

DEVELOPING AS A TEACHER: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN TEACHERS

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Abstract

This paper presents insights gained from preparatory work in relation to a research about the early career experiences of teachers in Lagos State. The historic failings of Nigeria's public school system have left Nigerian Education sector with challenges such as low teaching standards and lack of basic opportunities for learning. Lagos State is used as a representation of the Nigerian scenario. Eraut's (2004) model of learning and context factors that affect professional growth is used to analyze the extent to which new teachers develop the attributes that support learning in the way they engage with work, socialize at work and see themselves in that process.

A background of the research is first presented and then followed by a brief characterization of research participants' recruited so far. The issues arising from the recruitment of graduates into teaching in Lagos State schools is discussed and the paper ends with final reflections on pertinent concerns worth pondering about in order that efforts targeted at providing quality education in Lagos State stands a greater chance of success now and in the future.

Introduction

There is a growing international consensus about the importance of the early experiences of teachers in shaping their development, influencing their effectiveness, not only in their initial years but throughout their careers (c.f. Jensen et al, 2012). Bubb (2007) drew particular attention to the first year of teaching as the most formative period that can determine teachers' happiness and success. This research is about the early career experiences of teachers in Lagos State. It uses Eraut's (2004) model of learning and context factors that affect professional growth to analyze the extent to which new teachers develop the attributes that support learning in the way they engage with work, socialize at work and see themselves in that process. Unveiling stakeholders' perceptions about teachers professional growth may reveal new understanding and usable information about initial teacher education and new teacher development in the Nigerian context.

Although now classified as a lower middle income country (GNI per capita of more than \$1,045 but less than \$4,125), Nigeria's education system continues to suffer from low teaching standards and lack of basic opportunities for learning. Low entry standard of trainee teachers, ineffective pre-service training and inadequate in-service training of teachers are some of the causes of this weakness in Nigeria's education system. In Nigeria, the annual total number of teachers produced is unknown but about 75 colleges of education are said to produce up to 40,000 National Certificate of Education (NCE) Graduates annually. World Bank (2013) figures suggest that only 66.1% of primary school teachers are trained in Nigeria. Considering the contextual background, which reveal stakeholder concerns and motivations, the author seeks to explore the professional leaning and development of teachers using Lagos State as a representation of the Nigerian scenario. Many of Lagos State's educational challenges are replicated in other Nigerian States. For

example, private schools account for 57% of total enrolment in schools and less than 65% of private schools teacher are said to be qualified (75, 334 out of 118,758).

On the one hand, the content of graduate teacher training programme is examined alongside teachers actual experience of the programme to make sense of the process of teacher preparation in Nigeria; on the other hand, teachers and stakeholders reflections both on the reality of working in schools and its impact on teachers continued professional development and practice is also examined. This in-depth analysis is essential for understanding stakeholders perception about teachers preparation for their professional role in the classroom, the impact that the context has on teacher learning and to encourage dialogue about teacher support in this context. This effort will allow for (i) identification of successful experiences and challenges in how the graduate teacher training programme prepares teachers for making the transition from being taught to actually teaching in Nigeria with the aim of improving practice and the overall context, and (ii) to demonstrate how teachers can go beyond their personal boundaries, and show how learning happens from a personal perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This study deals with new teachers' professional identity which - in this study - can be defined as teacher's self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work and the meanings that are attributed to them by others (Day and Gu, 2010). Beijaard et al (2004) listed teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy, professional development, ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their teaching practice as elements of teacher identity. The concept of identity is therefore inherently bound to how teachers develop and grow within the context of their work. From this point of view, this study assumes that the context and factors that shape teachers learning experiences are relevant in exploring how this professional identity is developed.

The development of new teachers professional identity will be explored using the theoretical framework developed from findings reported by Eraut et al (2004) concerning the context and learning factors that affect professional growth of nurses, accountants and engineers. This framework is relevant and compelling for a study about teachers as it articulates the key factors that affect learning, whose relative significance Eraut et al. (2004) suggest will vary across contexts. In advocating the relevance of Eraut et al.'s 'two triangle' model for teachers development, Day and Gu (2010) contend that it illustrates the need to develop strategies and cultures which support teachers confidence, commitment and personal agency needs.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that sets out to use in depth interviews to explore stakeholders conceptions of new teachers learning and professional development, and at the same time analyse the coherence and proximities of opinions held. A qualitative methodology is adopted to discover the cause and effect relationships about new teachers learning and development and how the context interacts with these. This presents the right paradigm for teachers to discuss freely the shifts and transition in teachers' professional identity during teacher training and in schools.

The main objective of the study is to understand how new teachers in Nigeria perceive their learning and development through their involvement in a graduate teacher training programme (PGDE) and on arrival in schools. Documents such as Nigeria's national policy on Teacher Education as well as the Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers and the PGDE programme guide are examined along with the views expressed in the interview of fifteen new teachers, two school principals, two leaders at the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the PGDE course coordinator at the University of Lagos (UNILAG). It is hoped that the triangulation of document analysis with account from interviews can provide authentic information about any causal relationships or patterns that exists.

The data collection method for this study is in-depth interviews because they offer the advantage of face-to-face interaction in order to learn from the interviewee's experience. This method will allow the researcher and the respondents to jointly explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved.

Brief characterisation of participants recruited so far

Using a respondent driven sampling (RDS) method, contact was established with two teachers from an initial sample obtained from the PGDE course coordinator at UNILAG. These teachers were recruited in 2011 when Lagos State began the recruitment of graduates without teaching qualifications to teach in public schools starting from the 2011/2012 academic year. The male respondent had obtained a PGDE prior to being employed as a secondary school geography teacher while the female respondent had just completed PGDE studies in fulfilment of her employment condition as a primary school teacher.

Reflection from Research Preparatory Work

Insights gained from the study preparatory work revealed that in making improvements in Lagos State, the Ministry of Education began the recruitment of graduates without teaching qualifications who undergo teaching skills acquisition (TSA) Course prior to being posted into schools to teach. These teachers are expected to obtain PGDE within two years in order for their employment to be confirmed and to be placed on the correct salary scale. The challenge however is that these teachers are self-funded to undertake much needed pedagogic development in their own time while functioning in full time roles. It is also not clear what in-school support is available when new teachers arrive in schools and during their PGDE studies.

In recent years, the trend is on in many countries to explicitly focus on attracting the most talented graduates into the classroom as the idea that teacher quality is the key to improving schools has become increasingly widespread. Schemes such as Teach First (TF) in the UK and Teach for America in the US have won plaudits for recruiting more high-flying graduates into teaching. Research has shown that a fundamental contributor to the success of graduate recruitment in most education contexts is the support that teachers get during teacher training and in bridging the transition between teacher education and classroom practice. Indeed the opinion is widely held that adequate support helps beginning teachers to improve their effectiveness from day one. The need for teacher support cannot be

overemphasized especially when the amount of time lost to non-teaching activities is quantified. Jensen et al .(2012) concluded that in more than one third of the participating countries in the OECD teaching and learning international study (TALIS), up to 20% of teaching time is lost to keeping order in the classroom. Teacher support during training ensures that learning time is not lost as a result of the problems that new teachers experience with classroom management and other problems

Some of the ways graduates are supported during their first year is by having a reduced timetable, being mentored by experienced professionals (from the ITE institution and/or the school) who help them with subject knowledge development and wider professional practice within the school. For example, in recognition of the support that graduates need on the TF teacher training programme, three key roles (University tutor, School mentor and TF Leadership Development Officers) who support graduate trainees in their first year. In addition, newly qualified teachers are assigned a mentor in the school during their second (induction) year.

As a result of increasing recognition of the importance of the early years of teaching in developing teacher effectiveness and in recognition of the challenges faced, induction programmes have been introduced in many educational settings such as the UK, Canada and Australia (OECD, 2005). Although not without its critics (Tickle, 2001); the introduction of induction programs in many educational contexts have been shown to improve the effectiveness and retention of new teachers (c.f. Fuller, 2003; Holloway, 2001). Many researchers agree that a benefit of compulsory induction is that new teachers are helped to become more effective (c.f. Findlay, 2006; Bubb, 2007). Conversely, in some educational settings, the absence of a formalized (Kenya) or compulsory induction period (USA) has been reported to be detrimental to teacher development (c.f. Indoshi, 2003).

Anecdotal evidence from the two teachers above suggests that graduates in Lagos State do not benefit from a recognized period of support and induction during their first year and second years respectively. It can only be inferred that a seeming gap in the support arrangement for new teachers in Lagos State may be counterproductive for the impact that graduate teachers can make in transforming the education of children in Lagos State.

Implications of graduate recruitment into teaching in Nigeria

The rationale for the preferential recruitment of graduates into teaching position in Lagos State is not clear, it can be assumed however that the discourse will center around the age long debate about the location of ITE at either the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Such debates have focused on the relative merits of Bachelor of Education (BEd) versus Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programmes. Fundamental to such a debate in Nigeria is the publicly held opinion that years of failings of Nigeria's public school system have resulted in challenges such as low teaching standards and lack of basic opportunities for learning. It is no surprise therefore that concerns have been raised about the low quality of teachers being produced in Nigeria. To buttress this point, Furlong et al (2009) questioned the effectiveness of ITE in increasing teacher subject and professional knowledge. Also noteworthy is the low status

accorded the profession which in turn affects the quality of intakes onto initial teacher training courses. In fact Ejieh (2009) reported that many students in the nations' faculties of education could not gain admission into courses of their first choice. The above concerns and more could have informed Lagos State Government decision to target its teacher supply efforts to the graduate unemployment market to address the challenges of education in the state while alleviating the burdens of graduate unemployment in the state.

Subject mastery could well be an important consideration for the targeted recruitment of graduates on the expectation that possession of a PGCE can support the development of relevant skills for instruction. This seeming distinction between subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge shows Lagos State Government attention is being drawn to the fundamental problem of in-effective pre-service training and inadequate in-service training symptomatic of Nigeria's education system. Johnson (2009) suggested that teacher policy development have been inhibited by these on-going problems in Nigeria drawing attention to the challenge of deciding who can become a teacher and what their training should consist of. Past and current international response to the problem of education in Nigeria has been through different collaborations such as Lagos State Government Eko Secondary Education Project and the Department for International Development (DFID) and Cambridge Education (CE) projects such as ESSPIN, TDP, and DEEPEN. These collaborations have specified targets for improving teacher learning and development with success criteria defined in terms of teacher capacity development. Rather than depleting the teaching stock, these capacity development interventions have helped to cushion the skills and knowledge gap of a large of the teaching population with low academic and professional competencies.

International collaborations have made undeniable improvements in access to quality and equity within Nigerian education system, it would seem however that the question of who a qualified teacher is in Nigeria remains unaddressed. The recruitment of graduate teachers may be the start of government attempt to raise the academic requirements of those entering the teaching profession. It may be that a desirable end point for resolving Nigeria's education challenges is by making teaching a graduate profession. What this may entail in the Nigerian context is not clear in the absence of empirical research. The need for stakeholder discourse and debate cannot be over-emphasized in order for this to happen. What seems obvious and interesting however is the prospects that recruiting graduates bring for addressing the problem of low entry standards of entrants into the teaching profession. It is possible that teachers are of the right calibre upon entry into the profession and the problems of the past are not reinvented. Also important, is the possibility that in-service CPD stands a chance of increasing the academic and professional competencies of teachers as they progress in their career. In addition, another prospect that graduate recruitment into teaching brings is in alleviating the problems of years of graduate unemployment which commentators suggest is of multidimensional proportions on a national scale and has defied lasting solutions in Nigeria (Okechukwu, 2014). It is also anticipated that given the right remuneration and working conditions, there is a chance that graduate teachers will succeed and can be used as role models for the profile of the teaching profession envisioned for Lagos State and Nigeria.

Improving the caliber of teachers joining the profession in Lagos State is important and holds transformational possibilities for raising educational standards and student attainment in Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole. This in itself is not a silver bullet. Anecdotal evidence gathered from the above teachers suggest that graduates employed in Lagos State benefit from regular CPD but lack the kind of structured support that can help them to come up to scratch in the class room as soon as possible. Also, the requirement to become accredited by obtaining a PGDE while working full time places additional burdens on them. More awareness needs to be raised about the fact that the first few years of teaching is the most formative years during which graduates need support. It is also crucial to gain context specific insights about what new teachers need in order to be effective. Despite a two week TSA course, graduate teachers have limited experience of training to teach on arrival in Lagos State schools. With the right support, teachers can be equipped to transform the schools and the communities they work in. It would need the coordinated effort of schools, universities and education stakeholders collaboratively working together to see improvements in Lagos State children's educational attainment.

For a country that places a high cultural and social value on education, the multiplicity of educational policies and standards resulting from 50 years of UPE (c.f. Nwagwu, 1997; Ololube, Egbezor & Kpolovie, 2008), contemplating ways of working collaboratively may seem arduous. Graduate recruitment into teaching posts in Lagos State shows that the hope for transformations in Nigeria's education system is alive and change is possible. Indeed change is not just possible but it is inevitable if Nigeria is to deliver the target of substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers by 2030 (global goal 4).

Final Reflections

Pondering and looking forward with expectation, I am curious to know how the recruitment of graduates into the teaching workforce can change the education landscape in Nigeria for the better. What tensions does this present within the graduate unemployment market and how can different stakeholders collaborate to address this for improvements in education and reduction in graduate unemployment.

A useful place to start is in considering what support is available for self-funded graduate teachers who undergo PGDE training in fulfillment of their employment conditions? Beyond adjustments to the right salary scale, what incentives if any are offered to these graduates on completion of their PGDE. Beyond the government, what roles if any are other sectors and stakeholders playing to make teaching a rewarding career so that the burden of education reform is collectively borne by all stakeholders in Nigeria? For example what transport and accommodation schemes are currently in place to support government efforts locally and nationally in attracting teachers into the profession? What other schemes can be put in place to support the recruitment of graduates into teaching? What support are businesses and corporates currently providing to cushion the burden of financial incentives for teachers? How can teaching be made attractive to graduates as a sustainable career beyond just having a job in order to enter the job market? What can

businesses and banks do as part of their CSR to ensure sustainable retention of graduate teachers in the classrooms.

The recruitment of graduates into teaching is helping to address the problem of quality and equity in children's education on the one hand and addressing the multidimensional problem of unemployment in Nigeria. It is worthwhile however to consider what tensions this can present within the sector considering the holders of (BEEd) degrees who form part of the unemployed graduates. Education degree holders who education may have been their first choice at the university may feel marginalized in that the jobs that should rightfully have been theirs is now being offered to others who are less qualified to do the job on day one. These graduates could argue that the seeming weakness in the quality of their education degree is not a fault of theirs and they should not be denied the chance to develop their knowledge and skills on the job by giving education jobs to non-education degree holders. It would seem an appropriate time to start to consider what efforts if any are being channeled towards the dwindling regard for and viability of education degrees being offered by higher institutions?

It would seem that graduate teachers start work with limited training in schools on day one. What is not clear however is the expectations schools have for new graduate teachers in meeting their professional responsibilities as employees of the school. A useful consideration to explore is the provisions that are made for balancing the demands of full time work with the requirements for graduates undertaking a training course that does not appear to be integrated into the design of their work as trainee teachers in schools? How does this affect teacher's work life balance and what effect can this have on staff turnover and retention of teachers in the profession.

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Biography

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