Primary School Teachers Perception of Impact of their Conditions of Service on Pupils' Academic Achievement

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Abstract

The study sought to determine how primary school teachers perceive the impact of their conditions of service on primary school pupils' achievement, as well as whether any significant gender and qualification-group differences existed in the teachers' perception. It made use of 240 practicing primary school teachers (110 males and 130 females) in 40 randomly selected primary schools in Ibadan who responded to a four-point likert-type 10-item questionnaire. Data analysis involved the use of frequency, percentages and chi-square statistics. The results indicated that a greater proportion of teachers share the view that poor working conditions are responsible for the woeful achievement of pupils at that level of education; while significant gender and qualification-group differences existed in the teachers' perception. These results underscore the need for improved working conditions of practising primary school teachers in Ibadan.

Introduction

Primary education is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 - 11 plus. The objectives of primary education are to: inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy; and ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking; provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity among others (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). In pursuance of these objectives the curriculum for primary education covers majority of the subjects that Nigerian children will be exposed to during future education. It is the foundation of the entire education system. In spite of the importance of this level of education, there are indications that Nigerian children at this level of education perform poorly (Olatunde, 2003; World Bank 2004; Universal Basic Education Commission, 2005). For instance, the Nigerian children at this level of education ranked the lowest in measuring learning achievement (MLA) study conducted in Sub-Saharan and North African countries by UNICEF in 2003 with national mean scores of 30 per cent compared with their counterparts from Tunisia who had the highest mean of 70 per cent followed by those from Mali with 50.8 per cent (World Bank, 2004).

Further, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) also conducted a national study in 2001 and 2003 in four core subjects (English Language, Mathematics, Primary Science and Social Studies) at primaries 4, 5, and 6 levels. The 2001 result revealed that only one out of five pupils was able to answer correctly more than 30 per cent of the test items while less than one per cent of the children who participated were able to answer correctly half of the test items. In addition, the 2003 result also showed the same trend with the mean score below 40 percent across the four subjects (World Bank, 2004). Such is the magnitude of the problem that the Universal Basic Education Commission organised a nationwide training of primary school teachers on primary school curriculum interpretation in 2008 in an attempt to address the problem of underachievement

by Nigerian children at this level of education.

Aside this measure, UNICEF went further to identify factors which may be causing this. The major contributing factors as identified by UNICEF Nigeria include poor classroom conditions, inadequate distribution of essential textbooks and other instructional materials as well as poor teacher preparation. The major areas of neglect in research in Nigeria appear to be that of teacher motivation, teacher education (upgrading and continuing professional development) and teacher support. Teacher preparation with respect to upgrading and continuing professional development needs to be seriously reconsidered. Such professional development programmes could be in form of on-the-job or in-service training where issues pertaining new trends in teaching and learning processes are discussed. Providing such could serve as a motivating factor to practicing teachers which could affect the way they carry out their duties.

Motivation is a psychological drive which has the characteristic of making an individual exhibit certain behaviours but not others. It can be considered a driving force that compels or reinforces an action toward a desired goal (Pritchard and Ashwod, 2008). In a typical work environment, such drive could be the desire for praise and approval, which motivates an employee to behave in a manner pleasing to the employer. Prominent works on motivation include those of Maslow's hierarchy of Needs (Eysenck, 2001) and Herzberg's two-factor theory (Riley, 2012). A summary of Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates that human beings have wants and desires which influence their behaviour. To buttress this, Herzberg concludes that certain factors in the workplace result in job satisfaction but if absent, they do not lead to dissatisfaction but low productivity. Employers who want their workers to perform optimally in the workplace should endeavour to meet the needs or demands of the employees. Studies have shown that motivated employees always look for better ways to do their jobs, are more quality oriented and more productive (Thomas, 2004; Tom, 2004).

Before this period, a number of studies in Nigeria have examined some teacher-related factors that influence learners' underachievement in Social Studies, English language, and primary science (Okwilagwe and Falaye, 2005, Odinko and Williams, 2006; Isiugo-Abanihe and Longjohn, 2005). However, these studies, in spite of their scope and perhaps depth, only examined the influence of such teacher factors as age, teaching style, locus of control and cognitive style at the secondary level of education. None of the studies provided any empirical evidence for any relationship between teachers' conditions of service and academic achievement of Nigerian children at this level in spite of the fact that workers' job satisfaction could influence their productivity (Herington, Van Yperan, 2003; Moosung, 2006), when most teachers in Nigerian primary schools seem not to be satisfied with their salary and other conditions of service (Anya and Okpala, 1997; Orekomaya, 2006).

Statement of Problem

This background emphasises the need to bring into focus research which examines teacher motivational factors (e.g. conditions of service) as part of the teacher factor that could influence academic achievement. The present study therefore was designed to assess teachers' perception of impact of their conditions of service on students' achievement in English language. More specifically, the study provided answers to the following questions:

1. How do primary school teachers perceive the impact of their conditions of service on pupil's achievement at the primary level?
2. Is there any gender-group difference in the teachers' perception?

3. Does the teachers' perception depend on their educational qualification?

Methodology

Subjects were 240 primary school teachers (110 males and 130 females) of primary school pupils in 40 randomly selected schools in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. From each selected school, 6 teachers (each representing each level - primaries 1 to 6 classes) were randomly selected. Their ages ranged from 26 to 54 years (mean=38.2; SD=3.4). A questionnaire developed by the investigator was used for the study. It consists of two sections: A and B. section A solicits for personal information on teachers: age, gender, educational qualification and number of years of teaching experience. The section B consists of 10 items on impact of teachers' conditions of service on pupils' achievement. These items were placed beside a four-point likert scale: strongly agree (SA) agree (A); Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) in which the teachers were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement or otherwise. An initial version of the instrument was examined by two lecturers in education who made modifications on some of the items. The final version also approved by two lecturers in pre-primary and primary education classes. It was administered to 30 practising primary teachers who had no problems responding to the questionnaire. The instrument was therefore considered to be valid. A re-administration of the questionnaire to the same three teachers after one week produced a test-retest reliability estimate that ranged from 0.81-0.93.

Data for the study were collected from the practising teachers directly by the investigator. Data collection lasted for two weeks. Data analysis (for research question1) involved the use of frequency counts and percentages. For research question 2 and 3, the chi-square statistics was used since the data collected were at the ordinal level.

Results and Discussion

Overall Picture of Teachers' Perception

Table 1 shows the general pattern of practicing primary school teacher perception of impact of their conditions of service on pupil's achievement at primary school level. The results show that more than 65% of the teachers strongly agreed/agreed to the items that primary school pupils do not exhibit the expected behaviours itemized in the objectives of setting up primary level of education because teachers: "are not motivated enough "(item 1); "are not well recognized in the society" (item 2); "are not granted study leave" (item 3); "do not have sponsorship for in-service training" (item 4); "do not have necessary teaching materials" (item 5); "salaries are not regularly paid" (item 6); "not have car and housing loans" (items 7); "leave allowance are not paid on time" (item 8); "promotions are delayed" (item 9); and "do not have annual prizes for teaching very effectively" (item 10).

Table 1: A General Pattern of Teachers' Perception

Item No.	Item Description	Response	
	The results of primary school pupils' achievement is usually woeful because Primary school:	**SA/A**	**D/SD**
1	Teachers are not motivated enough.	180 (75%)	60 (25%)
2	Teachers are not well recognized in society.	169 (70%)	71 (30%)
3	Teachers are not granted study leave.	210 (88%)	30 (12%)
4	Teachers do not have sponsorship for in-service training to enable them meet up with new trends in teaching.	181 (75%)	59 (25%)
5	Teachers do not have necessary teaching materials.	165 (69%)	75 (31%)

6	Teachers' salaries are not paid regularly.	180 (75%)	60 (25%)
7	Teachers do not have car and housing loans, travel and child allowances.	174 (73%)	66 (27%)
8	Teachers' leave allowances are not paid on time.	180 (75%)	60 (25%)
9	Teachers' promotions are delayed.	203 (85%)	37 (15%)
10	Prizes are not given to the best teachers of the year.	162 (69%)	78 (21%)

Group Differences in Teachers' Perception

A further analysis was carried out based on gender to ascertain which category of the teachers used could these levels of agreements be emanating from. Gender was used as a Grouping Factor: Male teachers were classified as group A while female teachers formed group B. There were significant gender group differences on two items only. As can be seen in Table 2, a greater proportion of female teachers, unlike the males, tended to share the views that primary school pupils are unable to exhibit the expected behaviours as outlined in the policy because "teachers are not motivated enough" (item 1), although the overall majority of male and female teachers (75%) agree to such a view.

Table 2: Gender-Group Differences in Teachers' Perception with Respect to Item 1

Item	Gender	SA/A	D/SD	Total	χ^2	**df**
1	A: Male	60	50	**110**		
	B: Female	120	10	**130**	**45.313**	**1**
	Total	**180**	**60**	**240**		

***Significant at the 0.05 level (non-directional)**

The item is statistically significant because by checking the χ^2 table for one degree of freedom at $\alpha = .05$ is 3.84. Thus, since χ^2 exceeds the critical value it is conclude that the proportions are significantly different. Under the conditions of this study, more females are of the view that primary school pupils fail because teachers are not motivated enough.

Table 3 also shows that a larger proportion of female teachers tended to express the views that pupils perform woefully at the primary level because "teachers do not have annual prizes for teaching very effectively" (item 10) while a larger proportion of the male teachers would be more likely to object to such a view.

Table 3: Gender group differences in teachers' perception with respect to item 10

Item	**Gender**	**SA/A**	**D/SD**	**Total**	χ^2	**df**
10	**A: Male**	43	67	110		
	B: Female	119	11	130	**74.72**	1
	Total	162	78	240		

***Significant at the 0.05 level (non-directional)**

Qualification as a Grouping Factor: Teachers who hold Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) which is the minimum qualification to enable one teach at this level were classified as group A while those who had first degree formed group B. There were significant qualification-group differences on two items (Items 4 and 8).

As can be seen in Table 4, a larger proportion of teachers who hold N.C.E degree (unlike the First degree holders) tended to share the view that pupils perform woefully in examinations at the primary level because "teachers do not have sponsorship for in-service training to enable them meet up with new trends in teaching (Item 4).

Table 4: Qualification group differences in teachers' perception with respect to item 4

Item	Qualification	SA/A	D/SD	Total	χ^2	df
4	**A: N.C.E**	153	25	178		
	B:First degree	28	34	62	**44.1**	1
	Total	**181**	**59**	**240**		

***Significant at the 0.05 level (non-directional)**

While in Table 5, a larger proportion of teachers who hold first degree (unlike the N.C.E degree holders) tended to share the view that students perform woefully at the primary level because "teachers' leave allowances are not paid on time" (item 8).

Table 5: Qualification-group differences in teachers' perception with respect to item 8

Item	Qualification	SA/A	D/DS	Total	χ^2	df
8	**A: NCE**	125	53	178		
	B: First degree	55	7	62	**19.52,**	1
	Total	**180**	**96**	**240**		

***Significant at the 0.05 level (non-directional)**

Discussion

The findings of the present study are worth noting since they portray a consensus among practising primary teachers on the impact of teachers' condition of service on primary school pupils' academic achievement. The results indicate that teachers are not satisfied with their job conditions. It thus seems that the productivity of the teachers would be low considering the views that workers' job satisfaction could influence their productivity in such a way that the higher the satisfaction, the more the productivity (Orekomaya, 2006; Moosung, 2006). Workers in any organisation need something to keep them working. Most of the time, salary paid by the employer could be a vital factor to keep them working for an organisation. An employee ought to be motivated to bring out the best in his/her for the organisation. Repetitive action-reward constitution can cause the action to become a habit. Absence of motivation could affect employee's quality of work or all work in general could deteriorate. Thus, a worker's motivation could be determined by his/her take home pay, as a result the management in any establishment need not over look extrinsic rewards.

Sending practicing teachers to such in-service training could equip them better to respond effectively during their interaction with children in classroom settings. This could in turn affect learners' achievement positively. Primary school teacher quality could be defined by the performance standards based on the learning outcomes of their learners. Teacher quality or competence could be measured by the match of learners' performance standards and bench marks with respect to societal expectations and the objectives of setting up this level of education. According to Maslow, people are motivated by unsatisfied needs (Riley, 2012). We can relate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory with employee motivation. For example, if

a manager is trying to motivate his/her employees by satisfying their needs; according to Maslow, should try to satisfy the lower level needs before tries to satisfy the upper level needs or the employees will not be motivated. Also has to remember that not everyone will be satisfied by the same needs. A good manager will try to figure out which levels of needs are active for a certain individual or employee.

Maslow has money at the lowest level of the hierarchy and shows other needs are better motivators to staff. McGregor (Riley, 2012) places money in Theory Y category and feels it is a poor motivator. McGregor places praise and recognition as strong motivators. He thus concluded that motivated employees always look for better ways to do a job; are more quality oriented and also more productive. Workers in any organization need something to keep them working. Most of the time, the salary of the employee is enough to keep him or her working for an organization in other instances it may not. An employee must be motivated to work for a company or organization. It then shows that if workers are not well motivation, then their quality of work or all work in general may deteriorate.

The findings that gender-group differences and qualification-group differences existed only on three items are indications that the teachers are highly united in the view that their poor working conditions have negative impact on achievement in English language.

Conclusion

In all, the study results provide empirical basis for policy makers in education to improve the working conditions of teachers in order to improve primary school pupils' achievement in examinations. This is because positive learning outcomes at this level appear to be essential means of progress in future school learning since this level play a vital role in determining the level of attainment of a learner in other academic endeavours. The researcher had not made any attempt (due to the nature of the research design) to offer possible explanations for the significant gender and qualification-group differences observed in the present study. Further research may explain some of these significant differences in the teachers' perception.

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