

Licensure regime: A critical tool aimed at improving teacher standards

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Ghana as a country has developed an enviable record in many spheres of development across the Western African Sub-Region and the continent at large. The country's educational system at the lower levels has been reformed and reviewed over the past few decades. One of such reforms is the institutionalisation of a regulatory body to oversee the streamlining of the teaching profession.

The National Teaching Council (NTC) was established by the Education Act 2008 (Act 778) as a statutory institution with the mandate to regulate the activities of who qualifies to teach. The Act gives the NTC the responsibility for setting professional standards, registering and licensing teachers. These reforms were necessitated by the falling standards in educational outcomes, of which the quality of teachers was seen as one of the contributory factors.

After the enactment of Education Act 2008 (Act 778), its implementation was not done until the year 2017. The Ministry of Education, under the able leadership of Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh, took pragmatic and practical steps to ensure that portion of the Act was implemented. And so for the first time, students graduating from the Colleges of Education had to sit and pass a licensure examination to be eligible or qualify for postings under the Ministry of Education.

Although this initiative was greeted with initial agitations and disagreements from some teacher unions and students alike, the policy has come to be part of the country's educational policy. And the benefits of such a laudable policy intervention would remain instrumental in promoting better teaching and learning outcomes; as teachers play a pivotal role within the educational ecosystem. A licensure regime remains the preeminent gatekeeping benchmark for entry into any profession including the teaching profession.

Regrettably, former President John Dramani Mahama yesterday at his JohnMahama Live programme made certain remarks about the licensure regime. According to a StarrFm online report, the former head of state is quoted to have said, 'I would cancel licensure examination for students'.

May I say that former President stance is questionable since his position has suddenly changed. In paragraph 635, the 2016 budget statement of President Mahama had indicated the need for licensing of teachers to ensure professionalism. This is a clear contradiction to his own government's priority of teacher licensure, where the licensure regime was piloted in certain districts of the country in 2016; notably the Shai Osudoku District, Kassena Nankana East among others.

And all of a sudden, the former President no longer believes in his own convictions, owing to his unquenchable desire to return to the helm of the country's affairs. In addition, it appears that the former President who has touted himself as an advocate of strengthening our institutions has gone back on his own words. Or perhaps, he is merely engaging in a populist and sloganeering gimmicks.

Such an open declaration has a tendency to erode the gains made in the educational space and, stifle institutional freedom which is an affront to our democratic trajectory as a country. A reversal of the licensure regime as espoused by the former President would be a betrayal of the UNESCO convention on education which focuses on harmonizing and standardizing educational processes across the world.

The erstwhile administration of NDC had worked with international institutions to streamline our educational system, for which reason the current posturing of the former President is not only nauseating but shocking. It is imperative for the attention of former President to be drawn to the enviable benefits the licensure regime brings to the country's educational system, in terms of enhancing professionalism and promoting quality standards among teachers to spur better learning outcomes.

The former President should be reminded that the licensure regime would serve as not only a quality catalyst, but a tool to make teachers more globally competitive and relevant. The concept of licensure remains one of best approaches used by both developed and developing countries for improvement in teacher standards and Ghana cannot be left out.

The licensure regime provides high quality teaching and learning experiences, ensuring learners achieve their optimum best. It also provides teachers with a clear independent, representative and authoritative voice for the profession on teaching issues, which could transform the professional status and enhance public confidence in the teaching profession.

Indeed, greater emphasis on a regulatory body's qualification standards would streamline and improve the existing disparities in teaching qualification standards among the teacher education providers in the country, securing equality and consistency of learning opportunity for all trainees. The development of the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework and the National Teachers standards are important milestones in this regard.

As Ghanaians, we must all collaborate and support efforts aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes with reforms in teacher standardization. The issue of parochial political considerations should not be factored into discussions relating to educational reforms policy choices; as it has the tendency to erode public confidence and support. The ongoing reforms being implemented by the Ministry of Education if fully supported by all would be beneficial for the country's growth and development.

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