

Is Teaching a Last Resort Career? **Dr. K. A. Korb**

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“Most Nigerian teachers stick to teaching only as a last resort.” This sentiment is widely proclaimed in the media, in the academy, and even amongst teachers themselves. However, is this belief really true?

Mary Promise Audu chose teaching as a last resort career. She worked in a bank for seven years before obtaining university admission in educational administration and planning, though she had applied for sociology. Upon receiving admission into education, Mary said, “Wow, education. I was so discouraged. I was angry. I thought of going back to someone to assist me to change the course. Education! I have nothing to do with education.” However, she consulted with her sister, who persuaded Mary that God may have a reason for placing her in education. After praying about her admission and committing it to God, Mary began her coursework in education.

In the beginning of her third year, Mary participated in the teaching practice exercise, and her attitude toward teaching dramatically changed. “When I started my teaching practice, I found I loved what I was doing.” After Mary’s very first lesson, the teachers at her school complimented her, which encouraged Mary to continue improving her teaching skills.

Mary explains the teaching profession this way, “It is like reaching out to someone. In the banking industry, you reach out to people, but you reach out to them because you want to get something out of them. It is because of what they give you that you are trying to reach to them. But in the teaching profession, it is like you are reaching out to someone who is in need, not because he will give you anything, but because he wants to learn something and it is not dependent on what you as a teacher will get out of that person.”

After the teaching practice exercise, it became more difficult to balance working at the bank and pursuing her education. “I had already developed an interest for teaching during my teaching practice. I felt that if I have to reach out to someone [through teaching], I have to be fully equipped. I love what I am doing, so why not. I decided to quit the job [at the bank] to go fully into the teaching profession.”

Within the past two weeks, Mary finished writing her final year exams. She plans on volunteering as a teacher at the nursery section of her church’s new school to perfect her teaching skills. After developing her teaching abilities, Mary plans to pursue a masters degree in education. “I hope to be a great administrator to be reckoned with, one that would want the right thing to be done in our educational sector.”

Mary concludes, “A teacher has reached out to each person, that is why they are where they are at the moment. So they should not look down on the teaching profession. It is a profession that should be admired. You know you are giving something to someone. It is something that a teacher can be proud of. Anywhere I go now, I tell people, ‘I am a teacher.’”

How many teachers are like Mary, who choose teaching as a last resort career? I have conducted research to try to determine the truth of the statement that most Nigerian teachers only choose teaching as a last resort. The evidence shows this belief is quite inaccurate. Only 34% of students in the Faculty of Education agree to the statement, "I chose teaching as a last resort career." Indeed, 43% of the education students indicated that education was actually their first choice when writing the JAMB. Instead, the top two reasons for choosing education were to shape the future of children and to make a social contribution.

Thus, the majority of education students do *not* choose education as a last resort career. Furthermore, many who chose teaching as a last resort career are like Mary: once they begin learning about the teaching profession, they change their attitude and look forward to becoming teachers.

Indeed, there are many who choose teaching over other professions. Even as a teenager, Ahyuwani E. S. Akanet had the desire to be an educator. As the top economics student in his secondary school, Akanet's friends would ask him for help when they did not understand their economics assignments. After his tutoring assistance, his friends would say "Wow! Mun gane." Because of the inner satisfaction that he derived from assisting his peers, Akanet decided that he wanted to study to become an economics teacher. He chose education for his first degree, and volunteered part-time as a teacher during his studies.

After Akanet completed his first degree in education, he had options to pursue professions other than teaching, including being in a professional rock band. However, Akanet was very clear about what he wanted to do, and it was teaching. "Teaching is about helping students know and do things they could not do before. So the joy of seeing my students come to grasp with what I am teaching, and then see them leaving class with the excitement of wanting to go and do such things kept me going. I enjoyed what I was doing, so the passion was there, the urge to pursue the education line was there."

Regarding the low status of education within Nigerian society, Akanet says, "It breaks my heart. Sometimes when you ask young people what they want to become, they choose those things like, 'I want to be a politician, a doctor, an accountant.' Hardly would they mention teaching. Why? Because society's values are changing where we respect such disciplines above even what gave birth to them, which is teaching. So my encouragement to society would be to look at the value that lies in education, and to know that the future of our children, the future of generations to come after us, depends on what we teach today. If there is anything we need to treasure the most, it is education."

Akanet comments on his choice of becoming a teacher, "Yes, I am very happy with my choice of becoming a teacher. If I were given a long list of things I wanted to do, teaching would be at the top. It is just what I love to do."