

Interview with

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at the University of Calabar in Nigeria
and Executive Director of the Africa
Federation of Teaching Regulatory
Authorities (AFTRA)

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Interview conducted by Daniel Ergetachew, Gabriel Mekbib, and Kaoru Yamauchi

IICBA: Thank you so much for joining us. Would you please tell us your name, your organization, and what it is that you do.

My name is Steve Nwokeocha. I am a Professor of Sociology of Education at the University of Calabar in Nigeria as well as the Executive Director of the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities, which is the continental intergovernmental body of ministries of education and national teaching councils in Africa dedicated to the professionalization and regulation of teaching.

I am also the global advisor of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and International Development Research Centre project called Connected Learning First Hand, which is also a GPE project building capacity. Our Connected learning for STEM is University based in Africa and Asia. In Africa, there is IBBU University in Nigeria and Tanzania Open University. In India, there is Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India and in Bhutan, there is Samtse College of Education in Bhutan. So, my job spreads beyond Africa to Asia in terms of the GPE project as an advisor.

IICBA: In terms of understanding the teacher regulatory landscape on the continent, would you be able to describe the agencies that are involved and what it is that they do?

The Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA) is a creation of the Ministers of Education to coordinate all 55 countries of AU Member States towards regulating teaching. Some countries have created, by law, a National Teaching Council that serves as a professional regulatory authority. Some countries are also regulating teaching directly through their Ministries of Education.

In whichever case, the Ministers of Education of all 55 countries in Africa inaugurated AFTRA at a hub, as a forum, as a federation to bring all of them together towards standardizing, harmonizing and speaking with a common voice towards raising teacher quality and quantity. The keywords there are regulation and professionalization. Professionalisation means making teaching truly a profession, similar to that of being a lawyer or a doctor. It should be noted those did not become professions overnight.

Geographic Coverage of the KIX Africa 19 Hub



The KIX Africa 19 Hub comprises the following 19 partner countries in Anglophone Africa: Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), South Sudan, Tanzania (mainland and Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

This interview is part of a series conducted in May 2023 on the occasion of the inception meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the extension (phase 2) of the KIX Africa 19 Hub project. The transcript of this interview has been slightly edited versus the video version, which is also available on the UNESCO IICBA website.

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) project aims to meet the needs of national education systems for evidence-based policy. KIX creates spaces for GPE partner countries to share information, innovations, and good practices. Knowledge exchange is facilitated by four regional hubs, including two for Africa: the KIX Africa 21 Hub which covers francophone and lusophone GPE-eligible countries and the KIX Africa 19 Hub which covers anglophone countries. Both hubs function as regional fora within the framework of the KIX project to bring together countries with similar educational, socio-economic and linguistic characteristics for exchanges of experiences.



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There were measures enacted and mandated by their professionals and today they are very well known as professions. So, professionalization means putting in place the processes, the institutions, the frameworks and implementing them faithfully, so that teaching will become a profession. The other keyword is regulation, which means enacting a law to set standards and to follow those standards. And when you enact a law and standards that must be followed, an institution must be created. It must be institutionalized and that is what brings us to the concept of the National Teaching Councils or what we call teacher regulatory authorities. For example, if you are in medicine, you have a Medical Council. If you are in law, you have a Legal Council. If you are an engineer, you have an Engineering Council.

So now we are advocating for the establishment of Teaching Councils in many countries to be an institution or a vehicle for developing standards and implementing them. We, at AFTRA, as a continental body is developing Continental frameworks, jointly with the African Union,

UNESCO IICBA, UNICEF, and the Teacher Task Force towards professionalizing teaching. We are working towards achieving uniformity that will enable African countries to have something in common so they can interoperate.

IICBA: What was your motivation for getting involved in education?

I am a teacher by profession, and I love teaching. I spent years in the classroom before I came into the administrative cadre in the Ministry. Education is foundational. If we get it right in the education sector, we will get it right in every other sector. It is like a tool for national development and a tool for sustainable development.

In Nigeria, we have a ministerial strategic plan that stands on ten pillars. With our strategic education plan, we hope to achieve much more with support from both national and international development partners.

IICBA: Could we hear a little bit more about your experiences in Sierra Leone and The Gambia and what you found was especially interesting in your work there?

UNESCO IICBA has been a powerhouse for developing capacities in Africa. IICBA does it at institutional, country and continental levels while forging partnerships with bodies within and outside Africa.

To provide some context, UNESCO has a partnership with the Shanghai Municipal government in China. The partnership provided funds to help in the professionalizing efforts to ensure that countries have teaching standards because in the professionalization business, teacher standards are at the heart of it.

So, the Shanghai-FIT (Funds-in-Trust) project, which IICBA is overseeing for West Africa with a particular focus on Sierra Leone and The Gambia, required us to conduct a situation analysis and spend quite a considerable time in the two countries looking at their mode of implementation of the teaching standard which we accomplished .

Under the same UNESCO IICBA Shanghai-FIT project, we also did the mapping of West Africa where we addressed questions such as: *How are they implementing teaching standards? What don't we understand by teaching standards? Are these teaching standards aligned with the Continental and global framework?*

Because as a continental body, we are interested in strengthening alignment and establishing common frameworks to support standardization and interoperability. We're also working for the common vision of the African Union, which is Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want, a union of people that allows for the free movement of goods and services.

You cannot interoperate or exist as one community, if you do not have teaching provision systems that communicate and that share something in common. So, we studied how teaching standards are being implemented in Sierra Leone and in The Gambia and in the larger West African region and of course, our findings are interesting.

Some of the countries, such as Sierra Leone, have made far reaching implementations. They have developed their standards fully aligned to the African Union frameworks. They have established their National Teaching Council and they have legalized the teaching profession. They enacted a law stating teaching is a profession and you cannot practice it, if you are not registered and licensed. They also created the teacher service commission as the professional regulatory body. These are all part and parcel of the professionalization process that we are championing. The Gambia on the other hand has not

yet enacted the law or created the body for the teaching profession. It has developed standards; however, it has little alignment with the African Union framework.

The good thing is that both countries are acknowledging the impact of this study in their movement toward professionalization of teaching. In Sierra Leone, where we could say they are advanced, we still pointed out gaps, which they acknowledge and thanked this project for helping them to highlight it. Now the project will focus more on supporting them in these areas.

In The Gambia, they are happy and acknowledge that they are going to work with Shanghai-FIT project and with UNESCO IICBA to make a robust leap forward towards developing and aligning their standards, in legalizing the teaching profession, establishing regulatory framework, and creating a National Teaching Council.

Finally, we did point out that institutionalization of the teaching standard should not be done in isolation from the teacher policies. UNESCO has a teacher policy guide that has provided nine dimensions that cover areas such as teacher recruitment, reward and standards, and so forth.

You must keep your eye on all of these when you are developing any dimension so that it is coherent and consistent. In the same way, when you are developing teaching standards, you must keep your eyes on the other aspects of teacher policies and there were three key related areas we pointed out:

- 1) Preservice teacher education. If you develop standards for teachers, you must also take a fresh look at your preservice teacher education program. This is to ensure that the program is delivering individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies that are outlined in the standards.
- 2) Professional development is essential for teachers throughout their careers. It helps them to stay up-to-date on the latest research and best practices, and it provides them with opportunities to learn new skills and strategies.
- 3) A new national framework that will align to the new standards, because you cannot raise the standards and make more demands for teaching excellence without additional psychosocial support, financial support and non-financial support making the environment much better.

We are looking at all these areas collectively in the Shanghai-FIT project. I think it is turning around the education systems and those countries are really expressing their gratitude to UNESCO IICBA.

IICBA: What are your short term and long term hopes of teacher professionalization? For example, would it be a teacher in Nigeria going to teach a classroom in The Gambia with students having the same sort of learning outcomes?

It is already happening and I am happy you used the example of Nigeria. I was the first director of operations of the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria for 10 years. As the pioneer Director, I led the foundations for regulating teaching together with my immediate boss who was the Registrar Chief Executive Officer. As Director of Operations, I took responsibility throughout the thirty-six states of Nigeria, setting up offices and developing regulatory instruments. That was all the way back in 2002. Now we are talking about 20 years of running the regulation of teaching.

Today, the United Kingdom has come to Nigeria, and they have certified the Nigerian system to be acceptable to teach in England without additional requirements or examination. So, what you are already talking about is happening. In fact, Nigeria, which has pioneered regulation of teaching in Africa, is recognised in Canada, in the U.S., in Australia because part of the regulation means we network with other regulatory agencies across the world, and we share the instruments.

We have a common basis and now Nigerian teachers are acceptable anywhere in the world and the second regulatory body in Africa was the South African Council of Educators. They also enjoy that kind of privilege. We have seen other teacher councils coming up very recently; however, many more countries are yet to have theirs and that is why we will not rest. We are looking forward to where these things should be well established and any Nigerian teacher or any African teacher will feel like a medical doctor or a lawyer wherever they find themselves.

My son was a medical doctor in Nigeria before practicing in Britain. He did not go back to school. All that was asked for was a document from the Medical Council in Nigeria and then he wrote certain exams in school. He is a full-time medical doctor in Britain, but he studied in Nigeria. That is what we want for a teachers, so that wherever a teacher finds themselves, they can have the confidence to go into the class and teach.

Prior to this time, the opposite was the case. Before we started regulating teaching in Nigeria, Nigerians spent ten years in Canada, and they could not get licenced. Because the regulatory body there does not know anything about teacher education in Nigeria. They may have asked the following questions: *What is it all about? What do you people do there? Do you write registration? Examination?* They have no information, so Nigerian teachers waited 10 years. Today it has been turned around.

Evidence suggests that teachers are groomed based on standards that are well regulated, that are professional and bring more learning and better learning outcomes, so definitely that is our vision. We want a teaching profession in Africa that can stand with any other profession anywhere in the world.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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