

Developing as a Teacher – a study of Nigerian Teachers

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The quality of teaching staff and the subject of teacher education have been at the centre of education reforms in Nigeria for a long time. Fafunwa (1974) drew attention to the dependence of higher education on the foundations laid by primary and secondary education emphasizing the need for a well-qualified teaching staff as the vital step for training skilled manpower. Nigeria endorsed and benefited from Health and Education initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s, for example the initiatives following the Education for All Conferences (1990, 2000). Despite this, Nigeria's attempt at professional development for teachers has not recorded the success it was intended to achieve. Current processes have failed to support the teaching profession and to provide the required quality of education teachers provide.

Despite the fact that historically considerable policy attention has been paid to education, a symptomatic pattern of inefficiencies and implementation failures has resulted in fundamental weakness with regards to teacher support in Nigeria. In recent years, in an attempt to respond to the challenges of effective education provision, Nigeria has engaged in international collaborations through partnerships with local organisations which focus on improving access to the quality of, and equity in, education with a common feature being in-service training for teachers. However, Johnson (2009) argued that teachers produced in Nigeria are of low quality, and posed a pertinent question as to whether in-service teacher development programs could remedy the effects of low entry standards and increase the academic and professional competencies of teachers.

It has been claimed that the experiences of teachers in the early years determine their effectiveness and future development (c.f. Day et al, 2005; McNally et al, 2008). This growing

consensus about the importance of the early experiences of teachers in shaping their development, and influencing their effectiveness, not only in their initial years but throughout their careers (c.f. Jensen et al, 2012), is what made this research interesting for me. I am curious to find out how teachers' experiences of initial training and the learning context in which that takes place affects their professional growth.

My study investigates aspects of teachers' Early Professional Development (EPD) in Lagos State. It is particularly concerned with teachers who have no more than three years teaching experience. In some contexts, this period is identified as distinct phases that come with entitlement to specific types of support. It includes the first year during which teachers undergo initial teacher education (ITE), and the second year, often designated as the induction or Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year. The teachers selected for this research have undertaken the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) through various providers in Lagos State.

The main focus of this research concerns new teachers' experiences, perceptions and views relating to their EPD and how participation in the PGDE programme affects this. The research aims to find out if and how the experience of the PGDE affects new teachers' EPD, why this may be the case, and the role that learning and work contexts play in furthering or constraining these new teachers' EPD. In addition, the research will include an appraisal of the PGDE course (the course aims, approach, structure and content).

The research questions are

Main Research Question

What are the context and learning factors that influence the professional development of new teachers in Nigeria?

Sub Question

How do new teachers understand and negotiate their professional identity as they move from being trainees to work in schools?

In what ways do new teachers consider their roles and responsibilities as professionals within the context of their schools?

This study deals with new teachers' professional development which Beijaard et al (2004) listed as one of the elements of teacher identity. Day and Gu (2010) defined professional identity as a teacher's self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work and the meanings that are attributed to them by others. 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 teachers develop and grow professionally.

The professional development of new teachers will be explored using the theoretical framework developed by Eraut et al (2004) concerning the context and learning factors that affect professional growth of nurses, accountants and engineers. Eraut identifies context factors as: allocation and structuring of work; individual participation and expectations of their performance and progress and encounters and relationships with people at work. The learning factors are identified as the challenge and value of the work; confidence and commitment and feedback and support. This framework is relevant and compelling for this study as it articulates the key factors that affect learning, whose relative significance Eraut et al (2004) argue 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.

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 compare the range of opinions held. To achieve this goal, a descriptive and analytic perspective is adopted to the findings. In particular, documents such as Nigeria's National Policy on Education, as well as the Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers and the PGDE

programme guide, are examined along with the views expressed in interviews with 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). The qualitative methodology adopted to discover the relationships between new teachers' learning and development and the context in which these take place. This presents an appropriate paradigm in which teachers can discuss freely the shifts and transitions in their professional development during teacher training and in schools.

Interviews have already been held with 12 teachers and two head teachers, and preliminary findings show that in making improvements in Lagos, the State MoE began the recruitment of graduates without teaching qualifications who undergo basic training prior to being posted to schools. The teachers appointed on this basis are expected to obtain the PGDE within two years in order for their employment to be confirmed. Such findings are of immediate interest and relevance to this research, as it centers on the debate about the location of ITE at either the undergraduate or postgraduate level. In the context of the limited provision of quality education in Nigeria, and of children's poor learning outcomes, this debate was fundamental to the framing of this research and informed the choice to explore the experiences of teachers who have trained through the post graduate route. The assumption in so doing is that candidates on this course would have completed a programme which adequately prepared them for professional practice.

In recent years, the trend in many countries has been to explicitly focus on attracting the most talented graduates into the classroom as the idea that teacher quality is the key to improving schools' performance 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. A recent research project for TF concluded that the initiative had raised examination results in the schools where it operates. A fundamental contributor to the success and effectiveness of graduate recruitment in these contexts is the support that teachers get in bridging the transition between teacher education and classroom practice

through the allocation of key roles for people to work with graduates in year one, and the use of induction programs to support and improve new teacher effectiveness once they have qualified to teach.

Early indications from teachers interviewed so far in this study suggests that graduates in Lagos State do not benefit from a recognized period of support or induction during their first and second years respectively. 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; Walker et al 2011). Conversely, in some educational settings, the absence of a formalized induction (Kenya) or a compulsory induction period (USA) has been reported to be detrimental to teacher development (c.f. Indoshi, 2003; Stanulis, Fallona and Pearson, 2010). It can therefore be inferred that this lack of structured support is likely to be detrimental to graduates' effectiveness in Lagos State. This gap in the support arrangements for new teachers may well negatively impact the effect that graduate teachers can have in transforming the education of children in Lagos State. In analysing respondents' interviews, I am keen to gain an insight into how new teachers are supported in Lagos State and understand what impact this has on their work life balance. I will consider this in the context of teacher turnover and supply in the State.

This research is part of my doctorate in Education at University College London (UCL) Institute of Education (IOE) which will be concluded in 2017.