

Understanding the Underrepresentation of Male Teachers in Nigerian Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Enugu State (2014-2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study x-rays the decline in number of male teachers in Nigeria's secondary schools, highlighting the gender dynamics that influence the teaching profession. The role teachers play in the education sector of every country is paramount in nation building. There is a noticeable decline in male participation particularly at the primary and secondary schools' levels in Nigeria. The research questions that this study seeks to answer include: Why are male teachers underrepresented in the Nigerian Secondary schools? Secondly, how does the gender imbalance among secondary schools' teachers in Nigeria affect the educational experience of the students? Thirdly, what are the strategies to be employed in combating male teachers' underrepresentation and promoting gender balance in the teaching workforce of Nigerian secondary schools? Using social role theory and intersectionality as theoretical frameworks, the study examines cultural, economic, and social factors contributing to the underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools. Key findings reveal that low remuneration, social stereotypes, and cultural expectations deter men from pursuing teaching careers in Nigeria. Many view teaching in secondary schools as a low-status career, predominantly associated with caregiving roles traditionally assigned to women. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative data from surveys of 15 secondary schools in Enugu State and qualitative insights from semi-formal interviews with male teachers and non-teachers to attend to the research questions. The results showcase a significant gender imbalance, with female teachers constituting 67% of the surveyed workforce. This underrepresentation has negative implications that include; limited access to male role models for students and increased workloads for the remaining teachers. To address this, the study recommends public engagement initiatives to challenge the cultural and societal norms and promote gender balance in teaching, emphasising the importance of male participation in education for the wholistic development of students and fostering an inclusive educational environment in Nigeria.

Key words: Underrepresentation, male teachers, Nigerian secondary schools, Gender imbalance and stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

The underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools is a growing global concern, with implications for educational systems across various regions. In fields where men have historically had more sway, like science and technology, having male teachers in the classroom is essential for increasing gender diversity and giving children strong role models. Expansively, priority is given to education by the United Nation in her pursuit for the sustainable goals (UNESCO, 2023). The teachers play important roles in the educational scheme of every society since they administer the teaching duties that make learning seamless. Around the world, there is sharp decline among males in embracing the teaching career especially for the younger ones (Brody, 2015), thus, calls have been made for increasing participation of men in the profession so that the gender gap could be reduced globally. Historically, there have been significant gender inequalities in the workforce in the early grade schools (Sullivan *et al.*, 2020). Studies have indicated that the teaching profession is experiencing a significant increase in the number of female instructors, while the number of male teachers, particularly in early grades and foundation levels, is dropping rapidly (Xu and Waniganayake, 2018). Multiple

reports have suggested an underrepresentation of male teachers (Sahin et al., 2018). Women are overrepresented in the field of early childhood education and care jobs globally (Brody, 2015; Heikkilä and Hellman, 2017).

Teaching is perceived as a "feminized" profession, and many nations have seen a continuous fall in the number of male teachers due to poor societal reputation, inadequate salary, and limited professional growth chances. A comprehensive look into the reasons and possible remedies for the underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools is necessary in light of the serious concerns this trend brings about regarding the effects on gender representation, student involvement, and the quality of education provided.

In Nigeria, the underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools has been an issue to be concerned about, reflecting broader issues in the educational sector. Despite the crucial role that male teachers perform in impacting students' outcomes and providing varied role models, there has been a dramatic drop in male participation. This trend raises questions regarding the underlying causes of their underrepresentation, which range from inadequate salary and limited career advancement to societal expectations and working circumstances. Overall, there is a considerable reduction in males opting to teach as a career, particularly in pre-elementary, elementary, and secondary school settings. For instance, Ossai and Ramsaroop (2022) suggest that the early childhood education workforce is highly feminised in Nigeria with women dominating the field. Cultural, economic, and societal variables influence gender dynamics in teaching in Nigeria, including teacher gender makeup, professional experiences, and positions. This study investigates the gender dynamics among secondary school teachers in Nigeria, focusing on the causes, issues, and solutions to the diminishing proportion of male teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. Teaching in secondary schools is one of the most difficult and important professions for nation-building and development. With the ongoing gender disparities in this field among Nigerian secondary school teachers, men teachers are becoming increasingly underrepresented in comparison to their female colleagues. Historically, the teaching profession in Nigeria has attracted more women than men especially in recent times, and the continued drop in the number of male instructors raises severe questions about gender norms, professional happiness, and job retention.

Against the backdrop of the underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools in Enugu State emerging as a significant issue particularly in recent years, this study aims to study the reasons for the underrepresentation of male teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools, the consequences of the reasons for the underrepresentation in the education experience of students and the strategies to adopt in combating underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools. The study is therefore divided into six sections. Following this introduction, section two did literature review, section three highlighted the methodology adopted in the study, while section four did data presentation and analysis and in section five, we did the discussion. The last section concluded the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To answer the first research question of "why" the underrepresentation of male teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools, researches indicate that there are factors that deter many males from taking up teaching career in the Nigerian secondary schools. Some existing literature indicates that several factors contribute in the underrepresentation of male teachers (Manabete, 2022). Among these factors are low remuneration, lack of professional development, social expectations, and economic pressures which make teaching less attractive for Nigerian men compared to other professions perceived as more prestigious and lucrative. The stereotypes surrounding male teachers as potential sex predators, abusers, and child molesters (Tembo, 2015) represent an additional factor of concern. These indices make most parents to prefer their children being taught by female teachers (Zhao and Zeng, 2010). Any male teacher that relates well with students especially the female ones maybe susceptible of sexual misconduct with them. This makes many men see teaching especially young students challenging since a fair assessment of their work is not always given due to the stereotypes (Yang, 2015).

A cultural factor also discourages men from pursuing teaching as a profession. In Nigeria, the traditional roles ascribed to males (Mensah, 2021) limit their involvement in certain performatory roles of teachers, particularly in caregiving contexts. It is commonly assumed that the teaching profession is predominantly suited for

females, as it is often associated with caregiving and nurturing roles traditionally assigned to women (Tufan, 2018) in Nigeria and elsewhere. Historically, society has held women to a higher standard than men in parenting, leading to their greater enrolment in teaching compared to male counterparts (Joseph and Wright, 2016).

The low status and remuneration of teachers in Nigeria serve as significant obstacles for males considering the teaching profession. In Nigeria, teachers are not well regarded and are among the lowest income earners, in contrast to other regions where they receive higher respect and remuneration. Nwakpa (2014) observes that teacher salaries exhibit significant disparities when compared to those of other professions, such as doctors and engineers. Males are deterred from pursuing the teaching profession due to insufficient financial compensation to support themselves and their families (Asodike, 2016). The societal neglect and devaluation of teachers exacerbates the existing problem. Nigerian society perceives teaching as a profession for the weak and ineffectual, deeming it unsuitable for capable individuals. Male teachers are consequently perceived as not embodying authentic masculinity (River, 2016). Evidence for this is provided by the majority of students who were randomly surveyed regarding their interest in becoming teachers in the future, as most responded negatively (Arigbabu et al., 2024).

In all, no matter the cultural, social and even economic biases, sentiments and stereotypes that may circumvent male teachers, their roles in maintaining gender balance and gap in modelling the children in their various schools are paramount and of utmost importance (Akman et al., 2014). Female teachers outnumbering male teachers in schools creates gender imbalance and may affect the children in the future (Skelton, 2011). Male teachers are encouraged to be involved in the education of the children from early childhood grades (Zhang, 2017) so as to play positive male role models. It is important also for boys to see male teachers who care for the students or pupils around them in order to foster in them a great need to be caring as well.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed method (explanatory sequential) research design (Creswell, 2016) combining elements of quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to give a wholesome view to the topic. This study used quantitative data got from surveys of fifteen secondary schools selected randomly within Enugu State of Nigeria to illustrate qualitative findings accessed from reviews of previous works on the issue of gender distributions among secondary schools' teachers and qualitative data got from semi-formal interviews from twenty-five adult male teachers and fifteen other adult male non-teachers. The population of the study is 655 teachers (of which 25 teachers were interviewed among them) and 15 non-tutorial adult male. The sampling techniques used was purposive sampling technique. Instruments used for data collection were surveys and semi-formal interview. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, percentages) was the method used to analyse the quantitative data collected using interpretative research design (Creswell, 2013) which offers insight on how one in a given context makes sense of a given phenomenon to ascertain the numeric distribution of male teachers in those schools. The analysis focused on the distribution of male and female teachers across the selected schools. The qualitative data got from the semi-formal interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis approach as interview transcripts were coded and categorised into recurring themes like remuneration, gender stereotypes and cultural perceptions of masculinity in teaching. This interpretative analysis was essential in understanding the underlying factors that orchestrate the underrepresentation of male teachers in secondary schools. This ensured that the research went beyond surface-level statistical trends and uncover deeper issues.

This study was guided by the social role (Eagly, 1987) and intersectionality (Atewologun, 2018) theories in presenting a clear understanding of the dynamics of gender in accounting for the “why” of the low number of male teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools using both primary and secondary data/literature. Alice Eagly (1987) in her social role theory opines that gender roles are culturally construed nuances that dictate appropriate behaviour patterns for men and women learned through the process of socialisation and reinforced by social institutions. The theory of intersectionality (Atewologun, 2018) on the other hand is a critical framework that provides us with the mindset and the language for examining interconnections and interdependence between social categories and systems. In the Nigerian educational setting, culturally assigned roles of non-nurturant nature assigned to men affect their choice of teaching as a career path except in the

administrative unit. The strivings towards gender balance (Raftery and Valiulis, 2013) in education setting notwithstanding, there remain evidences of gender imbalance among the Nigerian secondary schools’ teachers. The feminisation of the teaching profession is of global concern (Drudy, 2013) since gender imbalance among the teachers in schools can affect the psychological or emotional development of young children.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected from fifteen secondary schools in Enugu State show a significant gender disparity among teachers. Out of the 655 teachers surveyed, 67% (439 teachers) are female, while 33% (216 teachers) are male. The survey data as illustrated in Table below provides a clear view of the gender imbalance in teachers across various schools, with rural schools showing a slightly higher male teachers representation compared to urban schools.

| S/N | NAMES OF SCHOOLS WHERE TEACHERS WORK | MALE | FEMALE | TOTAL |
|-----|--|------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Sacred Heart Secondary School, Uwani Enugu (U) | 10 | 25 | 35 |
| 2 | College of Immaculate Conception, Enugu*(U) | 12 | 27 | 39 |
| 3 | Holy Rosary College, Enugu*(U) | 12 | 38 | 50 |
| 4 | Union Secondary School, Awknanaw*(U) | 21 | 30 | 51 |
| 5 | Girls Secondary School, Abakpa-Nike*(U) | 31 | 60 | 91 |
| 6 | Maryland Secondary School, Enugu (U) | 11 | 23 | 34 |
| 7 | Girls High School, Uwani*(U) | 10 | 38 | 48 |
| 8 | Community Secondary School, Ugwuogo-Nike (R) | 12 | 32 | 44 |
| 9 | Community Secondary School, Neke (R) | 13 | 13 | 26 |
| 10 | Community Secondary School, Amagunze (R) | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| 11 | Community Secondary School, ObeaguAwknanaw (R) | 15 | 24 | 39 |
| 12 | Comprehensive Secondary School, Akwuke (R) | 15 | 25 | 40 |
| 13 | St Catherine’s Secondary School, Nsukka*(U) | 35 | 73 | 108 |
| 14 | Holy Trinity Secondary School, Iheaka-Nsukka (R) | 8 | 18 | 26 |
| 15 | Avila College, Nsukka (R) | 5 | 9 | 14 |
| | TOTAL | 216 | 439 | 655 |

* Schools that are not co-educational (U) Schools located in Urban areas (R) Schools located in Rural areas

From the above table, schools such as St Catherine’s (35 males, 73 females) and Girls’ Secondary School, Abakpa-Nike (31 males, 60 females) show a pronounced gender imbalance. Male teachers are significantly underrepresented, particularly in urban schools and all-girls’ schools. This disparity aligns with broader cultural and professional stereotypes that dissuade men from entering the teaching profession, particularly in urban areas.

The table shows that the number of male teachers is noticeably higher in rural areas than in urban areas. For instance, in Community Secondary School, Amagunze (rural), the gender ratio is much closer, with 6 male teachers to 4 female teachers. This trend suggests that rural schools might have less gendered expectations for teachers or offer more opportunities for male employment in education due to fewer job opportunities compared to the one in the urban areas. Hence, the rural areas may exhibit fewer barriers for male teachers due to the limited employment options, aligning with intersectionality theory, where location intersects with gender expectations to influence professional choices.

Semi-informal interviews with twenty-five teachers and fifteen non-teachers provided deeper insights into the why the underrepresentation of male teachers exploring personal narratives and lived experiences of male teachers in relation to their professional challenges. The interview questions were guided by themes emerging from the literature, including social stereotypes, economic pressures, and cultural expectations. They cited low remuneration as the major deterrent, followed by societal perceptions and biases of teaching as a feminised profession. Some of the respondents reported feeling stigmatised or being seen as less capable because teaching, especially at the secondary school level, is associated with nurturing, a role traditionally reserved for women in the Nigerian society. The interviews allowed for a richer exploration of the socio-cultural dimensions of “why” the underrepresentation of male teachers in Nigerian secondary schools that numerical data alone could not fully capture.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of the research, it is observed that there is a profound gender imbalance among secondary school teachers in Enugu State, with significant underrepresentation of male teachers. This trend as prevalent across Nigeria aligns with global discussions on the “feminisation” of teaching, particularly at lower educational levels. Informed by social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and intersectionality theory (Atewologun, 2018), the discussion examines how socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and gender stereotypes occasion male underrepresentation, the subsequent consequences for educational experience of the students and the strategies to be employed in combating male teachers’ underrepresentation in the Nigerian secondary schools.

Causes of Male Teachers’ Underrepresentation in Nigerian Secondary Schools

In social role theory Eagly (1987) posits that culturally construed gender norms define “appropriate” roles for men and women, influencing their career choices. In Nigeria, teaching is widely perceived as a nurturing profession more suited to women, stemming from its association with caregiving roles traditionally assigned to women. This perception is exacerbated by societal expectations that men should seek high-status and well-paying jobs to satisfy their role as family breadwinners. As a result, men are less likely to pursue teaching positions, particularly in primary and secondary schools where they might feel their professional identity is at odds with societal notions of masculinity.

Furthermore, male teachers report a sense of stigma especially when working closely with adolescent students. This aligns with findings by Tembo (2015) and Yang (2015) that male teachers face stereotypes of being potential threats in caregiving environments. The internalisation of these stereotypes by the community and male teachers themselves creates barriers to male pursuance of teaching career and contributes to their underrepresentation in Nigerian secondary schools.

Another factor that influences the greater numeric representation of females among the secondary school teachers is educational attainment in the professional development of teachers. In Nigeria, the academic qualification of teachers in the primary and secondary schools is lesser than that of higher institutions (Filgona and Sakiyo, 2020). Many women who become and are teachers in secondary schools hold qualifications like National Certificate in Education (NCE), Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) which are lower than the ones needed to teach in higher institutions in Nigeria. Nigerian men aim higher in their professional development more than women (Dosunmu and Dichaba, 2021) and this ends many women with lower academic qualifications teaching in secondary and primary schools.

Additionally, Carroll *et al.* (2021) indicate that schools capable of and actively making larger salary offers are able to effectively attract a greater number of male teachers than those that pay low salary. Teaching in secondary schools is a low-paying job in Nigeria (Ikeije and Islam, 2020) and many men decline from it because they are traditionally seen as primary breadwinners of their households. Women on the other hand are more willing to accept these low-paying teaching jobs in Nigeria (Nnanyibu, 2014) due to the relative stability and flexibility they offer which allows them to balance their family responsibilities and work. Women in Nigeria shoulder lesser financial responsibilities in homes except for those who are the heads of their families. This factor is instrumental in the career choices females make in Nigeria; hence, many females are employed in low paying jobs. Teaching being a low-income job in Nigeria is graced more by females than males.

Consequences of Male Teachers' Underrepresentation in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The underrepresentation of male teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools has notable resultant repercussions. Most importantly, it exacerbates the gender imbalance in schools which limits the access of students both male and female to diverse role models (Drudy, 2013). This affects the male students significantly since they may lack the opportunity of encountering positive male role models in their educational environment. Male teachers play an important role in mentoring male students especially in the rural communities where students may lack male authority figures at schools.

Again, it disrupts the seamless continuity of education since secondary schools often struggle in replacing teachers when they quit their profession and join others. This obviously leads to the increment of workloads for the remaining teachers who will be challenged to have larger class sizes and this further deteriorates the quality of education offered to the students. This can be seen in the table where a secondary school has only eleven teachers for teaching the whole students.

Another side effect of the gender imbalance in secondary schools is that female teachers tend towards paying more non-academic attention to male students as reported by Zinyahs (2024) in his paper. It was discovered that the female teachers that teach mathematics from the research locality tend to be more friendly with male than female students. The disparate treatments towards the female students by female mathematics teachers have deleterious impacts on the girls' self-esteem and self-confidence in their performance in mathematics. To avert this, teachers should manage their emotions, sentiments and biases in discharging their duties in other not to display any disparity, symptoms of favouritism or partiality for their effectiveness as teachers.

Strategies to Combating Male Teachers' Underrepresentation in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The underrepresentation of male teachers in Nigerian secondary schools is a multifaceted issue driven by cultural, social, and economic factors. To address the imbalance requires a comprehensive strategy that involves the cooperation of all the parties involved. The following are some of the recommended strategies:

First of all, efforts should be made in challenging and changing the cultural norms and stereotypes that limit men from taking up teaching careers in secondary schools (Connel, 2023). This can be achieved through public-community engagements and awareness campaigns in order to attain gender balance among the secondary schools' teachers (Drudy, 2013). Initiating campaigns to shift public perception around gender roles in teaching is paramount in promoting teaching as a respectable and viable career path for men, aligning with UNESCO's call for gender equity in education.

To promote academic, cultural and social development, gender balance among the teachers is an important variable to consider. Thus, more efforts should be made in ensuring the increment of the number of in-service male teachers in the educational workforce (Bryanand Milton, 2017). This idea is not known by many who have one or more prejudice about male teachers. They tend to forget that gender balance among teachers in secondary schools would promote effective role modelling especially for the male students.

Again, to promote greater male representation in the teaching profession, particularly in primary, and secondary education (Bryan and Milton, 2017), implementing school career counselling initiatives targeted towards men can be implemented. This is with the goal of helping them (male students) realise that they are also capable of becoming teachers in both elementary and secondary schools, challenging the notion that teaching is exclusively for females (Ossai and Ramsaroop, 2022). This will go a long way in curbing the societal and cultural biases that teaching in lower schools is a feminine career.

To make teaching more appealing to men, the government should promote the recruitment of males in both teacher-education and teacher-employment. They should also provide scholarships, grants and loans to aspiring male teachers in order to make the career more attractive. This will promote the interests of the growing populace to see teaching as a profession worth embracing.

School authorities and teachers' associations should make concerted efforts to enhance the public perception of teachers in primary and secondary institutions in order to increase the appeal of the profession to males (Stromquist, 2018). This can be achieved by celebrating successful male teachers and their achievements publicly, through awards, media stories, and profiling in educational journals. Male teachers who have had strong impact on students' outcomes or contributed to school leadership can demonstrate to the society that teaching is a rewarding career and therefore challenge the view that it is primarily a women's area.

Finally, researchers in education should conduct further studies on gender dynamics in teaching as a career among young Nigerian men (Okoro and Uwah, 2013). Such future studies should aim to explain further why male teachers tend engage in other high-income careers than teaching in primary and secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

The persistent underrepresentation of male teachers in Nigerian secondary schools underscores a multifaceted issue rooted in cultural, economic, and societal dynamics. This study found out that stereotypes associating teaching with feminine caregiving roles, coupled with low remuneration and limited professional development or advancement, deter many men from pursuing secondary education teaching careers. Consequently, the resulting gender imbalance deprives students, especially male students of diverse role models and contributes to increased workload pressures on remaining teachers which in turn affect educational quality adversely.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to shift societal perceptions by promoting teaching as a promising and respected career choice for men, fostering an environment that values gender diversity in education. Policies aimed at improving teachers' salaries, provision of career development incentives, and launching public campaigns to redefine the role of male teachers in secondary schools can attract and retain male teachers therein. By striving towards a balanced representation in teaching, Nigerian secondary schools can better support students' social and emotional development, providing meaningful interactions with both male and female teachers. This approach promises not only to enrich the learning environment but also to strengthen the foundation of Nigerian's secondary educational workforce for a more inclusive future.

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