choice can not be disputed as is evident in table 1 below, showing the phenomenal rise in the number of teachers in Zimbabwe from 1980-1989:

Table 1

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
No. of Teachers	3736	6112	8349	11191	14718	17315	19487	21981	23899	24856
% increase over 1980 figure	0.0	63.6	123.5	199.5	294.0	363.5	421.6	488.4	539.7	565.3

Source: Nyagura and Reece (1990)

The above picture in which the number of teachers had continued to rise every year can be attributed to the fact that since 1980, through the 'Education For All' (EFA) policy, Zimbabwe adopted an aggressive approach towards availing inclusive education to all citizens irrespective of their age, race, creed or colour. This was seen as a tool to redress the injustices and inequalities of the colonial bottleneck system that promoted education for the whites more, while denying the black majority equal privilege. As a result of EFA, demand for education ballooned and new schools were built. Consequently, the need for teachers to man the schools rose and the country embraced an ambitious teacher training program, the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) to spike its teacher recruitment drive (Zvobgo, 1999). Factors that attracted many people to teaching included its attractive salaries, favourable working conditions and security (Chivore, 1990).

The Sunday Mail 24-30 January (2010: D14) captures and entrenches the argument that teaching in Zimbabwe was one of the most cherished professions when he says:

There is no doubt that those in the teaching profession [in Zimbabwe] were respected members of society. They were smart and fashion-trendsetters. They could afford to wear the latest suit or dress/costume, wear the most expensive shoes and, most of all, they could afford their own cars... upon finishing Standard Six, Form Two, Form Four or Form Six, many students went to join this noble profession.

Such words as 'respected', 'smart', 'fashion-trendsetters', 'cars' and 'noble' portray teaching as an attractive and dignified career during that period. It is little wonder, therefore, that teaching became the biggest employer and career of first choice as echoed by one Nomala Tembo who, however, has since left for greener pastures in South Africa (*The Sunday Mail*, September 5-11 2010). It is on this premise that this paper seeks to investigate current attitudes towards the teaching profession.

This study has also been motivated by startling current recruitment patterns at a number of teachers' colleges as well as a local university's Teacher Development Department which, like teachers' colleges, trains pre-service primary and secondary school teachers. The tables below provide a synopsis of the random statistics drawn from some of Zimbabwe's teacher training colleges/universities which reflect a downward trend in the number of students joining the teaching profession over recent years.

Table 2

College A (Enrolment Patterns)

Year Group	Male	Female	Total graduating
2004 Intake II	92	158	250

Intake III	105	142	247
Intake IV	74	172	246
Grand Total for the Year	271	472	743
2006 Intake 3	90	200	290
Intake 4	70	104	174
Grand Total For the Year	160	304	464
2009 Intake 8	60	97	157

Table 3

College B (University X's Teacher Development Department Enrolment pattern)

Enrolment Year	Number Enrolled that Year
2006	91
2007	52
2008	43
2009	14

The above enrolment patterns show that enrolment into teacher training has continued to decline. Table 2 above shows how colleges resorted to increasing the number of intakes in a single year as a way of attracting more student teachers. However, in 2009 the Government determined that colleges revert to the old system of a single intake per year and this saw the intake for that year falling sharply as colleges could not attract significant number of trainees.

Based on current enrolment data of the above samples, there is generally an indication that teaching is no longer as attractive a profession as it was soon after independence. Previously, in most teacher training colleges, interviews for teacher trainees used to be held over three days because of the high number of applicants. But today, colleges have to re-advertise at least twice to attract trainees and ask them to bring a deposit fee on that same day, implying there are almost assured of a place. Another trend has been the colleges' introduction of bridging courses in subjects such as English Language, Mathematics and Science in order to attract prospective students for their diploma programmes.

The samples used in this research do not pretend to be nationally representative but as educationists, the researchers find the data relevant in providing a starting point for an informative research. Coupled with this information is the fact that Zimbabwe has lost

approximately 45000 qualified teachers to neighbouring countries or other professions. Thus, the fundamental challenge which this paper wishes to investigate is why it appears teaching has lost its appeal. The paper will be guided by the following fundamental research questions:

- a) Why have teacher training colleges witnessed dwindling enrolment figures?
- b) Why is there a rising tide of skilled teacher losses by the civil service to neighbouring countries or to the private sector?
- c) What perceptions do teachers and their pupils have concerning the teaching profession?

Methodology

The section explains how the study was conducted. It focuses on research design, study sample, sampling techniques, data collection procedure and data analysis.

Research Design

The research undertook a descriptive survey. According to Leedy (1980), the survey design allows researchers to glean the perceptions of a large population and also those from a relatively smaller number of respondents from that larger group. Surveys have also been adopted because they have been seen as appropriately suitable for studying attitudes (Babbie, 1989). The study involved obtaining information on teachers' and secondary school students' **perceptions** of the current status of the profession of teaching through interviews. The guiding principles were to be as nationally representative and as gender balanced as possible.

Population and Sample

All primary and secondary school teachers as well as 'O' level students in Zimbabwe formed the population of the study. To investigate on the attitudes of teachers towards the teaching profession, the sample comprised a purposive selection of 40 Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) In-Service primary and secondary first year students and all B.Ed Pre-Service first-year students registered with the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in the 2010 academic year. GZU is a tertiary institution which admits candidates from across the country on a gender quota balance. Of the 40 B.Ed students, 2 males and 2 females from each of the country's ten provinces were purposively sampled for interviewing. From the respondents' biodata, it can be seen that GZU B.Ed students constitute a proportionate cross-section of all Zimbabwean schools. Thus, this sample which included these university students enrolled in the programmes of Early Childhood Development (ECD), Special Needs Education (SNE), B.Ed In-Service Primary and B.Ed In-Service Secondary was considered representative because it is made up of teachers drawn from all Zimbabwe's provinces and schools who were currently upgrading their educational statuses. It was felt that because these teachers realized the need to upgrade themselves as teachers, they therefore could give more honest responses on their perceptions about the profession.

The B.Ed Pre-Service students, on the other hand, are on initial teacher training and have 'voluntarily' opted to train as teachers after passing 'O' and 'A' Level. They were also drawn from schools in all corners of Zimbabwe. It was felt that because they already have Advanced Level qualifications and could have opted for different professions on that basis, they could thus fairly assess their profession of intent. 60 'O' Level students from two rural, two urban and two mission boarding secondary schools also took part in this study to represent the thoughts, perceptions and attitudes that could be obtaining in pupils from all the diverse social settings in Zimbabwe. It was also felt that being at the stage of leaving school, these respondents could have thought about the career options open to them, of which teaching is one.

Data Collection Procedure

Qualitative data were collected using interviews which were held with forty teachers (20 males, 20 females) and 60 secondary school students. The interviews with the forty teachers sought to gain reasons for joining the profession, insights into their status satisfaction and their assessment of the current status of teachers and perceptions regarding teaching. In the interviews with students, the interviewees were requested to, among other views, rank career options and to give reasons for that ranking.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis of data in this study hinged on an appreciation of views of teachers and pupils on teaching as a profession, in an attempt to identify whether or not teaching was perceived as an appealing, noble, respectable, fulfilling, likeable or 'joinable' profession. Responses representing teachers' and pupils' perceptions about teaching were noted, reviewed, descriptively analysed and at the same time collated with documentary information. Data were analysed and presented qualitatively according to emerging themes from interviews. Direct quotes were also incorporated from interview data.

FINDINGS

Results From Interviews With Teachers

a) 'Teaching - a noble profession'

Of the interviewed teachers, only 10 (25%) had a positive view of teaching. Four (4) of them said they had joined the profession as their first choice career. These four (4) saw teaching as a calling which they genuinely enjoyed, despite the poor remuneration and poor working conditions. They argued that teaching was a job with a very high degree of job security if one had a modicum of professionalism. Two of the teachers said while it is a fact that teaching had lost its appeal, all was not doom and gloom as teachers still commanded a semblance of respect from some sections of society. They spoke nostalgically of the good times that

teachers used to enjoy in the 1980s and early 1990s and expressed the hope that things would soon get better once the economy improved, premising their optimism on the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009. The two said they took solace in the fact that it was not the teaching profession alone that had been affected by the decade long economic meltdown, but virtually all other professions. “It’s not just teaching that has been affected. Even nurses, soldiers, police officers and those in the private sector are bemoaning slave wages. Things will improve. Look, His Excellency, the Head of State and government and Commander in Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces has promised us better salaries from the proceeds from the sale of Chiadzwa diamonds,” said one of the teachers referring to an article in *The Herald* of 31 January 2011 in which President Mugabe promised civil servants better salaries.

Another two of the ten teachers who had a positive view of teaching taught at different mission boarding schools and they said they viewed teaching as a fairly rewarding and satisfying profession because their schools offered them over US \$250 dollars in financial incentive to augment their public service salary of \$150, free decent accommodation, free electricity, free treated water, free lunch and free transport to town on pay days, among other benefits. These two teachers said pupils at their schools had high respect for teachers and many of the pupils still saw teachers as role models. The other two of the ten teachers who portrayed teaching positively taught at separate urban day secondary schools. They said the US\$150 monthly incentive they received from their schools made teaching tolerable and considered themselves better off when compared to other professions where financial incentives were non-existent. One of these two said she cherished the long holidays which other civil servants did not enjoy and added that she usually supplemented her income through cross-border trading and extra lessons during these holidays, which could have been difficult if she had joined a different career. Of the ten teachers who had a positive view of teaching, seven said they had no intention of leaving the profession and would not hesitate to encourage their spouses, children, relatives and friends to join teaching. 3 said they might consider leaving if things did not improve in the coming two years. They also said it was up to an individual to decide to join the teaching profession or not and at the moment, they would not encourage anybody to join teaching.

b) ‘Teaching – a “dead end” job of last resort’

30 (75%) of the interviewed teachers expressed a negative view of teaching. Nine of them said they had joined teaching as a career of last resort and as a stepping stone to more rewarding careers but the economic decline of the past decade had seen them stuck in this ‘dead end’ job. 7 said they had joined teaching because it was one of the few careers they knew, owing to their rural backgrounds. The seven said given another chance, they would ‘never’ join teaching, now that they were aware of other ‘rewarding’ professions such as engineering, law, medicine, banking and so forth. 14 said when they joined teaching 15 to 20

years back, things were rosy, as teaching was regarded as one of the most sought-after jobs. A variety of adjectives was used to denote their feelings and attitudes and these are: “frustrated”, “disillusioned”, “unhappy”, “disgruntled”, “disappointed”, “used”, “insulted”, “neglected”, “annoyed”, “angry”, “vexed”, “discontented”, “bitter”, and “exploited”.

A wide range of reasons were given for the 30 teachers’ negative views of teaching, the most recurring ones being poor remuneration, heavy work loads, lack of respect from society, political victimisation, absence of or very low financial incentives, inadequate teaching-learning resources, poor accommodation, remoteness of some schools, poor transport facilities, bloated classes, poor water and sanitation, limited chances of promotion, and unfair salary grading system (bunching).

Said one teacher from a rural school: “I will live to regret the day I joined this once noble but now despicable profession. Teaching is now riddled with a host of problems. To begin with, the pay is just peanuts. Imagine, I earn a mere \$200 when the poverty datum line is at US\$500. What it means is I’m absolutely poor. It’s highly ironical that being a teacher, I can’t send my children to boarding schools. I am even struggling to pay the day school fees! At other schools, teachers are better off because they get substantial incentives from SDAs. Here we get nothing. If we complain, the headmaster threatens us with immediate transfer. The only time we got an incentive, it was in the form of a tin of maize a term for each of us. This is a mockery. I can’t wait to leave this job. Had it not been for the fear of xenophobia and high crime rate in South Africa, I would have left years ago. If we complain to this so-called GNU, we are called “cry babies” by a thankless government minister. I’m certainly not proud to be a teacher anymore. We are always told to be patient when our patience got exhausted long ago.”

Another teacher, also from a rural school, had this to say: “Teaching is now a far cry from the respectable, satisfying job that it was in the 1980s. We are getting a slave wage. US\$190 is useless. Come to think of it, I’m teaching a Grade Seven class of 60 pupils and have to improvise most of the teaching materials. I’m frustrated. I just don’t know why I joined teaching. If I were a bit younger, I would leave, but given my age (62 years), where would I go? As teachers, our woes are many. As professionals, we are apolitical but one party harasses us, accusing us of supporting another party. Come election time, we can’t concentrate on our job as we are forced to attend endless political party meetings. This is unfair. Other issues that we teachers have to contend with include dilapidated houses, expensive transport to town and poor roads. Cry the beloved profession!”

Yet another teacher from an urban secondary school said, “ I hate this degrading job. It’s worse than some menial jobs. The pay is ridiculously low. I hear those in the army are getting better housing and transport allowances. A soldier is trained for only about six months. I trained at the then Gweru Teachers’ College for four long years.”

c) **‘Teaching - a job viewed with derision’**

All the teachers in this study underscored the fact that teachers had been reduced to the laughing stock of society as all the respect that society used to have for them had been irretrievably eroded. They pointed out that there were a number of jokes that had been electronically circulated about teachers which were demeaning to the teaching profession. One teacher summed this up when he said,

“We used to be revered but we can not find comfort in the past. Now we are being sneered at like vermin. Imagine, yesterday I heard a *‘hwindi’* [rank tout] boasting, *“Tohudzasa hwechirungu isu mahwindi, maticha akati vavava!”* [We touts are getting sloshed with clear beer while teachers are watching in awe!]. The situation is pathetic.

Another teacher expressed that teaching had been disgraced because even housemaids who, comparatively, are less educated were demanding the equivalent of a teacher’s salary as their starting pay. He added, “Look at the jokes that are being bandied about teachers through cellphone text messages. Some of them make me want to cry. Like this sickening joke about a troop of baboons that refused to leave a farmer’s maize field until the farmer threatened to transform all the baboons into teachers. Only then, the joke goes, were the baboons said to have run away at breakneck speed. Then there is another joke about a child who missed his lunch in class and declared that it could only be the hapless, poverty-stricken teacher who had stolen the lunch! Yet another joke that has been cracked at the expense of teachers is that of a certain – real or imagined - begging blind woman who is said to have boarded a bus and expectantly sung her way from the entrance to the back of the bus and back to the entrance but didn’t receive any money from the passengers, whereupon she wondered aloud: ‘Tell me you people, is this bus full of teachers only?’” The teachers were generally agreed that such disparaging jokes directed at the teacher robbed the teacher of the dignified standing he or she used to enjoy.

Results From Interviews With ‘O’ Level (Form 4) Pupils

The table below shows, in order of popularity, the various career options, frequencies and percentages as given by students interviewed.

Table 4

PROFESSION	RANK	FREQUENCY(out of 60)	PERCENTAGE%
Accounting	1	28	46.7
Engineering	2	25	41.7
Banking	2	25	41.7
Journalism	4	23	38.3
Law	5	22	36.7

Nursing	5	22	36.7
Travel& hospitality	5	22	36.7
Piloting	8	21	35
Marketing	9	15	25
Medicine	10	14	23.3
Self-employment	11	13	21.7
Police	12	11	18.3
Army	12	11	18.3
Electronics	14	10	16.7
Secretarial	14	10	16.7
Driving	16	9	15
Farming	17	8	13.3
Teaching	17	8	13.3
Pharmacy	19	3	5
Construction	20	0	0

The above table shows that out of 20 possible career options, teaching was ranked 17th. Of the 60 pupils interviewed, only 8 indicated that teaching remained an alternative career option for them although 7 did not rank it first as shown in the table below:

Table 5

	RANKING				
	1	2	3	4	5
Pupil 1			X		
Pupil 2					X
Pupil 3			X		
Pupil 4					X
Pupil 5				X	
Pupil 6	X				
Pupil 7			X		
Pupil 8					X
TOTAL	1	0	3	1	3

Table showing how the 8 pupils for whom teaching is an option ranked teaching.

From the table above, the one pupil who chose teaching as her career of first choice pointed out that she liked teaching because it is relatively less strenuous when compared to other professions

like engineering, construction, driving and farming. She cited job security as one reason for her liking teaching and gave the example of her father whom she said had been teaching for the past 40 years. However, the fact that only a small number of students selected teaching as a career option reflect that the future of the profession looks bleak and Zimbabwe may one day have to depend on expatriate teachers.

The 8 pupils who pointed out that teaching remained an option if they failed to secure their careers of first preference expressed several reasons why they could end up settling for this profession, such as the privilege of free albeit poor accommodation at most schools, the long holidays that teachers enjoy and the long periods of leave. One of this group of interviewees, while acknowledging that the teachers' pay was pretty low, noted that some people have to take up teaching as a profession, given its importance in the development of the country.

The 52 pupils who did not choose teaching at all among the five careers of their choice were asked to give their reasons for shunning it. Below are excerpts from the interviews with these pupils:

- “Teachers are insulted, mocked and despised by both their pupils and members of the public and I can’t stand that.”
- “Teachers receive very low salaries so they can’t make ends meet. Also, they teach large classes and have no rest. They are standing and shouting like mad people the whole day and plan and mark at night.”
- “A teacher is a civil servant. I don’t want to be a civil servant. Civil servants, especially teachers, are associated with poverty. Teaching has no money (sic).”
- “Teachers are one of the first groups of workers who are affected when the economy is collapsing. In 2008 they were earning the equivalent of five rands.”
- “Teachers spend up to 4 years on training and deployed in remote areas where diseases like malaria are common. Then they are given low wages but when they complain they are described as unpatriotic and are threatened with dismissal.”
- “Teachers’ rights are suppressed. They are beaten up for supporting political parties of their choice. On voting day they are forced to say they are illiterate so that they can be ‘assisted’ to vote for a certain political party.”
- “Teachers don’t get any housing and car loans. Most are lodgers and pedestrians. Those who drive have very old cars which are always pushed and often break down.”
- “Teachers are poorly dressed and drink *masese* (opaque beer) *chikokiyana* (illicit brew) and ‘seven days’ (traditional brew) while other professionals drink clear beer.”

- “The government labels its teachers as ‘lazy drunkards’ even when they work very hard.”
- “Chalk dust causes health problems, yet they earn peanuts.”
- “Some headmasters are ‘hard masters’ who harass teachers. I don’t want to be bossed around.”

To compound the situation, students’ responses have shown that most teachers, especially those trained after independence, cannot afford decent accommodation and in some cases change lodgings in houses of their students’ parents. According to interviewees, in the end, some of those parents and students develop a low opinion of the teacher in society.

Discussion

The findings of this research as gleaned from teachers and students, seem to indicate that teaching as a profession has fallen from grace both in the perceptions of teachers and pupils and in real terms. According to respondents, one of the greatest ironies and paradoxes of teaching has been that after four long years of training, a teacher only educates others so that they make money and look down upon teaching as they dissuade their children from joining the profession. The respondents claim that teaching has lost its lustre and teachers have little or nothing to show for their invested years and effort.

This research has also revealed that there are social, economic and political factors which have had a cumulative negative effect on the reality of teaching and perceptions among outsiders and insiders to the profession. The research has shown that teachers and students castigate society for being in the forefront in disrespecting, insulting, mocking and despising the person of teacher simply because the social conditions and salary have not accorded the teacher the ideal status society would have wanted. Both teacher and student interviewees raised the concern that teachers have become objects of ridicule and a source of comedy in the communities they work, thanks to their penury and misery. Respondents have also noted the ripple effects whereby pupils follow suit, mock their teachers and refuse punishment from these teachers and thus lead to teachers’ losing respect, dignity and ultimately losing their credibility as role models. All this has catapulted the bulk of teachers into leaving the profession altogether or joining the exodus into the diaspora as a form of escape. On the other hand, such a scenario could help explain the negative reaction among students to teaching as a prospective career.

Another observation that this paper has made is that as the Zimbabwean economy suffered rapid inflation from the year 2000, the social standing of both urban and rural teachers continued to fall because, in most cases, they were seen to lead poorer social lives compared to those outside the teaching profession. According to one respondent, in economic terms “the last teacher to have his or her value fairly recognised and prized worked in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia under Bishop

Muzorewa's government." The implication in that utterance is that the post-independent Zimbabwean government has not acknowledged the national economic value of the Zimbabwean teacher through a fair and respectable financial reward system. Though the overall responses indicate that there has been a previous economically 'good times' for the teachers, something more ought to have been done to entrench a liking for teaching as a profession from which graduates could make a living like from the other yearned-for-professions such as medicine, law, accountancy and banking. For instance, the government could look at incentivising teaching through recognising good work by promoting exceptional performers and increasing the salaries of staffers based on service period and qualifications. 25% of the respondents show that the economic slump in Zimbabwe exacerbated the economic problems of an already underpaid but dedicated profession. According to interviewees, inflation and economic problems in Zimbabwe apparently had the effect of disempowering the teachers while it empowered the informal sector, a sector that comprised unemployed school leavers, touts, cross border traders and vendors. All respondents rued the fact that the Zimbabwean economy and society seemed to favour and reward those without official jobs, facilitating their prosperity more than they cared for those who had trained for their jobs like teachers.

Respondents have also shown that the apparent demeaning of teachers not only consigns them to pauperism but invites uncalled for gibing from touts, money changers and vendors who seem to enjoy a new lease of lifestyle they hardly dreamed of ever leading. Respondents, therefore, find it difficult to continue to support and cherish a profession which they think the government wants to see undermined and weakened. One respondent expressed this predicament in these words, "Our government has no money to pay its 'troublesome' teachers but can support cross border traders, informal traders and small scale entrepreneurs with soft loans." This utterance was a comment on the country's indigenisation policy statement about the future being dependent on the informal sector. While there is nothing wrong with such economic planning, the attendant deliberate rhetoric had the effect of lowering in pupils, the zeal for education or any appreciation of the work and profession of a teacher.

Respondents have also intimated that politics has had a great bearing on the desirability, status and perception of the teaching profession. Because politicians control popular opinion and media, some of their opinions and perceptions regarding teachers have poisoned the people's view of the person of teacher. According to respondents, the teaching profession has been stigmatised as consisting charlatan political trouble rousers in otherwise politically pacific communities. As respondents testify, this has tended to take away protection from the teachers who have been exposed as targets of political harassment and abuse. This has been one of the most significant push factors militating against students' wish to join teaching. The majority of student respondents have indicated the unlikelihood of their joining an unprotected, threat-prone, ridiculed and mocked occupation. Thus, unless something is done about the politicisation of teachers' professional issues, the perceptions of teachers and non-teachers to teaching will

remain politically mediated and thus compromised leaving the country in a situation where it would import teachers as is the current trend in countries such as UAE, South Africa and others. It is encouraged that politicians devise ways of resuscitating the health of the profession by creating conditions that encourage school leavers to join teaching. Government needs to treat its teachers as the pillars of the nation's economy and industry and not as dispensable baggage whose resignation government would receive as good riddance.

Conclusions

The research has exhumed an ugly picture of the teaching profession. Generally, the perceptions of teachers and students (would-be teachers) are negative and are all agreed on the highly discredited nature of the profession. It has been discussed that the major contributors to the negative perceptions about teaching are that while so much is expected of teachers, the teachers themselves are often little recognised. In the recent years, teaching has been associated with poor remuneration despite heavy workloads, spite from a largely disrespectful nation, political victimisation, lack of incentive, working with inadequate resources, poor accommodation, transport, sanitary and essential services and also limited chances of promotion and unfair grading systems. All these have delivered a knock on the appeal of teaching itself and subsequently on people's perceptions of teaching. As the research has established, a teacher, unlike any other worker, has nothing to sell or trade except his intelligence and in a poor society like Zimbabwe, most people would rather buy a candle than pay money for their child's extra lessons. It has also emerged that the unstable economic and political situation has incapacitated the teachers in spite of their education and has exposed them to poverty, abuse and social ridicule. The research, however, takes the view of some of the respondents who believe that the situation regards teaching was not eternally gloomy but only a temporary setback, that with big government and all stakeholders' commitment, the teaching profession could regain its lost lustre and noble status.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

- The Government look into teachers' conditions of service with a view of improving their salaries, accommodation and transport needs.
- The responsible Ministry assume a positive 'paternalistic' role with a view to protecting and defending teachers from political, administrative, societal and verbal abuse.
- There be advocacy that will facilitate societal appreciation of importance of teaching as the profession that enables all other professions.

- The Ministry of Public Service and Labour look into the possibility of paying civil servants according to the number of years taken for training.
- Society avoids stigmatisation and labelling of teachers as lazy drunkards and potential child molesters.
- Teachers be protected from politicians by making schools ‘no go areas’ for politicians.

If no major efforts are made to restore confidence in the profession, teaching will remain a nostalgically- discussed-about phenomenon, an increasingly endangered career.

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