

Addressing the Rising Cases of Victimization of Nigerian Teachers by Parents and Guardians

¹Simeon A. Dosunmu (Prof)

simipure@yahoo.com

¹Olasunkanmi I. Ashiru, Ph.D

¹*Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling Psychology
Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos*

Philip N. Honawon

*Department of Sports and Human Kinetics
Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos*

Abstract

In recent years, Nigerian classrooms have become contested spaces where teachers, the trusted torchbearers of truth, are increasingly subjected to assault, abuse, and abandonment by parents and guardians. The problem is compounded by an absence of protective laws, the procedural paralysis of teacher unions and a public bias that instinctively sides with parents, even when evidence points to teacher victimization. The purpose of this article is to explore the sociocultural and institutional roots of teacher victimization, and to portray the patterns and perils of this rising phenomenon. Theoretical framing drew upon Galtung's structural violence, Bourdieu's symbolic power and Marxian conflict theory are used to illuminate both overt and covert forms of victimization. The paper holds, based on reviewed literature, that teacher victimization is rising and multi-faceted; Nigeria lacks statutory protection for educators; public sympathy skews toward parents; teacher unions are largely ineffective; and that comparative models from other African countries demonstrate viable legal remedies. It concludes that the minds that mould should not be marred by menace. The paper recommends, among others, the enactment of The Teacher Protection and Respect Act to give legal protection to teachers.

Keywords: teacher victimization, union inefficacy, parental aggression, structural violence, pedagogical dignity

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a disturbing surge in the victimization of teachers by parents and guardians. What once was a revered profession is now subjected to ridicule,

verbal assaults, social media shaming and in extreme cases physical harm. All these are perpetrated by those who are meant to be partners in the educational journey. While the school environment is expected to model discipline, dialogue and development, it is becoming a theater of tension where teachers are increasingly under siege. Those who should be revered are routinely ridiculed, and those who should be protected are persistently persecuted. Across classrooms and communities, incidents of parental intrusion, intimidation and outright assault have multiplied, mutating from isolated infractions into patterned practices. When emotion eclipses evidence and sympathy silences sanity, the school, once a sanctuary, becomes a stage for spectacle. This paper argues that the victimization of teachers is not accidental but structural, symbolic and systematic; a product of weak laws, wavering institutions and warped public perceptions. It therefore proceeds not as an empirical report but as a position paper: persuasive in purpose, principled in posture and policy -driven in prescription.

Plague of teacher victimization: A growing concern in Nigeria

Teacher victimization is no longer episodic; it is endemic, escalating and emboldened. Evidence from media reports and professional testimonies point to a pattern where aggression is preferred. First, there are cases of parental intrusion, where anger overrides order. In Lagos State for example, a parent stormed Rosebud School in Idimu and assaulted a female teacher over disciplinary issue action, an incident amplified on social media, with outrage diffused but accountability diluted. No strong punitive measures followed. Second, there are cases of calculated retaliation where rule enforcement invites reprisal. In Ondo State, a vice-principal was attacked after confiscating a student's phone during public examination. Discipline was met not with dialogue but with violence (Olawale, 2022). Third, there are instances of collective complicity, where extended families or community actors mobilize against teachers. In such instances, the classroom is overrun by communal pressure and professional boundaries are breached with impunity (Ugwoke & Eya, 2021).

Causes of teachers' victimization in Nigeria

The drivers of this phenomenon are interlocking: structural weakness, symbolic subjugation and cultural contradiction.

1. Structural weakness: The law's long silence

Nigeria lacks explicit statutes criminalizing parental assault or defamation of teachers. Where frameworks exist, they are vague, weakly enforced or procedurally sluggish. This legal lacuna leaves teachers exposed, embattled and easily expendable (Ofoegbu, 2021).

2. Symbolic subjugation: Power plays and public postures

Drawing on Bourdieu (1991), parents, especially those with social capital, wield symbolic power to delegitimize teachers. Through threats, transfers and trending tags, they convert influence into intimidation. Digital defamation has become a modern cudgel - swift, viral and vicious (Oduolowu & Lawal, 2022).

3. Cultural contradiction: Discipline desired, disciplinarians denounced
Nigerians' ambivalent stance on discipline produces a paradox: society endorses firmness but condemns its application. Corporal correction is culturally normalized, yet teachers who enforce standards are swiftly scapegoated (Afolayan & Aderibigbe, 2023). The attendant consequence is that many teachers are petrified to enforce rules or uphold standards; thereby weakening classroom management and learning outcomes.

Theoretical and conceptual illumination of the plague

To fully fathom the roots, reach and determine repercussions of teacher victimization in Nigeria, it is crucial to scan the scholarly scene, sift through sociological scripts and synthesize structural insights. A literature review in the study of nature is not merely academic housekeeping. Rather, it is getting compass that charts where consensus converges, where controversy brews and where clarity is not clouded. By exploring theoretical threads, empirical echoes and contextual concerns, the silent systems and struggles that embolden parental overreach and embattled teacher authority are illuminated. It is through this scholarly scaffolding that a bolder, better-informed advocacy for legal reform, institutional fortification and societal reawakening could be built. Sociological theory argues that when institutional inertia intersects with individual ire, teachers become targets. Lagos study shows that exposure to violent media, verbal vitrol and vengeful rumours fuels aggression not only among students but also within adult guardians, thus seeding school-based violence. Pockets of Sociological theories are hereby considered in relation to teachers' victimization:

a) Structural violence and the schooling space: Galtung (1990) theory of structural violence elucidates how systemic inequalities manifest in underfunded schools, overcrowded classrooms and administrative apathy. These create fertile grounds for teacher victimization. Ugwoke and Eya (2021), describe Nigeria's public schools as 'toxic terrains' where teachers operate amid fear, frustration and fragile authority.

b) Boundaries symbolic power and parental policing: Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence explains how parental power, amplified by social status, political connections and digital platforms delegitimizes teacher authority. Oduolowu and Lawal (2022) highlight cases where parents, emboldened by socio-political privilege, override disciplinary processes, thereby reinforcing teacher vulnerability.

c) Conflict theory (The classroom as a context): Marxian Conflict theory frames schools as sites of struggle where power dynamics manifest between teachers, students

and parents. Obioma and Ugwuanyi (2020) document rising incidents of parental aggression, noting that unregulated parental interventions disrupt discipline and erode professional respect for educators.

d) Cultural coercion and corporal contradictions: Afolayan and Aderibigbe (2023) opine that Nigeria's enduring culture of corporal punishment, paradoxically justifies harsh discipline while provoking punitive backlash against educators. Teachers are trapped in a triangle of tradition, tasked with enforcing discipline yet, targeted for perceived excesses. Teachers are tasked to train, tied to tradition, targeted for toughness.

e) Union ineffectiveness and procedural paralysis: The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), ideally a bulwark against such injustices, has become disappointingly silent. Many members report that the union's priorities are largely focused on dues collection and ceremonial functions. When teachers are victimized, few tangible interventions follow – no legal support, no media defense, no political mobilization. This silence emboldens aggressors and worsens teacher morale. Olawale (2022) and Adesina (2024) critique the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) as structurally weak, reactionary and disconnected from the daily realities of teacher victimization. Teachers remain dues-paying members of a union perceived as passive and procedurally paralyzed.

Comparative perspective of the ugly scenario

Priya et al. (2017) demonstrate how Teacher Professionalism Bill and South Africa's Employment of Educators Act provide legislative shields for educators. Nigeria's absence of comparable protections renders teachers exposed, endangered and institutionally unprotected. From helplessness to hope means forging a framework to shield, support and strengthen Nigerian teachers. Failure to legislate is to license the violence, failure to speak is to sanctify the silence, and failure to protect the teacher is to sabotage the learner. Therefore, this paper argues not merely for empathy but for enforceable equity, not just public sympathy but protective status and not only union speeches but institutional safeguards that position the teacher as a protected professional, not a punching bag. When teachers are assaulted, public outrage typically centres on perceived “justice for the child”, an emotional reflex that sidelines facts. Parental assaults undermine discipline and spoil children, suggesting parents' war on teachers ultimately.

Impact on education quality and teacher well-being

When teachers tremble, classrooms crumble. When educators are engendered, education is extinguished. Fear breeds hesitation which in turn hollows instruction. Teachers become risk-averse, reluctant to enforce rules or maintain standards, leading to discipline decay and learning decline (UNESCO, 2023). According to Nwafor (2020), victimization exacts a toll of anxiety, anger and attrition. Burnout rises, morale wanes, and commitment

weakens. Authority diluted becomes authority denied. Schools struggle to uphold codes of conduct when external actors override internal processes. The result is chaos over coherence, conflict over collaboration.

Summary of points of concern

Based on literature reviewed and comparative analysis in this study, the authors hold that:

1. Teacher victimization is rising: Physical assaults, verbal abuse and online defamation by parents are becoming more frequent with media reports indicating incidents across multiple states (Ondo, Lagos, Enugu, and so on).
2. Legal protection is absent: There is no specific Nigerian law that criminalizes or sanctions parental aggression against teachers.
3. Public sympathy skews towards parents: Even when teachers are clearly victimized, public sentiment often favours parents, driven by emotional allegiance to the child.
4. Teacher unions are ineffective: Bodies like Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) are largely reactive, ceremonial and focused on dues collection rather than active protection and legal defence of their members.
5. Comparative models exist: Ghana and South Africa have enacted teacher protection laws that Nigeria can adapt to its context.

Conclusion

A nation that humiliates its teachers cannot raise honourable citizens. Teachers are not punching bags for aggrieved parents or scapegoats for a failing system (OECD, 2020). Protecting teachers is not merely about profession, it is about preserving pedagogical dignity, institutional order and societal sanity. Nigeria must rise to the occasion, legislate firmly and re-frame public consciousness. The hands that teach must not be the ones harmed.

Recommendations

To restore sanity to the education sector, Nigeria must urgently legislate teacher protection laws that criminalize physical or verbal assault on teachers by parents, repudiate defamatory publications or social media attacks on teachers and frown at slightest intimidation or interference with teachers' professional duties. Teachers, like doctors or law enforcement officers, deserve professional immunity zones where due process, not mob justice prevails. To enact enforceable legal, institutional and cultural mechanisms that protect Nigerian teachers from parental victimization, whether verbal, physical, digital or reputational, the following steps should be taken. Such legal process should provide legal

redress, establish clear protocols for handling disputes and prescribe sanctions for offenders (fines, community service and restraining orders).

A) Legislative advocacy: Enabling the "The Teacher Protection and Respect Act (TPRA)

i. The TPRA should criminalize any form of assault, intimidation, slander or online defamation of registered teachers in the line of duty. The law must be binding at both state and federal levels to protect teachers across public and private institutions.

ii. Legal provision to include Teacher Immunity Zones, which should emphasize that no teacher should be beaten within the classroom, no matter what happened; especially in the presence of students.

iii. The Act should make provision for a fast-track litigation routes; for instance a 30-day court resolution windows for teacher-related victimization.

iv. There should also be restitution for reputational damage, including compensation clauses for verified slander or assault.

v. The Act should provide for minimum sentencing guidelines, including fines, probation or community service for offenders.

B) Institutional mechanisms: Establishing "School Protection Panels (SPPs)"

Each school cluster should have a functional protection panel comprising a school representative (Headteacher or Principal), PTA representative, local education authority officer, legal advisor or NGO monitor and a union representative. Their functions will be to mediate disputes before they elevate, document grievances for legal purposes, provide safe channels for whistle-blowing or anonymous reporting and issue public reports quarterly to create transparency. When stakeholders co-own accountability, the school becomes a space of dialogue not dramas, justice not jungle and collaboration not chaos.

C) Union reformation: Repositioning NUT and the teachers' professional bodies

Part of the union dues should be redirected towards Teacher Legal Aid Fund (TLAF), Emergency Response Hotlines (ERH), and Social Media Counter-narrative Teams (SMCT).

References

- Adesina, L. (2024). Unionism or uselessness? The paradox of Nigerian Teacher Associations. *African Journal of Policy and Advocacy*, 9(1), 12 – 29.
- Afolayan, T. & Aderibigbe, M. (2023). Corporal punishment, culture and contradiction in Nigerian schools. *Journal of African Pedagogy*, 12(2), 44 – 61.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violent. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291 – 305.
- Nwafor, C. E. (2020). School discipline and student behaviour in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 10(1), 45–58.

- OECD (2020). *Global teaching insights: Teacher professionalism and well-being*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Obioma, U. & Ugwanyi, C. (2020). School violence and parent-teacher relations in Enugu public schools. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 6(1), 75-89.
- Oduolowu, E. & Lawal, O. (2022). Digital defamation and teacher harassment in urban schools. *Journal of Media and Education*, 7(3), 55 – 70.
- Ofoegbu, F. (2021). Teacher motivation and retention in Nigerian schools. *International Journal of Educational Administration*, 13(2), 89–102.
- Olawale, S. (2022). Neglected and exposed: the union disconnect in teacher welfare. *Lagos Policy Review*, 14(1), 88 – 102.
- Ondo State vice -principal beaten for enforcing exam rules, June 1, 2025.
- Parent assaulted teacher at Rosebud School, Lagos. *Punch/Tribune*, October 24.
- Priya, M., Prassanth, M. & Peechattu, P. J. (2017). Reflective practices: A means to teacher development. *Asia Pacific Journal of Contemporary Education and Communication Technology (APJCECT)*, 3(1), 126-131.
- Ugwoke, S. C., & Eya, P. E. (2021). Structural violence in the Nigerian school system. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(4), 201 – 220.
- UNESCO (2023). *Global report on teachers: Addressing teacher shortages and professional status*. Paris: UNESCO.