

Gender and Occupational Tenure as Correlates of In-Service English Language Teachers' Interest in their Professional Development in Selected Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

*No educational system can rise above the quality of its teaching force. Teachers lacking in enthusiasm for professional development cannot be expected to perform their duties satisfactorily in the face of the myriad of challenges of and rapid changes in the characteristics of the 21st Century students. Among the factors found in literature to influence language teachers' interest in their professions are gender and occupational tenure. This study therefore investigated the relationship between each of the two selected variables (gender and occupational tenure) and the interest of the English Language teachers in Ibadan metropolis in pursuing professional development. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to get a total of one hundred and thirty-three teachers served with copies of a fifteen-item questionnaire titled **Teachers' Perception of Teaching** adapted from Faniran and Olatunji 2011. Frequency Counts, percentages and chi-square statistical tools were employed to analyse the data collected in testing the two null hypotheses formulated. Findings from this study have shown that though more of the male English Language teachers than their female counterparts have higher degrees, the former are less enthusiastic about professional development. Also, most of the teachers lose more interest in their jobs as they grew older in the profession.*

Keywords: *In-service, gender, professional development, occupational tenure, English language teachers.*

Introduction

The teaching profession has passed through various developmental stages and faced a myriad of challenges. As a result the centrality of teacher efficiency to the success of any educational enterprise, various factors that affect it have also been investigated. The Nigerian Federal Ministry of education acknowledges this truism by asserting that “no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers” (FRN, 2004:). The quality of teachers is also a product of factors such as training and motivation or interest.

Teachers must be well-versed in the subjects they teach (Porter-Magee, 2004). The Nigerian government, therefore, invests huge sums of money in teacher training programmes yearly. The minimum teaching qualification in Nigerian schools has been raised at different times in the history of the nation. Gone are the days when people with primary school leaving certificates were employed to teach in public schools. In 1998, the Teachers’ Grade Two Certificate that had been the minimum teaching qualification was pronounced too low. The Nigeria Certificate in Education thus became the minimum professional requirement to teach in the country. The trend is fast moving towards making a university degree in education the least academic qualification into the teaching profession in the country. In fact, the elevation of colleges of education to university status with necessary system upgrade has become a government intention being discussed in the public space. In fact the former Tai Solarin College of Education at Ijegan in Ogun State has been transformed into Tai Solarin University of Education. The employment of graduates in different disciplines other than teacher training institutions to teach in government schools has been stopped while those already in the service are encouraged to acquire teacher training certificates before a stipulated deadline or face retrenchment. All these are some of the steps being taken to ensure proper training of the teaching force in the country.

One may then reasonably wonder why the blame of poor performance of students in school subjects, English Language inclusive and even especially, is often fully or partially laid on teachers in spite of their training. After all, a typical English Language teacher must have undergone rigorous training in the theories, psychology, philosophy, arts,

science as well as practice of teaching (Faniran and Olatunji, 2011). Is incompetence responsible for the language teachers' failure to produce the expected rate of language proficiency in their students? If they are incompetent, where is the place of the training spanning a minimum of three (NCE) or four year (Degree)? Could laziness be responsible for such incompetence or failure to deploy their teaching expertise in discharging their pedagogic duties? What could be the cause(s) of laziness?

Faniran and Olatunji (2011) found pre-service English Language teachers in colleges of education guilty of low level of interest in the teaching profession, the subject they are being trained to teach as well as the students they are to teach. This finding serves as a plausible explanation for the discrepancies between the teachers' rigorous training and their low degree of pedagogic results portrayed by students' perennial mass failure in the English Language.

Gender and the Teaching Profession

Teaching has been often seen as a profession for the feminine gender (Drudy, 2008). In fact, ancient textbooks used the feminine pronoun "she" in place of the word "teacher". Riddell, Tett, Ducklin, Stafford, Winterton, Burns (2005) describe teaching as a highly gendered profession, both historically and currently. Moors (2010) observes from literature that over a period of one hundred years, women have dominated the teaching profession at the primary school level. According to Milligan, Ashenden and Quin (1994:2), "schooling is and always has been a heavily feminised industry". They further report the finding that in Australia, women made up 73 percent of the people who completed tertiary qualifications in education, and the vast majority of these people seek entry as beginning teachers in 1990, and thus conclude that the trend of feminization of the school workforce is most likely to continue for a long time. It has been found from literature and research that women constitute the large majority of teachers in primary and lower secondary education in all European countries, with the exception of only Turkey. It is thus safe to conclude that Nigeria's status as a former British colony may have to some extent influenced the country's teaching force to be highly feminized in imitation of its former colonial masters.

Among the findings from a study conducted by Wood (2012) are that elementary teachers perceive differences between female and male teachers, male elementary teachers are perceived more negatively than female colleagues, thus adding to the literature showing relationship between gender and the teaching profession. In a study by Sharbain and Tan (2013) on 50 male and 50 female newly appointed teachers at United Nations Relief and Works Agency and Ministry of Education in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, there were significant differences at $p < .01$ in English Language Teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession between male and female teachers. Female English Language teachers seemed to have more positive attitudes towards teaching than their male counterparts. The gender variable had a large-sized effect on the teachers' attitudes.

It can thus be reasonably assumed that the females in the teaching profession would be better disposed to the profession than their male counterparts.

Gender and Language Flair

Ifegbesan (2010) observes that females are portrayed as more verbally expressive than males in extant literature. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) observe dramatic differences in the manners that children perform gender with their voices. According to them, children begin to exhibit differences in the fundamental frequencies in their speaking voice as early as age four. Soori and Zamani (2012), however found from a study of 20 male and 20 female students from Islamic Azad University Larestan branch that Most language features were used equally by male and female writers, but admit that there were some gender-based differences. A study conducted by Lin and Wu (2003) on reveals that although the English Proficiency Test did not demonstrate much gender differences, further analyses identified and confirmed the presence of the bundle of listening comprehension obviously favouring females, and the bundles of grammar and vocabulary, favouring males slightly.

Farashaiyan and Hua's (2012) findings from a study of randomly selected 120 university students including 60 freshmen and 60 seniors majoring in English Translation from Bandar Abbas Azad University reveals

that female participants performed better in pragmatic and language proficiency tests. These differences are intensified by the adults' choices in interacting with either male or female children. This is clearly exemplified in the following excerpt from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:17)

People handle infants more gently when they believe them to be female, more playfully when they believe them to be male. And they talk to them differently. Parents use more diminutives (kitty, doggie) when speaking to girls than to boys (Gleason et al, 1994), they use more inner state words (happy, sad) when speaking girls (Ely et al. 1995). They use more direct prohibitives (don't do that!) and more emphatic prohibitives (no! no! no!) to boys than to girls (Berlinger and Gleason 1982). Perhaps, one might suggest, boys need more prohibitions because they tend to misbehave more than the girls.

However a study conducted on 132 male and Female Saudi tertiary level male and female students of English as a foreign language by Al-Shumaimeri (n.d.) reveals male students significantly outperforming their female counterparts in two types of English reading comprehension tests. A study by researchers from Northwestern University and the University of Haifa reveals that:

- i. the language-associated parts of the brain work harder in girls than in boys during language tasks;
- ii. boys and girls rely on different parts of the brain when performing language-related tasks; and
- iii. language processing is more sensory in boys and more abstract in girls. (*Science Daily, 2008*)

The implication of this difference, if it still persists till adulthood, is that a female teacher will be more detailed in explaining concepts under consideration than a male teacher as additional details may be considered excessive, unnecessary, and distracting by a male teacher. Thus different characteristics can be expected between a language class

facilitated by a man and that of a woman. Moors (2010) observes that men that teach in grammar schools and above opt for subjects like Geography, History, Computing Studies, Chemistry, Physics and Technical Education, whereas women dominate subjects such as Home Economics, English, Music, Biology and Art, and that the choices are dictated by societal expectations.

However, a study conducted by Sahragard, Baharloo and Soozandehfar (2011) on 151 female and male college students majoring in English Literature at Shiraz University reveals no significant difference in language proficiency between the male and female participants. Another study carried out on 278 male and female Iranians taking part in the Ph.D Entrance examination to Shiraz University by Razmjoo (2008) shows no significant difference in language proficiency and other types of intelligences.

Occupational Tenure and Efficiency of English Language Teachers

Teaching experience is generally seen as a factor of the number of years that one has invested into the teaching profession. Lyn, Cao and Horn (1996) also suggest “occupational tenure” or “professional tenure” as more apt terms for it. Findings in literature concerning the impact of teachers’ occupational tenure on teacher efficiency are inconclusive. Some studies show that the shorter the occupational tenure the more enthusiastic, effective and efficient teachers are (Ilomaki, 2007; Mumcu and Usluel, 2010). Ferrero’s (2003) observation from an empirical study is that some teachers with long term occupational tenure become too unenthusiastic about learning the new tricks required for new innovations in their fields.

However, another study conducted on 1167 Australian teachers in Year 2008 shows greater competence and enthusiasm in teachers with longer occupational tenure than those with shorter occupational tenure. Dahar, Dahar, Dahar, and Faize’ s (2011) finding is that teachers’ command on their subjects increases with increase in teaching experience. But Darus and Luin’s (2008) investigation on Malaysian teachers of English language reveals that 77.8% of the younger teachers had positive attitude to innovative teaching facilities and techniques while only 11.1% of the older did same.

The foregoing shows that findings on the relationship between occupational tenure and interest in development of higher skills in language teaching are still inconclusive. Thus the current study thus seeks to investigate the relationship between the occupational tenures of English Language teachers in Ibadan metropolis and their willingness to pursue increased pedagogic competence.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed for the study. The first stage took the form of purposive sampling of the five local government areas that constitute Ibadan metropolis because of the logic that they are the places where best practices and almost adequate school staffing. At the second stage, ten secondary schools were randomly sampled from each local government area to make fifty schools. At the third stage, all English Language teachers that agreed to respond to the questionnaire items were used. A total of one hundred and thirty-three teachers were served with copies of the questionnaire in all. One hundred and twenty-seven of the distributed copies of questionnaire were eventually retrieved and used for data analysis.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire titled **Teachers' Perception of Teaching** by Faniran and Olatunji 2011 was adapted for the study. Eleven out of the fifteen items of the questionnaire were used verbatim or in modified forms and three others were added. Thirty of copies of the instrument were administered to English Language teachers of other secondary schools not included in the study sample. The resultant validation yielded 94.6 cronbach alpha.

Administration of Instrument

Copies of the instrument were administered personally by the researcher in each of the sampled schools. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected immediately in most cases to avoid loss. There, however, were instances when the researcher had to go back later to collect the completed copies as the concerned respondents were busy at the time of being served.

Analysis of Data

Frequency Counts, percentages and chi-square statistical tools were employed to analyse the data collected in testing the two null hypotheses formulated.

Findings and Discussion

Table I: Description of the Respondents according to Genders and Academic Qualifications

Sex	Qualification		Total
	First Degree	Postgraduate Degrees	
Male	35(66.04%)	18(33.96%)	53(100%)
Female	67(90.54%)	7(9.46%)	74 (100%)
Total	102	25	127(100%)

Table I shows that the random sample comprised more female than male English Language teachers, and indication that females dominate the actual population of the English Language teaching force. However, while 33.96% of the males possess postgraduate degrees, only 9.46% of the females have same. This is indicative of the fact that the society expects more in terms of career advancement and the attendant increase in economic power. The heavy domestic responsibilities with which women are saddled could also prevent them from pursuing career advancement.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between in-service English Language teachers' genders and their interest in professional development gender.

Table 2: Relationship between In-service Teacher's Genders and their Interest in Professional Development

Variable		r-cal	Sig	Decision rule
Gender	Male	0.247	0.74	NS
	Female	0.353	0.002	S
Total		0.306	0.000	S

From Table 2 above, the r-cal that shows the relationship between male and female in-service teachers professional development is significant because the p-value obtained is less than 0.05 level of significance. However, the r-cal of the female teachers is significant while, the male p-value was not significant at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, it could be concluded that there is a significant relationship between in-service teachers' interests in professional development based on their genders.

It is noteworthy that being a male has a relationship with the language teachers' interest in their profession, though not significant. This may have been caused by the fact that men, being the ones expected to shoulder financial responsibilities and also in need of the wherewithal to face a lot of social status challenges, are likely to be low on morale for continued development on this job that is generally believed to have little to offer. Most of them may just be "marking time" on the job while looking out for the next opportunity to opt for more socially rewarding jobs. But the overall finding that gender has a significant relationship with the in-service English Language teachers' interest in developing their professional skills has serious implications for policy making and implementation in the areas of training, recruitment, in-service training, remuneration, and so on.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between in-service English Language teachers' genders and their interest in professional development.

Table 3: Relationship between In-Service English Language Teachers' Occupational Tenure and their Interest in Professional Development

Variable		r-cal	Sig	Remarks
Occupational Tenure	Below 5years	0.447	0.083	NS
	6 - 15 years	0.242	0.051	NS
	16 -25 years	0.229	0.224	NS
	26 -35 years	0.497	0.059	NS
Total		0.288	0.001	S

Table 3 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between in-service teacher's interests in professional development based on their occupational tenure. However, below 5 years of experience is positively related but not significant; 6- 15 years of occupational tenure is positively related but not significant, 16-25 years of occupational tenure is positively related but not significant and 26-35 years of occupational tenure is positively related but not significant because their p-value (0.083, 0.051, 0.22, 0.059 respectively) were greater than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

The results show that whether a person has stayed long on the teaching job or not affects his or her interest in professional development on the job. The fact that those with less than five years of occupational tenure have the highest level of significance (0.083) indicates the truism of the saying, "New brooms sweep cleaner". Interest in professional wanes with increase in years spent on the job. This means there are phenomena that discourage the teachers as they continue to count years on the job. This may include unfulfilled dreams.

Conclusion

Findings from this study have shown that though more of the male English Language teachers than their female counterparts have higher degrees, the former are less enthusiastic about professional development. This means their interest in acquiring higher degrees is motivated by the hope to be qualified for better job opportunities that may spring up anytime but not for greater efficiency on their current job. This is an indication that most of the male teachers do not perceive

their jobs as being adequately rewarding to give them desired socio-economic status.

It has also been indicated that most of the teachers lose more interest in their jobs as they grew older in the profession. This is contrary to the finding of Ingersoll and Smith (2003) that teachers' minds get better settled for the teaching profession when they have invested more years into the profession than those who are novice teachers. But the finding from the current study corroborates Vidal-Ruga's (2006) assertion that teachers who are about to retire think it is too late to learn new tricks for more effective language teaching.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings from this study are the following recommendations:

1. No effort must be spared by Government in making teaching a highly rewarding profession so that teachers' interest in the profession may be sustained or even increased.
2. More research should be conducted into the influence of gender and occupational tenure on English Language teachers' interest in their professional development and productivity. This will provide invaluable information on how to help language teachers in keeping their passion for the profession aflame in spite of the peculiar challenges of their genders and various stages of occupational tenure.
3. The university faculties and other different institutions that offer pre-service and in-service training for English Language teachers need to include topics that can prepare students psychologically for sustained interest in their professional practice.

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