

Teachers' Characteristics and Instructional Quality in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

Worldwide, the importance of quality instruction in schools cannot be underestimated. However, over the years, the instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools seems persistently low, and worrisome based on the academic performance of students in external examinations. This has continued to be a subject of concern to individuals, the public, government, and other stakeholders. This study investigates teachers' characteristics and the instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria. A hypothesis was formulated and tested in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers and principals, as well as to assess the instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools. A total of 2,222 respondents (1,548 teachers and 774 principals) were sampled using both simple random and census sampling techniques respectively across the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria. The results show that teachers' characteristics have a significant influence on the instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria. The study recommends that government should prioritise teacher professionalism and employ only certificated teachers to teach in secondary schools in Nigeria geared toward achieving an improved instructional quality.

Keywords: Teachers' characteristics; instructional quality; educational qualification; teachers' experience; teachers' professionalism

Introduction

Over the years, instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools seems persistently low and discouraging. This has become a matter of concern to individuals, the public, government, and other stakeholders. This can often be traced to various factors such as inadequate preparation of lessons, poor delivery of lessons, use of inappropriate instructional materials, poor classroom management, and poor evaluation of lessons. Akanbi (2014) and Romina (2013) share similar sentiments that the quality of education in Nigeria today is critical and cannot be compared with that obtained in the West. Alamirew (2016) further argues that the quality of instruction is fundamental to the success achieved by the school and its students. Students' performance in Nigerian secondary schools has been generally unsatisfactory as evident in the West African School Certificate Examination results for 2016–2017 considering that the goal of education is to integrate its principles, values, and practices into all aspects of teaching and learning.

Recognising that teachers' behaviour can be altered to limit harmful effects on the instructional quality delivered in the class, quality instruction has evolved to include more than just recycling the same material over the years, but encompasses how students and communities behave and

interact in the larger society. This has raised issues relating to teachers' characteristics in the public secondary schools in Nigeria. Clugston and Calder (2015) intimate that teachers have a critical and tangible role in the delivery of quality instruction, not only for improved academic performance, but to develop productive individuals who can live peacefully with members of the society. As such, teachers are expected to be professionally qualified via training, years of experience, and demonstrated professionalism with evidence from the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN).

These characteristics undergird the basis for quality instruction. Since students are considered the future leaders and decision makers, as well as the future developers of societal institutions, investing in quality instruction at the secondary school level is therefore essential to the production of complete and quality students needed to solve industrial and societal problems. Worth noting is that most previous studies used variables such as teachers (Ajaja and Eravwoke 2013), schools (Akanbi 2014), and students (Humphreys and Crawford 2015) respectively or jointly to establish students' academic performance as a measure of instructional quality. However, findings of UNICEF (1998), as well as Adisa's (2013), confirmed that analysing only students' performance as a measure for assessing the quality of instruction is inadequate. Studies have also established various measures of instructional quality (Eric, Rich and Shalli 2010; Adesina 2012), but none compared these measures with teachers' characteristics. Therefore, this study investigates teachers' characteristics as a determinant of instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools.

The problem of instructional quality in Nigeria seems to be appropriately associated with teachers' characteristics (qualification, experience, and professionalism). Although research abounds on factors affecting instructional quality; available studies have ignored the relative and combined effects of teacher characteristics. The search for a possible relationship between instructional quality and teachers' characteristics has therefore become imperative considering the quality of education in Nigerian secondary schools. This challenge perseveres because previous studies have not attained adequate details on the progress of issues regarding the instructional quality in the school system.

The State of Instructional Quality in Nigerian Public Secondary Schools

It has been established that the drive to improve the quality of instruction at the public secondary education level in Nigeria remains a matter of concern given the unimpressive performance of students in the final examinations conducted by the recognised examination bodies. Thus, the Federal Ministry of Education (2011) views what teachers do or not do, are able or not able to do, are willing or not willing to do, and do properly or poorly, as a great determinant of the effectiveness of the school curriculum (what students learn). This intense debate on instructional quality in public secondary schools is even more important because the outcome of the secondary school education must meet the basic requirements for entry into institutions of higher learning, especially, for students who intend to proceed further with their education.

The general trend has been to assume that the quality of education has fallen drastically. While some researchers reflect on the output of tertiary education being the university graduates to assess quality; others simply pay limited attention to the input such as the students themselves, the teachers, the facilities, and other factors that affect learners in the school. Only a few studies combine both input and output, and often the impact of teachers' characteristics in achieving a quality instruction in the school system is usually neglected. The poor quality of instruction in public secondary schools in Nigeria can be observed from the unimpressive performance of students in the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE). Table 1 below gives a

quick look at the preceding five years (2014 to 2018) before this research goes on to explain the unimpressive performance as represented:

Examination Year	Registered Candidates	Candidates with five Credits (including English Language and Mathematics)	% of Passes	% of Failure
May/June 2014	1,692,435	529,394	31.28	68.72
May/June 2015	1,593,442	616,370	38.68	61.32
May/June 2016	1,552,758	878,040	56.55	43.45
May/June 2017	1,559,162	923,486	59.23	40.77
May/June 2018	1,572,396	786,016	49.99	50.01

Sources: West African Examination Council (WAEC Annual Reports, 2014 - 2018)

In the table above, the students' academic performance in the West African Secondary School Certificate between the years 2014–2018 in the May/June examinations shows an alarming failure rate. The statistics suggest that there are issues with instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria when one considers the debacle in students' performance. In fact, findings suggest that, as at 2008 (although not the focus of the study), the failure rate was as high as 86.24 per cent, and thereafter there was no noticeable improvement till 2018, although slight improvements were noted in 2016 and 2017 when the failure rate reduced to 43.45 per cent and 40.77 per cent respectively. However, in 2018, the failure rate regressed to 50.01 per cent. This situation is worrisome and demands the attention of parents and all stakeholders as these students are constantly faced with challenges in gaining admission into institutions of higher learning because of appalling performance.

Poor instructional quality is one of the challenges confronting secondary education in Nigeria. Having identified this as a prominent challenge, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) recommends that to have a world acclaimed quality instruction in schools which will manifest in students' performance; there must be recruitment and re-training of professionally qualified teachers for primary and secondary levels of education. This will assist in providing a solid foundation for quality higher education. Thus, the government recommends that teachers in Nigeria have certification from teacher training institutions. It is within this context that Ogbonnaya (2014) applauds the Federal Government's recommendation to produce qualified and professional teachers from the nation's approved teacher training institutions as a way of enhancing the quality of education at both primary and secondary schools. Also commendable is the Federal Government's effort to professionalise teaching through the registration of teachers by the TRCN before practicing.

Despite these efforts, Baikie (2015) identifies teacher absence, student non-attendance, irrelevant and culturally unresponsive curricula, poor pedagogical content knowledge, dilapidated structures, insecurity (specifically the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast region of the country), and inadequate funding, as other limitations to instructional quality. These factors have led to non-coverage of the curriculum for secondary schools; poor implementation of education policies; poor instructional delivery; non-incorporation of technology into all aspects of secondary education due to lack of facilities; and lack of the financial will to support instructional delivery due to poor budgetary allocation to education. Additionally, Arong and Ogbadu (2010) observe the lack of

adequate inspection and supervision as other negative factors. These defects affect public secondary schools in Nigeria.

The resulting effect of these inadequacies contribute to the lack of qualified teachers, lack of instructional materials, poor students' attitudes towards learning, and misplaced government priorities, as well as a lack of integrity among some unscrupulous education stakeholders and workers. Specifically, the lack of adequate school inspection and supervision significantly contribute to the declining nature of the quality of instruction. According to Adesina (2012), crises in secondary education result in the constantly declining quality of those sent to the classroom to train the minds of the nation. Evidently, teachers' inability to impart instructions effectively combined with ineffective interpretation of the curriculum mar students' performance. Finally, Anchor (2014) identifies the poor remuneration and working conditions of teachers as other challenges confronting instructional delivery in Nigerian secondary schools. He states that poor rewards received by teachers for services rendered in schools contributes to the debilitating standard of education as teachers' rewards are never forth coming.

Expounding Teachers' Characteristics and Instructional Quality

In the past, little was known about the significance of instructional quality in education because few studies had investigated the effect of student learning that is similar across sections of the same course. However, student learning varies systematically across institutions and this can be correlated with observed instructors' characteristics such as qualification, professionalism, and experience. This is because instructors appear to have an influence on students' learning beyond their impact on the curriculum of the subjects completed in the classrooms. It is well-documented that student learning may vary substantially across classrooms in elementary and secondary schools depending on the experience of the teachers (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006).

Quality is always a difficult term to define and gain consensus on. This is because it is a general term that is applicable to any trait or characteristic, whether individual or generic. Hornby (2015) perceives it as the standard of something when compared to other similar items; the degree of excellence of a product or service; or the distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something. In the opinion of Newel and Dale (1991), it is the level of achievement in five basic areas: people, equipment, methods, materials, and the environment. In broad terms that are specific to education in the context of this paper, quality can be defined as having the characteristics of being well thought out; prepared with care, and implemented with responsibility; having a firm direction but flexible enough to cope with contextual variation; and being positively responsive to comment and criticism (Peter, 2015). Thus, the focus of this study on quality includes curriculum, quality of content, qualification and experience of teachers, availability of instructional aids, motivation for users (both teachers and students), well-managed educational systems, and functional assessment techniques.

There are diverse opinions from the parents, teachers, employers of labour and the government about the quality of instruction in Nigerian public secondary schools. This perhaps shares affinity with the increasing rate of secondary school graduates who are unable to possess the minimum requirements for admission into institutions of higher learning. Clearly, quality instruction in secondary schools is a crucial tool for improving the prospects of higher education. For Eric, Rich and Shalli (2010), an academic instruction is qualitative if the learners take less time to assimilate, the learners spend a major portion of instructional time actively engaged in learning, the teacher achieves a high level of success, content coverage is achieved, the teacher proceeds through the curriculum as specified by the regulatory agencies, and individual learners gain mastery of specific

skills. Following this trajectory, one can assume that public secondary school education in Nigeria is not qualitative enough.

For this study, quality instruction is that instruction which is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society (Ndiomu, 2008). Majasan (2014) maintains that quality instruction is value-loaded with the argument that quality instruction should produce disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. Hence Akinpelu (2009) argues that education without quality instruction can be even more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education instruction has no value. In a study carried out by Adebajo (2009) it was remarked that if a teacher is incompetent, a good output cannot be expected. Thus, a competent teacher is regarded as one who has undergone relevant training in a chosen field of study and is certificated. In agreement with this view, the South African Ministry of Education (SAME, 2010) posits that the operation of unqualified and under-qualified educators in the school's system impacts negatively on the quality of teaching. The activities of qualified and competent teachers cannot be under-estimated in achieving the stated goals and quality instruction in the school.

In a study by Adeyemi (2015) on the influence of teachers' factors on students' academic performance in Lagos State secondary schools, it was found that students taught by experienced teachers outperform those taught by inexperienced ones. Jekayinfa (2007), in another similar study, notes that the quality, relevance, adequacy, and competence of teachers are in doubt and this results in a lack of confidence in the Nigerian educational system. In addition, Obanya (2010) affirms that good teachers must be quantitatively adequate, properly educated, professionally prepared and well-motivated. It has thus been established that it is necessary to provide students with an effective instruction at secondary school level as a means of providing a solid foundation for higher education.

The Theory of Educational Effectiveness

This study is hinged on the theory of educational effectiveness propounded by Creemers (1994:189). For Creemers, effective instruction starts with teachers in the classrooms and this refers to two important implications. Firstly, teachers as a central factor have to make a lot of decisions at a classroom level: about goals, the allocation of time to (groups of or individual) students, use of material, their own instruction, and behaviour management during the instructional process. Secondly, to guide the planning of the instructional process by teachers and the development of effective arrangements, central guiding ideas are of crucial importance. These can be found, next to the goals of education, in theories and research about learning and teaching, and in theories and research about the quality and effectiveness of instruction.

The theory presents a holistic view on education as it considers the outcomes of education, the input, the process, and the context in which education takes place. In this study, the outcome of education is the proportion of students transiting from secondary schools to institutions of higher learning having met the minimum criteria for admission into such institutions through examinations conducted by the WAEC. The outcome can also be the value added by secondary education to the initial attributes of students to become more useful individuals in the society. The theory consists of variables such as the background of the teacher, the method of teaching, and time-on-task which is the time students spend on school learning which can be expanded by school homework.

Importantly, the theory consists of components such as teachers' characteristics which to Creemers (1994) makes a difference between effective and non-effective instruction. At the

classroom level, the characteristics of effective instruction are related to time-on-task and opportunity to learn. The quality of teachers and materials, grouping and behaviour is in one way or another related to the time available for learning. Thus, Creemers' idea on teachers' characteristics as being integral to instructional quality serves as the theoretical backdrop for this study.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach through a descriptive survey research design. The research design was employed for its prowess in describing characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied, which in the case of this research, is the characteristics of teachers in public secondary schools. The entire population of the study consisted of teachers and principals in the public secondary schools located in the 774 local government areas (LGA) of Nigeria. These schools were categorised according to their LGAs. One public secondary school was selected from each of the LGAs. A census sampling technique was used to select the principal of the selected schools while a simple random technique was used to select two teachers from each of the selected schools. A total of 2,322 respondents were sampled which comprised 1,548 teachers and 774 school principals in the country. The researcher employed the use of 37 research assistants to administer the instruments, one assistant representing each of the states in the country.

Two instruments were used to gather information from these categories of respondents (one was self-designed, while one was adapted). The instruments include: The teacher characteristics questionnaire (TCQ) and the students' academic performance rating scale (SAPRS). The TCQ was designed for teachers to measure teacher characteristics variables (such as educational qualifications, teaching experience and professional qualifications). The questionnaire accurately reflects each of the teacher's personal characteristics. A test-retest method was used to ensure the reliability of the entire instrument to measure the consistency and appropriateness of the instruments. The test-retest questionnaires were administered to 24 teachers, and 12 principals in 12 public secondary schools randomly selected in the southwest geo-political zone of the country. The reliability was done item-by-item using a pre-test at an interval of two weeks in the randomly selected schools. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to measure its consistency and a co-efficient of 0.87 was obtained. The SAPRS was designed for the principals to collate the academic performance of students in the West African School Certificate Examinations pertaining to their schools from 2014 to 2018. The information collected from the principals was validated by the reports received from the WAEC as provided in table 1.

Ethical considerations were observed during the data collection process. The researcher ensured that informed consent and due permission was obtained. In ensuring informed consent in this research, consent was sought from the participants through a written means before the administration of the instrument to them. Each of the participants was given a consent form to confirm their participation in the research and they were duly notified that they were permitted to withdraw from the research at any time due to any conceivable factor or their willingness to participate. In terms of permission, approval was sought from the management of each school before proceeding with data collection. Also, the confidentiality of the participants was ensured as participants were not required to provide any form of identification. A multiple regression analysis was employed to test the only hypothesis formulated for the study at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

The study was predicated on the hypothetical statement that: there is no significant relative influence of teachers' characteristics (qualification, experience, and teachers' professionalism) on the instructional quality in public secondary schools in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Relative Influence of Teachers' Characteristics on Instructional Quality Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	58.103	3.703		15.691	0.000
Edu Qualification	-0.841	2.292	-0.033	-0.367	0.714
Years Teach Exp	3.688	0.666	0.215	5.540	0.000
Professionalism	7.668	2.369	0.287	3.237	0.001

Table 2 aptly captures the findings of this study. It is revealed that professionalism has the highest significant influence on instructional quality ($\beta = 0.29$; $t = 3.24$; $p < 0.05$). The level of professionalism is then followed by the years of teaching experience of the teachers ($\beta = 0.22$; $t = 5.54$; $p < 0.05$) whereas, the educational qualification of the teachers has no significant influence on the quality of instruction with regard to these public secondary schools ($\beta = -0.03$; $t = -0.37$; $p > 0.05$). As such, it is argued that two of the variables have a relative influence on instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools namely: professionalism and teaching experience. By implication, teachers' professionalism and years of teaching experience have a significantly positive influence on the instructional quality in public secondary schools. Put differently, the professional ethics demonstrated by teachers as well as the amount of experience they possess have a larger influence on instructional quality than other factors.

While the years of experience is an important factor in instructional quality, this is dictated by time, and generally there is little or no control over time. However, what can be controlled is the professionalism of the teachers seeing that it has a significant impact on the quality of instruction given to students. More importantly, training and capacity development activities should be prioritised if the professionalism of teachers is indeed expected to have enormous impact on instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools. Surprisingly however, studies focussing on teacher development and student learning outcomes are still in their infancy. A point echoed by Hermans, Sloep, and Kreijns (2017) that there is limited literature on the link between teachers' professional development and student learning outcomes.

Aspects of teachers' professional development cannot be understated in instructional quality when one considers Hermans, Sloep, and Kreijns' (2017) position that the teachers' professional development reinforces the teachers' ability to reflect on the practical implementation of the new teaching design and not merely adapt materials to their own classroom needs. As such, teachers themselves become creative and develop classroom-specific designs that allow for a more tailored teaching approach. Such continuous professional development is important as it allows such a teacher to cross-pollinate and prepare for the possible educational challenges that may exceed the individual teacher's classroom practice.

The findings of this study resonate with Ogbonnaya's (2014) perception who acknowledges the Federal Government's effort towards providing qualified and professional teachers for the purpose

of quality education at the primary and secondary levels to achieve educational objectives. It is also in line with the findings of Adeyemi (2015) who submits that there is a significant difference between academic performance of students taught by professional/experienced teachers and those taught by unprofessional and inexperienced ones. This indicates that the professionalism and experience of the teachers enhances instructional quality in the public secondary schools.

Surmising from the above, teachers' characteristics can be described as an observable behaviour that indicates effectiveness, or otherwise, of instructional leaders in the classroom, school, campus, and community. Orlando (2017) stresses that a teacher with good characteristics must respect students, create a sense of community and belonging in the classroom, be warm, accessible, enthusiastic and caring, set high expectations for all students, have his/her own love for learning, be a skilled leader, able to shift position, collaborate with colleagues, and maintain professionalism in all areas relating to the teaching profession. Ajaja and Eravwoke (2013) identify the following as indices to measure teachers' characteristics: personality, attitudes, experience, aptitude/achievement, gender, and training as measured by the certificate obtained.

However, as evidenced from this study, there are other indices to measure teachers' characteristics among which are, but not limited to: qualification, experience, and professionalism. For Adeyemi (2015), it is a quality typical of a teacher that distinguishes the effective teacher from the ineffective one. Effective teachers are those who make the desired impact on the lives of the students, while the ineffective ones may not necessarily make any meaningful impact. In the view of Garikney (2013), teachers should be a role model both in the school and in the entire community as both students and the entire community look up to teachers as a standard that should be worthy of emulation.

Thus, for a teacher to be effective, the fundamental factor is to be able to deliver quality instructions, which in the interest of this study emanates from the teacher's experience and professionalism. However, several indicators such as students' performance and research studies have shown that much is needed to be done to proffer lasting solutions to existing poor instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria. For these reasons, this study filled the gap by examining the relative and combined effects of teachers' characteristics as a determinant of instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria. The study tests for any significant relative influence of teachers' characteristics (qualification, experience, and professionalism) on the instructional quality in public secondary schools in Nigeria. Ideally, the longer a teacher teaches in a school, the more experienced such teacher becomes.

Unlike the level or experience and the degree of professionalism, the educational qualification of the teachers has little or no significant relative influence on the instructional quality in the public secondary schools in Nigeria. This might also be a result of the fact that many are teaching without teaching qualifications as the teachers possess qualifications such as a Higher National Diploma (HND), degrees in Pure Arts, Humanities, and Science, without recourse to education training. In fact, having the appropriate teaching qualification is the first step towards professionalism. It is within this context that relevant bodies prioritise the involvement of these teachers in capacity-building initiatives geared towards the professional development of these teachers. The inability of these teachers to understand the nitty-gritty of teaching poses, and will continue to pose, a great risk for instructional quality. In a similar vein, Hermans, Sloep, and Kreijns's (2017) espouse that to overcome educational challenges relating to instructional quality, perfect teaching conditions must be met and this should begin with teachers as there is a significant number of teachers not able, capable or willing to define educational challenges, design a new pedagogy and get involved in a full cycle of design inquiry.

What is evident from the topical research is that these educational challenges in Nigeria will be exposed during teacher training and necessary corrective measures will be ensured. Hence, the professionalism of teachers should be a major objective in achieving effective instructional quality in Nigerian public secondary schools. Teachers must be provided with an array of opportunities to develop themselves and they must be encouraged to utilise these opportunities in order to combat the disturbing situation of instructional quality in the country, as the continued lack of attention towards teachers' development will continue to have negative effects on students' performance. Finally, the findings of the study, as well as the interrogation of other studies, suggest that the professional development of teachers will result in educational effectiveness and consequently assist in thwarting the poor performance of students in Nigerian public secondary schools.

The characteristics of teachers in ensuring instructional quality in secondary schools cannot be overemphasised. The years of teaching experience and professionalism play a critical role in instructional quality in secondary schools. It is no doubt that quality of instruction is germane to what the school and individual students achieve and become in life. It is not only important to a student's success, it also leads to a society where the products of the school system are able to interact with and lead society with ease, with the popular notion that students become leaders, managers, and decision makers in society. As a result, the quality of instruction deserves serious attention at an early stage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the years, the issue of instructional quality has been a major concern in Nigerian public secondary schools, which is evident from the academic performance of secondary school students in the externally conducted examinations. Importantly, this study reveals the desiderata. For quality instruction and improved academic performance, it is necessary to rely on the services of teachers with an educational certificate from a recognised teacher training institution and ensure uniformity in application of criteria used by the TRCN to professionalise teaching. Therefore, the study recommends that teachers must be encouraged to attend educational conferences, seminars, and in-service programmes where issues relating to quality of instruction are discussed. This will expose the teachers to practical capacity programmes on instructional development and can also form part of the promotion requirements for teachers.

Also, governments, through their various supervising ministries and agencies, should advise and ensure that qualified teachers are recruited into the teaching positions in Nigerian public secondary schools. Finally, the TRCN should ensure that there is equality of application of the standards set for teachers' professionalism across all the states of the federation. This would make it possible for a professional teacher in one state to be employed as a professional teacher in any state of the federation. As with many other studies, this study also has its limitations. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, a qualitative research study could help to fully understand the complex and behavioural processes involved in teachers' professional development *viz-a-viz* the impact of such on instructional quality. Also, more studies may be conducted to focus specifically on the different states in the country. Perhaps, through such studies, new findings that are state-specific may be generated.

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