

Teacher Attrition in Nigerian Schools: A Case for the UBE

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Abstract

This paper deals with the issues of teacher attrition in Nigeria as it affects the Universal Basic Education. A number of theorist opinion were sought and there was a general agreement among them that teachers with specific human capital were less likely to leave the teaching profession while teachers who had acquired generic human capital were most likely to leave the job for other better paying jobs. Other reasons for attrition were, childbirth, moving house, ill health, old age etc. Two major types of teacher attrition were identified namely: temporary and permanent attrition. Reasons why teachers leave their jobs were also identified as lack of incentive for the job, poor salary structure, late or non-payment of teacher's salaries and allowances, non-inclusion of teachers in decision making in matters concerning them among others. It was therefore suggested that for the UBE to succeed in Nigeria, teachers' salaries and allowances should be paid as at and when due, incentives should be given to serving teachers, teachers should be part of decision-making in matters concerning them among others.

Keywords: Teacher attrition, Nigerian Schools, UBE, incentives

BACKGROUND

Teacher attrition has always been a problem in the education system the world over. This is because there have never been enough teachers to meet the demands of the ever increasing number of students and pupils especially in Nigeria. Teachers are always leaving the profession for one reason or the other, especially in the public schools. Thus, recruiting and retaining teachers for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) poses a challenge for educational planners. It is therefore pertinent to identify the causes of teacher attrition in secondary schools in Nigeria and proffer possible solutions to stemming the tide. Buckley et al., (2004) propose that there are three factors that affect teacher attrition. These are, teacher, school and community factors. Teacher factors include wage, idealism and teacher preparation courses; school factors are working conditions, organizational factors, lack of resources and accountability while community factors have to do with government policy, budgeting policy, public, stereotypical thought about hours and mandate that has legislated for quality teachers only. McGaw (2002) holds that apart from Poland, all OECD countries face the problem of staffing as a result of retirement and resignation. This paper therefore examines the theoretical explanations why teacher attrition occur, various reasons why people leave the teaching profession and suggestions as to how to stop teacher attrition in order to ensure the success of the UBE in a developing economy like Nigeria.

THEORIES OF ATTRITION

A number of theoretical explanations have been given as to why teachers leave their job or why

teacher attrition occurs. Grissmer and Kirby (1987) propose that teachers leave in a predictable U-shaped curve thus is tied to their life cycle and career stages. The highest rate of attrition they say occur early in the teacher's career (change job attend graduate school and childbirth) and at the end of one's career (retirement, illness and death). Grissmmer and Kirby further add that deciding to stay in teaching depends on six inter-dependent variables namely:-

- (a) The degree of transparency present during the hiring process.
- (b) The degree of human capital acquired to do a specific job in a specific location.
- (c) Previous work experience when hired.
- (d) Change in family status (marriage, divorce, spouse moving to another job and childbirth).
- (e) Compensation and working conditions.
- (f) Job opportunities in and outside of teaching.

Human capital is the benefit a person receives from a career. Human capital can be generic or specific. It is generic when it can be transferred to other job situations while specific human capital is that which is acquired to do a specific job. Thus, the more generic human capital people acquire, the more the possibility of their leaving for other jobs because they can transfer the acquired skills to other job situations. The higher the specific human capital a person acquires, the less the possibility of leaving the job. Teachers who acquire generic human capital are more likely to leave teaching for other jobs while those who acquire high level of specific human capital tend to stay in the teaching profession since their skill is only specific to teaching.

In support of Grissmer and Kirby, Billingsley and Cross (1991) report that certain aspects of the school environment make teachers to leave their jobs. Lack of administrative support, lack of collegial and parental support and insufficient involvement in decision making may make teachers to leave their jobs. Gonzalez (1995) also found in his studies that many disposition and work environment elements combined to influence teacher attrition. The dispositional factors that were most common among teachers who left teaching were youth, being female high scores on teacher exam(s), mid to upper social economic status (SES), little experience, low level of commitment to teaching and ineffective strategies. The environmental factor that make teachers to leave their jobs were high school teaching assignment, large class size or caseload or both, unsupportive administrator, excessive paper work, ambiguous or conflicting role demands, few job rewards and lack of decision making opportunities.

Kirby and Grissmer (1993) are of the opinion that individuals make a systematic assessment of the net monetary and non-monetary benefits from different occupations. People will definitely go for jobs that give them the highest monetary benefit, and teaching maybe their least option. Stinebricker (2002) found that large amount of teacher attrition was directly related to changes in a teacher's family situation in which childbirth was a major cause rather than the commonly portrayed scenario in which a teacher is lured away from teaching by the attractiveness of a non-teaching job. Most women will stay on the job if they have access to house helps.

Types of Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition could be permanent or temporary, while some teachers may combine teaching with other jobs. Thomas (2007) hold that some teachers leave full time classroom teaching for jobs in unrelated fields or depart the teaching profession to new or different fields. Some teachers remain in the profession but move to other jobs while others leave the job, temporarily to have children, start a family and return to continue their jobs.

Another group of teachers leaves the teaching profession for different jobs in the field of education. For example, teachers may join the ministry of education or the education board from the classroom. This type of teacher attrition elevate such teachers into higher status in the profession as they could become Board Chairmen, Board Secretaries, coordinators, Heads of school services or even education commissioners. This is peculiar to teachers who have high level social capital, personal contacts, information access and mentors who make available information to them to gain access into such

rewarding job opportunities especially if they possess the generic human capital to embrace such jobs. Teachers with strong academic background belong to this group as they are more or less redundant in the classroom. Teachers who are high performers are also likely to leave the profession as their performance could pare ways for better job – opportunities for them in other areas.

Teachers who wish to attain high status in the teaching profession can only aspire to become school administrators. Thomas (nd) report that teachers who sought greater status in their careers had only one choice, they could become school administrators. This situation limits the ambition of teachers who aspire to such positions as only a few of them can actually become school heads out of the large number of teachers in service. Thus, teachers who wish to aspire higher must leave the profession to other areas in order to actualize their dreams. Teacher attrition could be subject based. Teachers in the sciences and other core subjects areas often leave when the conditions of service is not favourable to them or when they are posted to places where there are no modern facilities.

Why Teacher Attrition is High.

A number of reasons have been advanced as to why teacher attrition is on the increase. It has been noted earlier that teacher attrition could be temporary or permanent. Teachers could leave temporarily in order to improve their capacity. Such teachers go for further studies to take courses in education and return as soon as they complete their studies. Females teachers in the childbearing age could leave their jobs to have children only to return when they are through with baby making. Others still leave to join their husbands after marriages. This is very common among the female teachers and sometimes young male teachers who may wish to join their wives, especially where such families are still young and the need to stay together is of utmost importance to the couple. Some teachers may leave when sickness or age no longer allows them to put in their best. Such teachers could retire voluntarily in order to have time to take care of their health. The death of a teacher creates a big vacuum in the system, which may take some time to fill especially if such a teacher is highly skilled. The loss of such experience teachers do not augur well for the profession because such teachers could became to mentors to beginning teachers and teach them the rudiments of the job. Teachers may also leave the profession as a result of burn-out. Such attrition is very common with school administrators who are burdened by the board over one return, or the other and are required to meet deadlines. Burnout may also occur among teachers who teach core subjects and may need to mark 300-400 scripts and still meet the deadline of issuing results. Such teachers are not rewarded specially even

though they put in more than their counterparts who may have as little as 20-50 scripts to mark. Burn out could also arise from the poor facilities in this classroom- airless classrooms with very poor ventilation housing nearly a hundred students at a time. Teachers in this category may decide to look for alternate employment before they collapse in class.

Gender discrimination in employment and appointments is also a factor of teacher attrition. Teachers who are denied appointments as a result of their gender usually leave the school to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Egu (2006) found that majority of teachers in Abia State are made up of females. However, they are poorly represented when it comes to appointing them into the office of the principal. In her studies out of 183 principals of secondary school, only 58 are females. The rest of the teachers remain in school and retire as deputy principals or leave the profession in pursuit of higher education in order to get generic human capital.

Thompson (1986) found that 713 teachers who qualified to teach Agricultural Education (AGED) between 1975 and 1985 only 242 (34%) were still, teaching Agric Education in 1985. Kelsey (2006) report that of the 3770 who never taught, the majority (67%) were women. Wooden (1973) reported that only 55% of the graduates who qualified to teach AGED entered the profession. In AGED, Kelsey report not that there are higher attrition rates among women, many college institution experienced challenges in placing their female AGED graduates because of their gender.

Teacher attrition is highest among newly employed and young teachers. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) report that 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years. Such young teachers are posted to rural areas where they are rarely exposed to experienced teachers who could prepare them for teaching. The situation is worsened by lack of infrastructural facilities in the rural area. Young people need exciting job environment, so they leave for other professions. Before they are fully developed into optimally effective practitioners. They also add that exciting new teachers are often replaced by similarly in-experienced teachers and consequently students in high schools with high turnover rate may rarely be exposed to experienced teachers. Stuit and Smith (nd) are of the opinion that the constant churning of teaching staff make it difficult to collaborate, develop standard norms of practice and maintain progress towards uncommon goal. For Guin (2004) this situation can lead to fragmented instrumental programmes and professional development plans that must be adapted each year to meet the needs of teaching staff in constant flux.

The public schools in Abia State are populated with pupils and students from the low-income homes who cannot afford the high fees charged by private primary and secondary schools. Teaching such students can be quite challenging. Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) observed that despite the overwhelming challenges that come with teaching and working with low income students with greater needs, beginning teachers are often given little professional support or mentorship opportunities to help them develop the necessary pedagogical knowledge, attributes and dispositions needed to help this population to succeed which unfortunately contributes to high level teacher attrition.

Teachers in urban areas may still leave their jobs as results of the host of problems encountered in the job in the urban areas. NCESS (1997) is of the opinion that urban teachers are more likely than their rural counterparts to see problems as serious including student absenteeism verbal abuse of teachers, lack of parental involvement, student apathy, poverty and student disrespect for teachers. Imakezi (nd) adds that the job of the urban teacher is often more challenging, leading to burn out as many of the students have different needs and many of them are not prepared to learn. McKinney, Berry, Dickerson and Campbell-Whately in support of Imakezi agree that the urban setting can be stressful and unsettling leading to high level of teacher burnout over a short period of time.

In addition to the problems encountered by urban teachers and population explosion in schools as a result of the Universal Basic Education which makes it mandatory for every child of school age to be in school, there is the poor conditions of service, irregular payment of teachers salaries and allowances, incessant strike action by teachers to press for one demand or the other. These problems lead to high rate of teacher attrition. The problem of teacher retention and attrition is centred around teacher remuneration. Igwe in Babalola and Ayeni (2009) agree with this when they state that the economic problem of teachers centre mainly around conditions of service and salary structures, disparity in pay, late arrival of salary, non or late payment by allowances. For the success of the Universal Basic Education, there must be formidable high quality human resources. Igwe (2004) and Obanya (2006) identified inadequate number of qualified teachers, irregular payment of teachers salaries and teachers dissatisfaction with their conditions of service as the obstacle to effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Arikewuyo and Adegbesan in Babalola and Ayeni (2009) are of the opinion that the quality of teacher resource depends on the recruitment, retention and development of professional teachers and dedicated

staff that would promote an optimum level of performance towards the provision of quality education since the ability of the schools to achieve its aim depends on the competence of its staff. Uche in Babalola and Ayeni (2009) warns that deliberate and sincere efforts should be made to retain teachers to ensure continuity and effectiveness. The three areas that must be taken seriously if the best staff in school is to stay are:

- Conditions of service
- Morale boosting
- Efficiency

Adeyemi also in Babalola and Ayeni in support of Uche add that staff will stay if there is: the establishment of clear channels of communication with teachers; establishment of clear staff policy and principles of justice and fair play.

- Encouragement of teacher participation in decision making
- Welcoming teacher initiative
- Provision of opportunities for promotion and in-service
- Assigning reasonable duties and workloads to teachers.

Arikewuyo (2006) identified some of the welfare services that can be provided by the organization to stem staff attrition to include adequate retirement benefit, pension scheme, medical services for teachers and their dependants, provision of counseling services crèche or nursery schools for staff children, official cars for staff, end of year bonus etc.

CONCLUSION

It does appear that teacher poor conditions of service, late or non-payment of Salaries and allowances, lack of incentive, non involvement of teachers in decision making over matters concerning them to mention but a few are the main causes of attrition. Thus, if the UBE in Nigeria is to succeed, all hands must be on deck to ensure that these issues are dealt with once and for all. This is of utmost importance especially now that Nigeria hopes to be among the first 20 developed nations in this world come 2020.

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