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PROFESSIONALISM AND UNIONISM IN THE TEACHING SERVICE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS' 'ORGANISATIONS' IN UGANDA

A.K. TIBERONDWA*

INTRODUCTION

In pre-colonial Uganda, "teaching", like many other activities then, was not a salaried occupation. The 'teachers' of African indigenous education who passed on the culture and the values of one generation to the next did not have an employer to whom they were collectively responsible.

The most important teachers in African indigenous education system of pre-colonial Uganda were the parents and the older members in each family, clan or other social units. They were assisted by specialists in certain skills such as worship, witchcraft, doctoring, iron smelting, hunting, fishing and other activities which could not be taught by parents and relatives.

The 'teachers' did not have organised groups similar to the workers' unions or associations found in modern Uganda. However, specialists in certain skills such as rain-making, gynaecology, witchcraft and the herbalists often consulted each other on matters of mutual interest.

In 1877 Protestant Christian Missionaries from England arrived in Uganda and in 1879, they were joined by Roman Catholic Missionaries from France. Between 1877 and 1925, Education in Uganda was provided and controlled by the European missionaries who trained the early African teachers and employed them for very low wages in churches and schools. Education and Christianity were interwoven, and therefore the school teacher and the church teacher were often found in one person whose main qualification was his ability to read the Bible and to abstain from participating in certain traditional activities which the missionaries regarded as sins. The work and the faith of the teacher were one, for as an agent of the European missionaries the African teacher had to act and behave according to the principles of Christianity.

Although the African teachers were underpaid, it is important to note that teaching was one of the very first salaried jobs within reach of the Africans. Other occupations which carried regular wages were those of house-servants and baby-sitters. The Africans who secured these jobs were better off than the majority of their neighbours. It was therefore important for the Africans who were fortunate enough to be appointed to teach other Africans to keep their salaried jobs which were reasonably permanent. The concept of underpayment did not become evident until new non-teaching jobs became available and open to the Africans.

*Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Zambia.
The new jobs included dispensary cleaners, sweepers and orderlies, clerks, askaris, interpreters and general low grade workers in the offices of European administrators. These categories of jobs increased from 1894, the year when the British Government declared Uganda a British Protectorate and sent many colonial administrators to Uganda to administer the new colony. The new colonial administrators recruited some of the school graduates and Christians and appointed them to junior positions which, nevertheless, carried wages which were generally higher than the salaries of the majority of the African teachers.

One of the reasons why the African teachers did not protest openly about their poor conditions of service was that every white person was seen as a ruler whether he was a miner, a priest or district commissioner. A white person symbolised power and authority and the idea of questioning the manner in which he treated his workers could not be easily popularised among the employees. They feared losing their jobs on earth and their seats in heaven, for obedience without question had become accepted as one of the most important Christian virtues. In any case the final person to decide on whether or not the teachers were justified in their demands for better conditions was the employer himself, the European missionary who represented the ruling race on earth and was also the chief interpreter of what God wanted the Africans to be. Therefore it required great courage for any African teacher to question what his master wanted him to do.

THE CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS

Until about 1940, the teachers in Uganda did not have an organisation through which they could, as a body, express their grievances or air their views to the authorities. The teacher's survival depended on approval by his missionary employer. Before 1925 most teachers did not have recognised professional qualifications which could enable them to change from one school to another. A teacher was either an employee of the Catholic mission or the Protestant mission and had to lead a life approved by his church.

In 1925, when the government Department of Education took over the control of education, teachers began to be formally trained and the successful ones were certificated. This certification gave the teachers new confidence because a teacher who disagreed with his employer could change to another school using his certificate as a proof of his abilities. However, the matter was not all that easy because the Catholic teachers could not be easily accepted to teach in Protestant schools and the Protestant teachers could not be easily accepted to teach in Catholic Schools.

The teacher training colleges were also owned by one or the other of the two religious organisations and a transfer of a Protestant teacher to a Catholic school was not easy. Not only would the transferred teacher feel out of place in his new school, but he would also not be welcome in a school of a different religion from his
own. In addition to the possession of a teachers' certificate, a recommendation from the head of the mission employing the teacher was necessary before a transfer could be effected.

The teachers' private life was not very much separated from his life on the job and assistance in the spread of the word of God seemed to be regarded as part of the teacher's duties. Despite all these demands on his private life the teacher was not paid as well as other people working in offices for less hours a day.

The certificated teacher, despite his low salary and other poor working conditions, was more secure in his profession and felt safer to air his views. For example, in 1936 missionary employers wanted to withhold teachers' salaries during holidays but the teachers put up a resistance against this suggestion because some of them knew that teachers in the United Kingdom were paid full salaries during school holidays. They argued that if the employer wanted them to work during the holidays, they would work.

As more certificated teachers joined the teaching force, the employer - then the missionary - found it increasingly difficult to insist on the teachers' involvement in the duties which were clearly outside the job they felt they were hired to do. School teachers found it easier to tell the head of a school what they felt without as much fear as they used to have before certification. Lugumba and Sekamwa described the advantages brought by the certification of Ugandan teachers:

"This was the gradual independence of the teacher from subordination to the missionaries, because he felt that he could use his certificate to go and teach in another school if he felt out of favour with the missionary who was in charge of one school. But the situation was still complicated by the fact that the schools were broadly owned by the two groups of Christian hierarchies: the Roman Catholic and the Church Missionary Society. A teacher brought up in the teachers colleges of one group and who also by religion belonged to that denomination would not be easily accepted to teach in the schools of the other group."

The fact that disgruntled teachers could not easily move from one school to another or from schools owned by one mission to another greatly angered the more militant of the teachers. They felt that their certificates did not grant them as much freedom as they had expected. This brought a new and disturbing element to the missionaries. Some qualified teachers felt that they could no longer continue to serve the master whose conditions of employment they did not approve of, and some of these men ventured to open schools of their own. It appears that the main driving forces behind the opening of private schools in Uganda by some of these militant African teachers was the betterment of their own conditions of service rather than the need to provide better education for the African children.
THE EMERGENCE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

In 1925, Mr. Mukasa Sebbanja, a qualified Uganda primary teacher started a private school and persuaded other disgruntled teachers to join him. Mukasa Sebbanja's school and other private primary schools opened later, offered employment opportunities for the Christian teachers who found it difficult to work in Christian mission schools. Even those teachers who were dismissed from mission schools on moral grounds found no difficulty in being re-employed either in Moslem schools or in private schools. More and more qualified teachers started questioning their conditions of service but they did not as yet have an open way in which they could air their grievances.

In May 1935, Dr. Ernest Kalibala one of the earliest Ugandans to obtain a degree of Doctor of Philosophy resigned from his work as Assistant Educational Secretary for the Church Missionary Society and severed his connections with the C.M.S. education in Uganda. He founded his own independent school about three miles West of Kampala and named it Aggrey Memorial School, thus identifying it "with that side of Dr. Aggrey which advocated independence."6

The idea of trade unions was not known by many people at the time and those who suggested it were labelled by the missionaries, and the colonial administrators as anti-Christian. Teaching in private schools was therefore the most obvious, and financially the safest way to protest against missionary dictatorship and exploitation in Uganda's educational institutions. In 1941 some prominent Baganda teachers resigned from King's College Budo and many of them joined private schools as teachers. Aggrey Memorial School to which many of the resigning Christian teachers went became a centre of 'the nationalism and political activities which led to the formation of political parties in the nineteen-fifties'.7 Naturally this development was a direct challenge to missionary education and a threat to the colonial administration in Uganda.

Dr. Kalibala applied to the Phelps-Stokes8 Fund trustees for financial assistance to improve his school but his application was undermined by the colonial administration in Uganda, and therefore rejected by the trustees of the Phelps-Stokes Fund.

Dr. Kalibala was therefore forced to do something he would definitely not have liked to do if he had other alternatives. He applied to another groups of Christian organisation - the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. (Negroes) and asked them to support his efforts to put up an independent school in Uganda. He got the money and started making improvements on the school which he had already started.9

But the colonial government's attitude towards this and other private schools was very negative until Uganda became independent in 1962 when a separate section
for dealing with private schools was created in the Ministry of Education.

One of the reasons why the colonial government disapproved of starting independent schools in Uganda was that these schools reminded the colonialists of the activities of Malaki Musa Jakawa and Joswa Kate (Chief Mugema) who started the Malakite religious sect in Mbale area in the 1920's and convinced several members of the main Christian churches to abandon their faiths and to join the New Malakite sect. It was feared that the products of independent schools might become a threat to Christianity and colonial administration.

THE BEGINNING OF TEACHERS' UNIONS IN UGANDA

In 1942, a group of teachers who held a meeting in Mbale town, Eastern Uganda, to review their position, described the treatment given to the teachers by their missionary masters as inhuman. They stated this in a letter written to the Director of Education, dated 8 October, 1942.

"Since the missionaries started employing the African teacher, the decision regarding the conditions of his employment have been made by the church leaders without consulting the African teacher himself. The salaries have not been improved for many years and the few teachers who ask reasonable questions to the priests are transferred to remote missions immediately. Some have been dismissed simply because they have asked questions relating to their jobs. We cannot tolerate this inhuman treatment...

Sir, we beg you to allow us to send you a small group of representatives to explain to you our difficulties and our disagreement with the supervisor of schools in this area."11

This letter alleged that, among other things, the decisions made about the conditions of service of teachers were unilateral. The teachers were not represented on the decision-making bodies and they simply accepted orders from their missionary master. They had no opportunity to appeal to higher authorities.

Instead of meeting teachers' representatives from Mbale as he had been requested, the Director of Education asked the Mbale C.M.S. Education Secretary, a missionary himself to deal with the matter.12 This step annoyed the teachers in Mbale and in November 1942, some of them met and formed a teachers' organisation - "The African School Teachers Association" (ASTA) with membership of nineteen certificated teachers.13 One of the reasons they gave for forming this organisation was that young men who had become clerks, nurses, policemen, interpreters and even houseboys were getting better salaries than the teachers although their educational standards were not higher than those attained by the teachers.14

Unfortunately the ASTA was an all-Protestant organisation and did not, therefore, have a wide base. It was labelled a communist organisation by both the Protestant missionaries and the Catholic priests. It did, however, serve a purpose because its members decided never to approach problems of their employment as individual members. Individual teacher's grievances were expected to be addressed to the General Secretary of the organisation who would then approach the employer of the aggrieved teacher.
In 1943, the Baganda teachers working in Kampala formed the Uganda African Teachers Association (UATA). The aims of this association which was larger than the one formed in Mbale were set out in its constitution than those attained by the teachers.

(a) To secure the unity of all African teachers in Uganda.
(b) To promote the status of teaching profession and to give it respectability.
(c) To have high professional qualifications.
(d) To be affiliated to national and international organisations which had proved of interest in education.
(e) To fight discrimination of all types in the teaching profession.

Nicholas Mafabi, President of the Uganda Teachers Association in 1969 gave an account of the early days of teachers' unions in Uganda:

"The Association has evolved from a very small beginning. In the early 1940s some teachers in various parts of Uganda, particularly those who taught around Mbale and Kampala began to talk about the need for a teachers' organisation. The teachers in Mbale called their group "African School Teachers' Association". The teachers in Kampala called themselves "The Uganda African Teachers' Association". The UATA had great difficulties in its early days because it did not have enough funds to spread itself all over the country. The missions were very suspicious of the motives of this new organisation and advised the teachers not to join it. The Catholic mission started a counter-organisation called "The Catholic Teachers' Guild"; and in Mbarara, the "CMS Teachers Guild" was formed but it did not last long. These church-based organisations had as their aims the improvement of education controlled by their churches. However, the more progressive teachers belonged to both the church-based organisation and the national association.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES OF THE TEACHERS' ORGANISATIONS

The ASTA formed in Mbale in 1942, and the UATA formed in Kampala a year later had one disadvantage clearly spelt out in their respective constitutions; they did not permit non-Africans to join either of the organisations.

In 1943 and 1944, the teachers under the leadership of Mr. T. Kibebere, presented their first memorandum on teachers' salaries and conditions. This fetched them a salary increase of 10 per cent for the unmarried teachers and 15 per cent for teachers who were married and had more than one child. From then on teachers realized that they must pull their forces together in order to fight for their rights. 'They tried and they were rewarded'.

Since there was not much difference between the Mbale-based organisation and the Kampala-based organisation, the former was dissolved in January, 1953, and its members were free to join the Kampala-based organisation which had more members and had become much more national.
In 1957, the new members from the Mbale branch demanded that the name of the organisation they had joined should be changed so that the members from both branches could suffer no disadvantage of being regarded as new. In addition it was decided that the organisation should open its doors to all teachers regardless of race. The name was changed in 1958 to The Uganda Teachers Association and the constitution was also amended to allow non-African teachers to join. Many Asian teachers joined the association and at the time of Uganda's independence (1962) the UTA was already well-known by all the teachers in Uganda.

In 1955, the teachers of Primary and Junior Secondary Schools expressed strong objections to the idea of belonging to the same organisation as the secondary and other graduate teachers who were already receiving comparatively high salaries and having decent houses. The primary and junior secondary school teachers felt that the secondary school teachers were generally happy with their conditions of service and that a separate organisation for the primary and junior secondary school teachers should be formed.

In 1956, the primary and junior secondary school teachers formed their own organisation called The Primary and Junior Secondary Teachers Union (U.P.J.U.). There was no room for teachers of qualifications higher or lower than the primary and junior secondary teachers qualification. The name of the organisation made it clear as to who could become members. Unlike the U.T.A., the U.P.J.U. was more of a trade union than a professional body. Later on, UPJU changed its name of Uganda Teachers Union to allow teachers of all categories to become members.

The Uganda Teachers Union was very popular in the late and early 1960's and it attacked the UTA on the grounds that the latter was in the pockets of the officials of the Ministry of Education and could not truly serve the interest of the teachers. This accusation was not without substance. The Ministry of Education had, on many occasions, shown that it did not recognise the Uganda Teachers Union and had done what it could to promote the Uganda Teachers Association whose full-time General Secretary, worked very closely with the Ministry of Education. The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education admitted that the Ministry of Education recognised the UTA and did not take UTU seriously.

The Uganda Teachers Association has tended to follow a professional line and to avoid the type of unionism practised by workers in other occupation. Emphasizing this philosophy of professionalism, and indirectly attacking the members of the Uganda Teachers Union for their unionist approach to professional matters, the President of the Uganda Teachers Association said:

"Since the birth of the Association, we have held to the principle that we are a professional organization. We are trained for the job and anybody who says we are like any other groups of workers offends us. In this connection we request the Government to take steps to remove the non-professionals from schools. I cannot practise medicine unless I am qualified to do so. For how
long shall we continue to dilute the profession. It has been alleged that teachers will never get their conditions improved if they continue to belong to a professional association. I warn teachers that these are the people who do not want us to be united. If we believe that the training we undergo makes us professional people, then, we must act and behave as professionals. We cannot be considered weak because we preach professionalism. I do not think U.T.A. is any less militant in its demands for better salaries and conditions than any workers organisations that I know in Africa."\(^{19}\)

Since Uganda's independence, the Uganda Teachers Association has grown from strength to strength under a full time General Secretary. In 1971, its membership was over 50 per cent of Uganda teachers.\(^{20}\) Attempts by the Uganda Teachers Union (UTU) and the Uganda Teachers Association (UTA) to merge and form one organization have failed, mainly because the UTA is enjoying support of both the Ministry of Education and of many teachers all over the country and wants to merge with UTU on its own (UTA's) terms. On the other hand the UTU feels that as an organization of long history it should not drop all its principles, and that the UTA and the UTU should join on equal terms. This difference was apparent in 1967 when the negotiations between the two rival groups failed.

The UTA made it clear that it did not encourage trade unionism in the association and therefore could not merge with UTU on trade union terms: The UTA President confirmed this when he said:

"We would have done justice to ourselves if we didn't have among us teachers who are not convinced of their professional obligations. They are so irresponsible that they wander around looking for support outside the teaching profession. We, the U.T.A., believe teachers must uphold the principle of professionalism. It is our first weapon in our fighting against the poor conditions under which the majority of us work".\(^{21}\)

Although the Uganda Teachers Association has been criticised by its more militant members and by the members of the Uganda Teachers Union, the Association has achieved visible successes which include the following:

1. Membership of 12,000 teachers (in 1969).\(^{22}\)
2. The organisation has an impressive Headquarters building between Kampala shops and Makerere University, and in this building is a library which is fairly well-stocked.
3. The teachers are represented on most decision-making bodies dealing with matters affecting education in general and the teachers in particular.
4. The Association has made arrangements for teachers to attend refresher courses at short intervals.
5. There is an arrangement between the National Insurance Corporation and the UTA, and through this arrangement, teachers can buy life insurance policies.
6. The UTA has fought for the definition of the teachers' employer, and now all the teachers in Uganda are employees of the government like any other workers.

Thus through the UTA, the teachers' grievances and suggestions can be heard much more easily than through the voice of individual teachers. But some of the successes of the Uganda Teachers Association are connected with the fact that the
present General Secretary (John Kisaka) is a very influential man in the Ministry of Education because of his previous connections. With a more militant general Secretary or with change of faces in the Ministry of Education Headquarters, the role of the Uganda Teachers Association can be easily affected.

In line with its philosophy of professionalism, the Uganda Teachers Association has its own code of ethics which constitutes professional guidelines for the members of the teaching service. The code has fourteen sections as shown:

1. The teachers' first responsibility is to the pupils in his charge and for the quality of service rendered by himself and his profession.
2. The teacher shall speak and act towards pupils with respect and dignity and shall deal justly with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
3. The teacher shall respect the confidential nature of information concerning pupils and may give it only to persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare.
4. The teacher shall keep his teaching as objective as possible in discussing with his class controversial matters whether political, religious or racial.
5. The teacher shall recognise that a privileged relationship exists between the teacher and his pupils, and shall refrain from exploiting this relationship.
6. The teacher shall honour his appointment within the Teaching Service until such an appointment has been legally terminated or cancelled by mutual consent.
7. The teacher shall apply for positions or promotions through proper channels.
8. The teacher shall avoid any unfavourable derogatory criticism of another teacher except when it is directed in confidence to a person or an authority who is in a position to rectify its cause, and the teacher concerned has been informed of the nature of the criticism.
9. The teacher shall report through proper channels all matters harmful to the welfare of the school.
10. The teacher shall regard it as his right and duty to examine the conduct of the Association to make such criticism as the facts may warrant.
11. The teacher shall respect the presentation to higher authority of matters duly agreed upon by his fellow teachers.
12. The teacher shall acknowledge the powers and obligations of his branch and the Association as a whole and shall refrain from making individual representations to the District Education Officer or the Ministry of Education or other bodies regarding any matters that are properly to be dealt with by the Association either at Local or National Level.
13. The branch of the Association shall not take independent action on matters requiring the authorisation of the National Executive of the Association.
14. The teacher shall adhere to all agreements negotiated by this professional organisation.

The UTA teachers' code of ethics just outlined does not encourage militancy. It advocates, good professional conduct. On the other hand, the rival UTU stand is that teachers, like other workers, should be able to strike for better conditions of service if this becomes necessary.
Although in theory there are two rival teachers' organizations in Uganda, in effect there is only one functional one, the Uganda Teachers Association which was started in Mbale in the 1940's as an organ for presenting complaints to the Department of Education. The Uganda Teachers Union (UTU) a potentially more militant organisation, which broke away from the mother organisation has become ineffective through discouragement by the Ministry of Education. The Uganda Teachers Association is becoming increasingly less militant and more professional. It was once described by U.T.U., the rival organisation, as a "Department of the Ministry of Education".  

In addition to the teachers' unions just described, there are many professional bodies to which teachers may belong. These are usually based on the subjects taught in Uganda secondary schools, and some of them admit members who do not necessarily teach the subjects. In some cases, people who do not belong to the teaching profession are allowed to join. The Uganda Science Teachers Association, the History Teachers Association, and the Mathematics Teachers Association are just a few of the available professional subject-based association.

The Uganda Education Association is a very powerful professional organisation which includes university teachers and whose patron is the country's President. Its aim is "to promote education at all levels" and its membership is open to all interested persons.

The Headteachers Association draws schools' and colleges' heads together to discuss matters of administrative and educational importance and to make appropriate representation to the Ministry of Education. Makerere University Faculty of Education and the Ministry of Education continue to play useful roles in encouraging professionalism in teaching by giving moral and practical support to these professional organisations through providing conference rooms, laboratories and other facilities for getting the country's educationists together and by participating actively in the workshops and conferences.

CONCLUSION

The Uganda teachers unions were started mainly because the African teachers in Uganda wanted to better their own conditions of service. Unlike the other workers' unions in Uganda, the teachers' unions were not associated with any political organisation. They were concerned with the teaching profession and with the working conditions of their members. It is, of course, true that the Uganda Teachers Association has been represented on many committees and commissions dealing with different aspects of education in Uganda, but the Association as such has never spearheaded any major aspect of the country's educational reform.

It should also be pointed out that the philosophy of education and the curriculum being followed in Uganda's educational institutions in the 1970's
have changed only very slightly from those of the colonial era. The only major
difference between the education system of the two periods is that there are
now more and higher educational institutions producing more graduates every
year. Many of these graduates add to the already serious problem of the un-
employed school leavers.

One main reason why the curriculum has not effectively changed is because
the party and the Government did not give any definite ideological direction.
Therefore the Uganda Teachers Association could not, on its own, initiate major
educational reforms even if its members were interested in doing so. In line
with the general non-ideological line followed by the Uganda Government up to
1969, the UTA policy during the independence period will not differ substantially
from its policy of the colonial period which emphasised professionalism and
discouraged militancy in the teaching service.

Finally while professionalism in teaching must be supported and encouraged
in every possible way, the Uganda teachers need to inject some amount of
unionism in their professionalism so that their employer is kept reminded that
when necessary, teachers, like any other workers, can withhold their services.
After all, if doctors whose services are much more urgent than those of teachers
can resort to striking when necessary, why should teachers consider it pro-
fessionally wrong to do the same, at least when other means of settling disputes
with employers fail? This has been the argument advanced by the more militant
but dwindling organisation, the Uganda Teachers Union.

In a democratic society which Uganda once used to be, workers should, at
least potentially, be able to withhold their services when necessary. The
philosophy of incompatibility between militancy and professionalism was a trick
which the colonial oppressors used as a tool to silence the Africans from demand-
ing their rights. A good teacher then was one who never questioned his missionary
employers. Now that we are independent we should be able to combine profession-
alism with militancy for there is no contradiction between them. In fact militancy
can be used in defence of professionalism.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ingham, K. The Making of Modern Uganda (London: George Allen and
Unwin Ltd., 1953), p. 84.

2. From Mengo Protestant Teachers to Mengo Church Council 16th April,
1902. Catechist teacher's salary averaged £2 p.a. in Mengo area depend-
ing on the contributions from the Christians in the area. Clerk's salaries
averaged £6 p.a. House servants wages also averaged £2 p.a. The
Catechists were exempted from paying house tax and their children paid
no school fees.


8. In 1911, Miss Caroline Phelps Stokes of U.S.A. established a fund, known as Phelps Stokes Fund. Among the objectives stated in the will of the founder of this fund was the education of Negroes in the United States and in Africa. A Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. Jesse Jones was appointed in 1921 to survey education in Africa. This commission was known as "The Phelps-Stokes Commission."


10. Ingham, K., op. cit., p. 118.


12. Ibid. L/T3.

13. Ibid., L/T3.


17. Ibid., p. 27.


22. The information was obtained from U.T.A. office, Kampala.


24. From U.T.U. Mbale Branch to District Education Officer, Mbale (dated 16/1/1967). It attacked the proposed merger between U.T.U. and U.T.A. and was copied to Kibuka, É., and Luande, H., of the National Labour Unions.