VALUING TEACHERS' VOICES: TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT:

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the quality and outcomes of education, yet their voices are often marginalized in policy formulation and implementation. This paper explores the significance of empowering teachers in Nigeria by redefining the social contract for education. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of participatory governance and social justice in education, the study examines the current challenges teachers face, including inadequate representation in decision-making, poor working conditions, and limited professional development opportunities. Using qualitative and quantitative analyses, the paper highlights the impact of teacher's insight inclusion in educational policies, implementation and sustainability, constraints and prospectsof valuing teachers' voices and its effect on student outcomes in Nigeria's educational ecosystem. The study advocates for a transformative approach that recognizes teachers as key stakeholders, ensuring their voices are integral part of policy decisions through structured dialogue, improved working conditions and professional development.By redefining the social contract for education in Nigeria, this paper highlighted a collaborative framework where teachers, policymakers, and communities jointly initiates educational reforms that foster sustainable development and inclusive growth. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at enhancing teachers' active participation in improving educational policies and implementations as this will strengthening Nigeria's education system in the 21st century era.

Keywords: Teacher Voices, Social Contract, Education Policy, Nigeria, Participatory Governance, Educational Reform.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Education is frequently referred to as the foundation of society, influencing the rate of development of communities and nations and shaping future generations. However, teachers' voices are frequently ignored

because they are at the forefront of the educational process (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). The current educational landscape demonstrates a disconnect between classroom realities and policy decisions. According to Morrison (2011) and Gray et al. (2015), the social contract for education puts bureaucratic and financial interests ahead of the expertise and well-being of teachers. This perpetuates a top-down approach by devaluing the voices of teachers. Demotivated teachers, ineffective policies, and a lack of connection to community issues are some of the consequences (Afe, 2002). A new social contract for education, according to this paper, is not only necessary but essential for the development of efficient teaching and learning methods in a developing nation like Nigeria. According to Podolsky et al. (2016), we can develop an educational system that is more equitable, responsive, and efficient by incorporating teacher voices. According to Bangs and Frost (2012), the role teachers play, have gone beyond mere transfer of knowledge to learners, but also includes equipping the students with problem solving skills and creative thinking ability for a successful livelihood in a digitalized, dynamic and technologically driven world (Thomas, 2009) . However, since then, their participation in policymaking has remained limited. The mid-20th century witnessed a rise in educational reforms movements, yet these reforms often occurred without significant teacher involvement and participation (Nelson and Sadler, 2013).

Oduolowu (2009) says that teachers are sometimes accused of not being committed to their jobs. For example, in the late 20th century, standardized testing and accountability measures were mostly implemented without teachers' input. According to Nelson and Sadler (2013) and Gray et al. (2015), this pattern has resulted in a disconnect between educational policy and classroom realities, which has resulted in teachers becoming disillusioned and their morale declining. From a researcher's perspective, marginalization has been the story of teachers. Mytle (2021) gave references to the following instances; Taylorist managerial model (early 20th century); Post-WWII bureaucratic expansion; Neoliberal reforms (1980s-present). Education adopted the Taylorist Managerial Model, which reduced teachers to "technicians" implementing standardized curricula (Famade, 2012), based on Frederick Winslow Taylor's scientific management principles that emphasized control and efficiency. Secondly, Post-WWII where the Bureaucratic Expansion Increased, government involvement and bureaucratic administration leading to centralized control and teachers' autonomy diminished as administrators and policymakers gained power (Farrell, 2012). Neoliberal Reforms (1980s - Present): which emphasis on market-driven education and privatization, teachers' work intensified, without an increased accountability measures and working welfare (Akbari, 2010). Progressive Education Movement (1920s -1950s); initially emphasized student-centered learning, teacher autonomy, later co-opted by bureaucratic and administrative interests (Morrison, 2011). Cold War Era and the "Culture of Compliance" characterized by "Fear of communism and social change led to increased control and "Teachers' voices suppressed to maintain social order (Famade, 2012); Hoang, 2022).

2. LEGACY OF MARGINALIZATION OF TEACHER VOICES:

The marginalization of teacher voices in education is not a recent phenomenon or peculiar to Nigeria (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). it is embedded in a complex historical context that has contributed to a persistent legacy. Several historical factors have created this legacy, leading to significant implications for the teaching profession and the system of education. According to Batt (2022), there has always been a power imbalance in educational systems, with decision-making authority frequently falling on administrators, policymakers, and external stakeholders rather than teachers, who are at the heart of the system. Podolsky et al, (2016), studies stated that this

has resulted in a systematic diminishing of teachers' expertise and autonomy, leading to a culture where educators are viewed primarily as implementers of policies rather than as knowledgeable professionals with valuable insights (Morrison, 2011). This imbalance is often perpetuated by a lack of recognition of the unique skills and roles the teachers play to the classroom and students learning experience (Gray et al., 2015). Teachers' professional judgment and insights are frequently undermined in discussions about curriculum design, pedagogy reviews, assessment practices, and educational reforms and implementation (Morrison, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016). According to Gray et al. (2015), this not only has an impact on the morale and job satisfaction of teachers, but it also restricts their capacity to innovate and respond to the diverse needs of students and their own job demands. Affin, (2021), opined that the rise of standardization in education, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has further entrenched the marginalization of teacher voices. Policies like "Every Student Succeeds Act" and "No Child Left Behind" have emphasized uniformity in curriculum and assessment (Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). These policies were frequently imposed by outside forces rather than being informed by the realities of the classroom by teachers. Teachers have been forced to follow predetermined curricula and standardized testing procedures as a result, leaving little room for innovation or adaptation to local circumstances (Farrell, 2012). This standardization not only constrains teachers' pedagogical approaches, but also reduces the quality of students' educational experience (Thomas, 2009). Teachers are further disenfranchised from meaningful participation in their profession as a result of the emphasis on quantifiable outcomes, which frequently gives test scores more weight than holistic educational practices. Gard, (2022), added that another historical factor that has contributed to their marginalization is the disconnection of teachers' voices from policy-making processes. According to Gray et al. (2015) and Khan (2020), classroom teachers in Nigeria frequently do not provide sufficient input when developing educational policies (Gray et al., 2015; Khan, 2020). According to Nelson and Sadler (2013), a disconnect exists between the realities of teaching and the decisions made at higher governance levels as a result of this lack of participation. Teachers' perspectives, experiences, and expertise are overlooked when they are left out of policy discussions. This disconnection can lead to policies that are ill-suited to the challenges faced in the classroom, resulting in ineffective reforms that fail to address the needs of students and educators alike (Shen et al., 2020; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023).

3. IMPLINIZATION OF MARGINIZATION OF TEACHERS' VOICES IN EDUCATION:

It is essential to recognize and address the systemic issues that have been identified within the education system. Understanding the historical factors that have led to the marginalization of teachers' voices is essential. This comprises Recognize Teacher Marginalization's Systemic Nature Acknowledging that the marginalization of teachers' voices is a systemic issue allows educators, policymakers and stakeholders to view it as a fundamental challenge rather than an isolated concern (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Gray et al., 2015). This recognition can foster a deeper understanding of how power dynamics, historical practices and institutional structures have contributed to the current state of education (Podolsky et al., 2016). By framing

teacher marginalization as a systemic issue, advocates can work towards comprehensive reforms that address the root causes, rather than merely treating the symptoms (Famade, 2012; Farrell, 2012). According to Sanfo and Malgoubri (2023), this comprehension will also enhance collaborative actions among educators to unite, reclaim their voices, and assert their essential role as stakeholders in the educational process. Put a stop to firmly rooted power structures. Educational systems and power structures are deeply ingrained with the legacy of marginalization (Shen et al., 2020). The first step in challenging these structures and advocating for change is to acknowledge this reality. According to Jackson (2020) teachers, administrators and advocates can work together to confront the hierarchies that have historically sidelined teacher voices. Efforts to challenge these power structures can include advocating for participatory governance models that include teachers in decision-making processes, promoting policies that value teacher input, and fostering collaborative relationships between educators and administrators (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Gray et al., 2015; Mytle, 2021). Stakeholders have the ability to develop an educational environment that is more equitable and inclusive by actively challenging ingrained power dynamics. (2012, Bangs and Frost; 2012, Famade) Advocate for the Autonomy and Empowerment of Teachers Understanding the historical legacy of marginalization empowers advocates to push for teacher empowerment and autonomy (Egbo, 2011). This advocacy can take various forms, including promoting professional development opportunities that enhance teachers' skills and knowledge, supporting initiatives that prioritize teacher leadership, and advocating for policies that grant educators greater flexibility in their classrooms. According to Gray et al. (2015) and Obizue (2020), empowering teachers to actively shape their professional practices not only benefits educators but also improves the quality of education provided to students. Teachers are more likely to use creative teaching methods that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences when they feel supported and valued. Obizue and Obizue, (2021) stated that the legacy of marginalization of teachers voices in education is shaped by historical factors such as power imbalances, standardization, and disconnection from policy-making. Understanding these factors is crucial for recognizing the systemic nature of teacher marginalization and for challenging entrenched power structures within educational systems (Akbari, 2010). According to Podolsky et al. (2016), stakeholders can work toward a more equitable and efficient educational framework that values teachers' expertise and contributions by advocating for teacher autonomy and empowerment. According to Bietenbeck et al., (2023) by incorporating teachers' voices is essential for fostering a vibrant and responsive educational environment that meets the needs of all students.

Teachers play a vital role in promoting democratic education by encouraging dialogue, facilitating discussions on social and political issues, and creating inclusive learning environments (Gard, 2022). The educational framework may lack the diversity of viewpoints necessary for fostering a rich, democratic discourse when their voices are marginalized. According to Farrell (2012) the silencing of teachers' voices can also lead to a curriculum that does not reflect the complexities and realities of the world in which students live. This disconnect can further alienate students from their education, leading to disengagement and apathy towards civic participation (Bangs and Frost, 2012; Amakiri, 2023).

4. FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST VALUING TEACHERSVOICES IN NIGERIA:

Some of the factors that perpetuate devaluing of teachers voices in education system in Nigeria includes the following-

i. **Bureaucratic Control and Centralized Policy-Making-** Morrison, (2011) stated that bureaucratic control in educational systems has increasingly shaped the roles and responsibilities of teachers, leading to a significant transformation in how schools operate (Gray et al., 2015). This shift is primarily characterized by the expansion of administrative roles and a corresponding decrease in teacher influence within the decision-making processes (Famade, 2012; Nelson and Sadler, 2013).

ii. **Increased Administrative Roles and Decreased Teacher Influence-** Bangs and Frost(2012) are of the opinion that in modern educational settings, there has been a marked increase in administrative positions, often at the expense of teachers' authority and agency. Administrative personnel, including superintendents, district officials, and school administrators, have taken on heightened responsibilities in policy formulation and implementation (Thomas, 2009; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). This trend can be attributed to a growing emphasis on accountability and compliance with state and federal regulations, which often necessitates a more structured and hierarchical approach to governance (Mytle, 2021). Amakiri, (2023), rightly stated that as a result of this bureaucratic expansion, teachers find themselves with diminished influence over critical aspects of their professional practice, such as curriculum development, assessment methods, and instructional strategies. Gray et al., 2015) stated that this shift can lead to feelings of disempowerment among teachers, as their voices are increasingly sidelined in favor of top-down directives (Farrell, 2012). The result is an educational environment where decisions are made by a few individuals at the top of the hierarchy, often disconnected from the realities of classroom experiences (Akbari, 2010; Nelson and Sadler, 2013).

iii. **Top-Down Decision-Making and Limited Teacher Participation-** (Farrell, 2012) stated that centralized policy-making inherently involves a top-down approach to decision-making, whereby policies and reforms are designed and enforced by higher authorities with little input from those directly impacted (Affin, 2021). In this model, teachers are often seen as implementers of policies rather than active participants in the policy-making process (Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). This lack of participation can lead to a disconnect between the needs of students and the policies enacted to address those needs. Gard, (2022), opined that limited teacher participation in decision-making processes can stifle innovation and creativity within schools. Educators, who are on the front lines of instruction, possess valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within their classrooms. Morrison, (2011) stated that when teachers expertise is overlooked, policies may be implemented that are misaligned with the actual needs of students. This not only affects the quality of education but can also lead to increased frustration and burnout among teachers, who may feel their professional judgment is undervalued(Famade, 2012; Gray et al., 2015).

iv. **Emphasis on Standardized Testing and Accountability Measures-** The emphasis on standardized testing has significant implications for teaching and learning. Schools are often pressured to allocate substantial instructional time to test preparation, which can detract from a well-rounded curriculum (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). Subjects such as art, music, and physical education may be sidelined in favor of core subjects that are tested, leading to a narrowed educational experience for students (Morrison, 2011). Moreover, accountability measures tied to standardized test results can create a high-stakes environment that fosters anxiety among students and teachers alike.Famade, (2012) was of the opinion that teachers may feel compelled to "teach to the test," focusing on test-taking strategies and rote memorization rather than fostering critical thinking and creativity. According to Farrell(2012) indicated that the shift can undermine the fundamental goals of education, which should include nurturing a love for learning and encouraging intellectual exploration (Obizue and Obizue, 2021).

v. **Teachers' Autonomy and Creativity Stifled-** Bangs and Frost (2012) asserts that relentless focus on standardized testing and accountability can stifle teachers' autonomy and creativity in the classroom. Teachers are increasingly finding themselves constrained by rigid curricula and mandated assessments, leaving little room for personalized instruction or innovative teaching methods (Thomas, 2009). This loss of autonomy can lead to decreased job satisfaction and a sense of professional inadequacy among teachers, who may feel they are unable to engage their students in meaningful and relevant ways (Egbo, 2011). The interplay between bureaucratic control, centralized policy-making, standardization, and high-stakes testing represents significant challenges in the contemporary education landscape. Nelson and Sadler (2013) stated that these forces can diminish teacher influence, stifle creativity, and create a rigid educational environment that may not serve the best interests of students. Morrison (2011) added that addressing these issues requires a re-evaluation of how educational policies are developed and implemented, with a renewed focus on including teachersin the decision-making process and fostering an educational climate that values autonomy and innovation (Farrell, 2012; Shen et al., 2020).

vi. **Commodification of Education**- Bangs and Frost (2012) stated that the commodification of education refers to the transformation of educational institutions and processes into market-driven entities, where education is treated as a product to be bought and sold rather than an essential societal asset. According to Nelson and Sadler (2013), this trend has significant repercussions for educational policy and practice in Nigeria, a developing nation. According to Thomas's 2009 research, educational establishments have increasingly adopted market principles, viewing students as consumers and education as a service. According to Morrison (2011), this shift is frequently marked by the promotion of competition among schools, where success is measured by enrollment numbers and student performance metrics, similar to a business model. According to Mytle (2021) and Sanfo and Malgoubri (2023), the focus may shift from holistic education to quantifiable outcomes like test scores and graduation rates. This commodification can lead to a prioritization of profit over educational quality. In order to maximize profit margins, some institutions may, for instance, reduce expenditures on essential resources like qualified teachers and support

services (Shen et al., 2020). Particularly in underfunded regions where resources are already limited, this can have a negative impact on the quality of education that students receive. Additionally, according to Gray et al. (2015), the commercialization of education may result in the proliferation of for-profit educational institutions that may place shareholder interests ahead of the requirements of students and communities. The shift, as stated by Gard (2022), raises questions regarding accessibility, equity, and the fundamental purpose of education as a public good aimed at fostering critical thinking and citizenship (Nelson and Sadler, 2013).

vii. Technocratic Governance- In education, technocratic governance places an emphasis on data-driven decision making and places efficiency and productivity ahead of educators' professional judgment (Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). The formulation and implementation of educational policies will be significantly affected by this strategy. Making decisions based on data with efficiency and productivity as priorities. According to Thomas (2009), the increasing reliance on quantitative data to guide educational policies and practices is indicative of the rise of technocratic governance. Egbo (2011) reported that this trend reflects a belief that data can provide objective insights into student performance and institutional effectiveness. As a result, rather than qualitative assessments of student needs, curriculum, teaching methods, and resource allocation decisions are frequently based on numerical outcomes. According to Amakiri (2023), although data-driven approaches can provide useful insights, they can also result in an excessive focus on metrics that place efficiency ahead of meaningful educational experiences. According to Gray et al. (2015) and Mytle (2002), schools may, for instance, place an emphasis on raising students' test scores at the expense of developing their critical thinking, creative thinking, and emotional intelligence. This narrow focus can ultimately undermine the broader goals of education, which should include the development of well-rounded individuals (Bangs and Frost, 2012).

viii. Teachers' Expertise and Judgment Marginalized- According to Thomas, (2009) in a technocratic governance model, the expertise and judgment of teachers are often marginalized. Educators, who have firsthand experience with their students and the complexities of classroom dynamics, may find their insights undervalued in favor of data-driven metrics (Arong and Ogbadu, 2010). This can create a disconnect between policy decisions and the realities of teaching and learning. Yost, et al., (2000) opined that teachers can monitor and adapt to the changing needs of learners, however in a situation where teachers are sidelined in decision-making processes, they may feel disempowered and disengaged from their roles, leading to increased frustration and potential burnout (McMeniman, et al., 2003). Additionally, educators may not have the opportunity to share their expertise or contribute to the creation of policies that truly reflect their students' needs because of this marginalization (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Batt, 2022).

ix. Neoliberalism and Privatization- Neoliberalism and privatization have become dominant forces in shaping contemporary educational landscapes. These ideologies advocate for market-based approaches to education, emphasizing competition, individual choice, and reduced public investment (Thomas, 2009; Gray et al., 2015).

x. **Charter Schools and Voucher Programs-** Two prominent examples of neoliberal policies that aim to privatize education are charter schools and voucher programs. According to Thomas (2009), charter schools operate independently of traditional public school systems and frequently offer greater curriculum and governance flexibility. Critics of charter schools contend that they have the potential to divert resources from public schools and exacerbate inequality (Egbo, 2011; Gray et al., 2015), whereas advocates of charter schools assert that they foster innovation and accountability. This shift toward privatization is further exemplified by voucher programs, which provide public funding for students to attend private schools. Sanfo and Malgoubri, (2023) opined that these programs are often marketed as a means to increase educational choice; however, they can lead to the erosion of public school funding and diminish the quality of education available to students who remain in public systems (Morrison, 2011; Nelson and Sadler, 2013).

xi. **Increased Competition and Decreased Public Investment in Education-** The emphasis on competition inherent in neoliberal policies can result in a race to the bottom for public schools, as they strive to compete with privately funded alternatives. A focus on short-term outcomes, like test scores, rather than long-term educational quality and student development may result from this competition. Sanfo and Malgoubri (2023) reported that decreased public investment in education often accompanies these neoliberal reforms, leading to underfunded public schools that struggle to provide essential resources and support. As public schools face budget cuts and resource constraints, the disparity between affluent and under-resourced schools can widen, exacerbating existing inequalities within the education system (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). The commodification of education, technocratic governance, and the influence of neoliberalism and privatization represent significant challenges in contemporary educational policy and practice. Thomas (2009) reported that these trends can lead to a focus on efficiency and profit at the expense of quality education, marginalizing the voices of educators and ultimately affecting student outcomes. Addressing these issues requires a reevaluation of the fundamental values that underpin education and a commitment to prioritizing equity, access, and the holistic development of all students (Obizue, 2020; Gard, 2022).

CONSTRAINTS TO VALUING TEACHERS VOICES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION:

Despite the clear benefits of valuing teacher voices, several challenges persist. They includes-

- **Institutional Barriers-** Many educational institutions have hierarchical structures that limit teacher participation in decision-making (Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). Policies may be formulated at the administrative level without adequate consultation with teachers, leading to a top-down approach that undermines collaboration (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Affin, 2021).

- **Professional Development-** Teachers often lack the professional development opportunities necessary to engage meaningfully in policy discussions (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). Without training in advocacy, negotiation, and policy analysis, teachers may feel ill-equipped to contribute their perspectives effectively (Bangs and Frost, 2012).

- **Time Constraints-** The demands of teaching often leave little room for teachers to engage in policy discussions or advocacy efforts (Gray et al., 2015; Mytle, 2021). Finding time to voice concerns or participate in collaborative efforts can be challenging amidst the pressures of curriculum delivery, grading and administrative duties (Khan, 2020; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023).

EFFECTS OF DEVALUING TEACHERS VOICES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION:

According to Jackson (2020), the devaluation of teachers' voices in educational settings in Nigeria can have profound and far-reaching consequences. When educators feel that their insights and expertise are overlooked or marginalized, it not only impacts their professional experience, but also affects the broader educational landscape.

i.   Demotivation and Attrition- One of the most immediate consequences of devaluing teacher voices is demotivation. When teachers perceive that their opinions and experiences are not valued in decision-making processes, it can lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment (Morrison, 2011). This emotional toll often manifests in decreased job satisfaction, as educators may feel that their efforts to contribute meaningfully to their students and schools are being ignored. As demotivation sets in, attrition rates among teachers may rise. Gard(2022) opined that high turnover can create instability within schools, disrupting student learning and continuity. Experienced educators may leave the profession, taking with them valuable knowledge and skills that are difficult to replace. The loss of seasoned teachers can hinder the development of mentorship opportunities for newer educators, further exacerbating challenges within the educational system (Thomas, 2009; Gray et al., 2015).

ii. Ineffective Policy and Reforms- Educational reforms and policies may become disconnected from classroom realities when teacher voices are devalued (Hoang, 2022). Policymakers who do not consult educators may implement initiatives that fail to address the actual needs of students or the complexities of teaching. This disconnect can result in ineffective policies that do not lead to meaningful improvements in student outcomes. According to Thomas (2009), top-down reforms without teachers' input may prioritize standardized testing or accountability measures that ignore students' diverse needs. As a result, educational reforms may be perceived as burdensome rather than beneficial, leading to resistance from educators and a lack of buy-in from those who are expected to implement these changes (Nwosu, 2016; Jackson, 2020).

iii. Disconnection from Community- According to Gray et al. (2015), devaluing teacher voices can also lead to a disconnect between schools and the communities in which they are located. Due to their knowledge of their students' cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, teachers frequently play an important role as neighborhood stakeholders. Schools may miss opportunities to effectively engage with families and community members if their voices are ignored. Batt (2022) stated that this disconnection can hinder collaborative efforts to address educational challenges and limit the resources available to support students. Schools that do not actively engage with their communities may have difficulty establishing trust and forming partnerships, which will ultimately have an effect on the success and well-being of students (Thomas, 2009; Mytle, 2021)

iv. Loss of Teacher Expertise and Professionalism- When teacher voices are devalued, their roles are often reduced to that of implementers of standardized curricula. This shift has several implications for the professionalism and expertise of educators.

v.   Reduction in Teachers Implementation of Standardized Curricula- Teachers are frequently expected to strictly adhere to prescribed curricula in an atmosphere characterized by standardized testing and uniformity. According to Bangs and Frost (2012), this method reduces their capacity for creative lesson planning and instruction and professional judgment. Jackson (2020) stated that as a result, educators may find themselves teaching "to the test," prioritizing rote memorization and standardized content over fostering deep understanding and critical engagement among students. Thomas, (2009) opined that the reduction of teachers to mere

implementers of standardized curricula undermines their professional identity, as they are no longer seen as knowledgeable practitioners who can tailor their teaching to meet the unique needs of their students. According to Nelson and Sadler (2013) and Gray et al. (2015), educators may experience a decrease in job satisfaction as a result of this shift, as they may believe that their expertise is being wasted and that their passion for teaching is being suppressed.

vi. Decreased Autonomy and Decision-Making Power- According to Gray et al. (2015), devaluing teachers' voices frequently results in less autonomy and decision-making power in educational settings. Teachers have little control over their professional practice when they are left out of discussions about curriculum design, assessment methods, and school policies (Hoang, 2022). Teachers' ability to adapt their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students may be hindered by this lack of autonomy. Autonomy allows educators to respond dynamically to classroom situations, modify lessons based on real-time feedback, and incorporate students' interests and cultural backgrounds into their teaching. According to Nelson and Sadler (2013), teachers' ability to create engaging and relevant learning experiences may be hindered without this flexibility, reducing their effectiveness in the classroom (Thomas, 2009; Jackson, 2020).

vii. Undermining of Education's Democratic Potential-Education has long been viewed as a cornerstone of democracy, with the potential to foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and informed citizenship (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). However, the devaluation of teacher voices can undermine this critical role in several ways.Education's Role in Fostering(Jackson, 2020; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023)

viii. Critical Thinking and Citizenship Diminished- The educational experience can become overly focused on standardized content and assessments when teachers are unable to voice their opinions or influence curriculum (Jackson, 2020). According to Gray et al. (2015), this narrow focus can limit students' opportunities to engage in critical thinking, discussion, and debate—essential components of a democratic education. Thomas (2009) reported that lack of emphasis on fostering critical thinking skills can result in students who are less equipped to analyze information, question assumptions, and engage thoughtfully with societal issues (Farrell, 2012). According to Nelson and Sadler (2013), education may not be able to accomplish its goal of educating citizens who are well-informed and engaged and who can make meaningful contributions to democratic processes.

IMPACTS OF DEVALUING TEACHERS' VOICES ON STUDENTS LEARNING OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA:

The consequences of devaluing teacher voices extend beyond educators, significantly impacting students and their educational experiences.

i. Limited Educational Experience- The reliance on standardized curricula often leads to a one-size-fits-all approach to education that can stifle student creativity and critical thinking (Thomas, 2009; Nelson and Sadler, 2013). When teachers are bound to teach specific content in predetermined ways, they may have limited opportunities to explore topics in depth or employ innovative teaching methods that encourage exploration and inquiry. Farrell (2012) stated that as a result of the above, students may miss out on valuable learning experiences that promote creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration (Thomas, 2009). A limited educational experience can hinder students' ability to think critically and adapt to new situations skills that are increasingly important in a rapidly changing world (Gray et al., 2015).

ii.   Teachers' Ability to Adapt to Student Needs Constrained- Morrison (2011) stated that the devaluation of teachers' voices constrains their ability to adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. Famade, (2012) reported that effective teaching requires an understanding of individual learning styles, interests, and cultural backgrounds. Egbo (2011) added that when teachers are restricted by standardized curricula, they may be unable to provide personalized support or modify lessons to address the specific challenges faced by their students (Thomas, 2009). This lack of adaptability can lead to disengagement among students who do not see their needs reflected in the curriculum. Gray et al., (2015) was of the opinion that when students feel that their unique perspectives and experiences are ignored, their motivation to learn may diminish, further impacting their educational outcomes (Affin, 2021).

iii.   Increased Inequality- Sanfo and Malgoubri, (2023) stated that the devaluation of teachers voices can contribute to the reinforcement of existing social and economic disparities within the education system. Nelson and Sadler, (2013) stated that when decision-making is centralized and teacher input is disregarded, schools may implement policies that do not account for the diverse realities of their student populations. Morrison (2011) opined that as a result, educational inequities may be exacerbated, particularly for marginalized communities. Schools serving low-income or diverse populations may struggle to provide the resources and support necessary to address the unique challenges faced by their students, further entrenching systemic inequalities (Famade, 2012; Gray et al., 2015).

iv.   Teachers' Expertise Essential for Addressing Inequities Marginalized- Teachers possess invaluable expertise and insights into the challenges faced by their students and communities. By devaluing their voices, educational systems may overlook critical strategies for addressing inequities and promoting inclusive practices (Egbo, 2011). When teachers are not included in discussions about equity and social justice in education, their ability to advocate for necessary changes is severely limited (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). This marginalization can lead to policies that fail to address the root causes of educational disparities, perpetuating cycles of inequality and limiting opportunities for all students (Thomas, 2009). The consequences of devaluing teacher voices are profound, affecting not only educators but also students and the overall educational landscape. The loss of teacher expertise and professionalism, along with the undermining of education's democratic potential, can lead to limited educational experiences, increased inequality, and a disconnection from the community (Gray et al., 2015). To create a more equitable and effective educational system, it is essential to prioritize teacher voices, empower educators, and foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity (Bangs and Frost, 2012). Egbo (2011) added that by doing so, we can ensure that education fulfills its vital role in promoting critical thinking, civic engagement, and social justice for all students (Jackson, 2020; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023).

THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUING TEACHERS VOICESIN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM:
Some of the importance of valuing teachers' voices includes but not limited to the following

i.   Enhancing Educational Outcomes- Research consistently shows that teacher effectiveness is one of the most significant factors influencing student achievement. Sanfo and Malgoubri, (2023) reported that by valuing and incorporating teachers voices, educational policies can be more closely aligned with the needs and realities of the classroom (Nelson and Sadler, 2013). Teachers possess firsthand knowledge of their students' diverse learning needs, classroom dynamics, and effective pedagogical strategies (Shen et al., 2020). When teachers are involved

in decision-making, they can contribute insights that lead to more tailored and effective educational practices (Gray et al., 2015; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023).

ii.   Promoting Teacher Well-Being and Retention- The teaching profession is often characterized by high levels of stress and burnout. Teachers who feel their voices are heard and valued are more likely to experience job satisfaction and commitment to their profession. Hoang (2022) stated that a new social contract that prioritizes teacher input can foster a culture of collaboration and respect, ultimately leading to improve dretentionrates. Shen et al., (2020) emphases that by addressing the concerns and needs of teachers, educational institutions can create a more supportive environment that encourages educators to thrive (Gray et al., 2015).

iii.   Fostering Trust and Collaboration- Gard (2022) opined that valuing teachers' voices fosters a culture of trust and collaboration within educational institutions. When teachers are included in decision-making processes, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the outcomes of those decisions (Shen et al., 2020). This collaborative approach can lead to innovative solutions to complex educational challenges, as teachers bring diverse perspectives, experiences and opinions towards solving a given educational challenges (Bangs and Frost, 2012).

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHIN VALUING TEACHERS' VOICES IN NIGERIA:

Sanfo and Malgoubri, (2023) stated that for a sustainable new social contract for education in Nigeria,education stakeholders should prioritize building a collaborative culture of valuing teacher's insights, opinions and wellbeing, bearing in mind the enormous contributions to the nation's educational growth and development.Morrison(2011) stated that this can be achieved by promoting a shared vision of education that includes teachers, administrators, policymakers and community members (Gray et al., 2015). Collaborative initiatives, such as teacher-led workshops, community forums, and joint research projects, can foster dialogue and mutual understanding among all stakeholders (Thomas, 2009).

PROSPECTS FOR A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:

To address the consequences of devaluing teacher voices, it is essential to rethink the social contract in education by centering the perspectives of teachers (Shen et al., 2020; Bieten beck et al., 2023). This approach involves recognizing the importance of teacher autonomy, participatory decision-making, community engagement, and ongoing professional development (Thomas, 2009; Hoang, 2022).

Framework for Integration: According to Obizue and Obizue (2021), the framework for integration is to establish a new social contract which incorporates and values teacher opinions and concerns. He further proposed a multi-faceted framework that includes:

i.**Inclusive Policy-Making**: Educational policies should be developed collaboratively, with structured opportunities for teacher input at all levels. This can involve regular consultations, focus groups, and representation on policy-making boards (Arong and Ogbadu, 2010).

ii. **Professional Development**: The government and other stakeholders should investing in professional development of teachers at all levels, with the requisite skills for they to perform optimally and engage in

advocacy and policy discussions is crucial (Tooley and Dixon, 2006). These trainings may include: ICT adoption in teaching and learning, project management negotiation; curriculum development; policies and its implementation (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Amakiri, 2023).

iii. **Supportive Structures**: Educational institutions should create supportive structures that facilitate teacher involvement, such as designated time for collaboration and advocacy efforts, as well as mentorship programs that empower teachers to take on leadership roles (Gray et al., 2015; Hoang, 2022).

iv. **Recognition and Valuation**- Establishing mechanisms for recognizing and valuing teacher contributions to policy-making can enhance morale and encourage participation (Akinbote, 2007;Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). Recognition is a morale boosting and a way of acknowledging and rewarding teachers, this can be in form of awards, public acknowledgment among other incentives (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Yost et al., 2000).

v. **Teacher Autonomy and Professionalism-** Promoting teacher autonomy is crucial for fostering a sense of professionalism and ownership among educators. Gray et al., (2015) was of the opinion that when teachers are empowered to make decisions about their teaching practices and curricula, they are more likely to invest in their work and feel a sense of pride in their contributions (Bangs and Frost, 2012). Autonomy allows educators to tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of their students, fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment. Sanfo and Magoubri, (20023) stated that recognizing teachers as professionals also means respecting their expertise and judgment. Farrell, (2012)added that by valuing their insights, schools can create a culture that encourages collaboration and innovation, ultimately benefiting students and the educational community as a whole (Morrison, 2011;Podolsky et al., 2016).

vi. **Participatory Decision-Making and School Governance-** Obizue, (2020), asserted that involving teachers in participatory decision-making processes is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. Bietenbeck et al., (2023) stated that when educators are invited to contribute to discussions about school policies, curricula, and reforms, they are more likely to feel valued and invested in the outcomes (Jackson, 2020; Gard, 2022). Participatory governance structures can take various forms, including teacher committees, councils, or collaborative leadership models. Nelson and Sadler(2013) stated that these mechanisms allow teachers to express their perspectives, share their experiences, and play an active role in shaping the direction of their schools. Such involvement not only empowers educators but also leads to more informed and effective decision-making (Morrison, 2011; Hoang, 2022).

vii. **Community Engagement and Partnerships-** Reconnecting schools with their communities is vital for fostering a supportive educational ecosystem. Thomas (2009) stated that by centering teacher voices, schools can better understand the needs and values of the families and community members they serve. This understanding can lead to more meaningful partnerships that enhance student learning and well-being (Gray et al., 2015). Engaging with the community can involve various initiatives, such as outreach programs, parent-teacher associations, and collaborative projects that bring families into the educational

process (Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). These partnerships can enrich the educational experience for students and create a sense of shared responsibility for their success (Affin, 2021; Hoang, 2022).

viii. **Ongoing Professional Development and Collaboration-** Shen et al., (2020) stated that investing in ongoing professional development is essential for ensuring that teacher's feel supported and equipped to meet the challenges of their profession. Professional development opportunities should prioritize collaboration and the sharing of best practices among educators, allowing them to learn from one another and grow together. Bangs and Frost (2012) stated that by fostering a culture of continuous learning, schools can help teachers stay current with educational research, instructional strategies, and emerging technologies (Hoang, 2022). Collaborative professional development can also provide teachers with the tools and resources they need to advocate for their voices and contribute meaningfully to their school the consequences of devaluing teacher voices are significant and far-reaching, impacting teacher morale, educational policy, and community engagement (Thomas, 2009; Sanfo and Malgoubri, 2023). Rethinking the social contract in education by centering teachers voices can lead to a more equitable and effective educational system's in Nigeria in the 21st century (Famade, 2012; Farrell, 2012; Hoang, 2022). Shen et al., (2020) reported that by promoting teacher autonomy, participatory decision-making, community engagement, and ongoing professional development, we can create an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute to the success of their students and schools (Morrison, 2011; Nelson and Sadler, 2013). The prioritizing of teachers voiceswill not only benefits educators but also enhances the overall quality of education for all stakeholders in the sub-sector (Khan, 2020).

CONCLUSION:

Valuing teachers' voices is not merely an ideal; it is a necessity for effective advancement of educational practices, policies and implementation. By recognizing the expertise and insights of teachers, we can create a more equitable and effective educational system that benefits all stakeholders. The establishment of a new social contract for education, grounded in collaboration and respect for teachers' voices, insights and contributions has the potential to transform Nigeria's educational landscapes and improve outcomes for students, teachers, and communities alike. It is time to listen to and empower those who are at the heart of education the "teachers".

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The researcher hereby recommend that Nigeria educational system stands to gain a lot both in its growth, quality and development; increased access and effectiveness, if they adopt and implement these strategies highlighted in this studies with regards to valuing teachers' voices in all aspects of educational policy making, curriculum development, pedagogies and their overall implementations. All educational stakeholders in Nigeria should incorporate teachers' insights and concerns in all their policies and frameworks in the 21st century.

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