

# **Additional Discoveries on Causes of Teacher Attrition**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to explore additional causes of teacher attrition different from the conventional causes as identified by many literatures around the world. A qualitative method was used. Six serving teachers in two urban secondary schools in Niger state, Nigeria were purposively sampled, an in depth interview and document analysis was used as a means of data collection. The findings discovered; irregular promotion, Language problem among students, and late payment of salary, as the additional causes of teacher attrition. The paper concludes that teacher attrition is affected by the three major factors identified from the study and these factors give the impression that teaching profession is not respected as other professions in the study area hence their welfare was not given due consideration.

## **Introduction**

The rate of teacher attrition has become an issue to both policy makers and educational administrators which attracted series of researches in both developed and developing nations. In United States for example, Rosenow (2005) reported that 9.3% of public teachers in US leave in less than one year of their entry into the profession, while 15% leave within their three years in teaching. About 50% of beginning teachers exit the teaching profession within their first five years of service in America (Greiner & Smith, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). In addition, Chang (2009) discovered the rate of teacher attrition in US within the first years to be 25% while about 40% leave the profession within five years of their entrance.

In a research conducted by Alan & Pamela (2003), at the Centre for Education and Employment Research of the University of Buckingham

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(CEER) it was discovered that attrition rate was about 14.1% and 7.9% among primary and secondary school teachers, they further commented that the large proportion of about 38.8% were moving to another full-time position at a maintained school, while 5% and 13.5% of teachers are leaving and retiring from the job respectively. The rate of teacher attrition is more pronounced in England than in Wales (Robinson & Smithers, 2001). Norway has less teacher attrition compared to US and UK, with 8.8% leaving their teaching position within a year and 4.6 changing their profession within and outside the country. (Schone, 1999).

The case of teacher attrition is common in many African countries because of low income status. In Lesotho, Urwick et al. (2005), conducted a research in three districts of Thaba-Tseka, Mafeteng & Maseru from 2002-2003, they discovered that Thaba-Tseka being the most remote area, have the lowest rate of teacher attrition with only 0.5%, this was due to less opportunity for the teachers of not having access to available jobs compared to their counterparts in the urban centres who have opportunity of many jobs. In Mafeteng, the attrition rate among teachers was 10.3% while Maseru has the highest with 13.4% within the year of study. The rate of teacher attrition in Zambia has rapidly raised within four years, in 2004 the rate was 5.5%, but increased to 11.9% in 2008 (Zambian Statistical bulletin, 2008). In Nigeria the rate of teacher attrition varies within the Geo-political zones. In Southern part of the country where most of their states are educationally developed the case is minimal with about 10-15% (Ekundayo, 2010; Popoola, 2009) Compared to the Northern part where almost all the states are less educationally developed has about 15-20% rate of teacher attrition (Fati, 2010; Adamu, 2010).

### **What literature says on Causes of Attrition among Teachers.**

Studies from different parts of the world identified Low salary, Poor learning environment, and School leadership style as the major factors causing attrition among teachers (Adelabu, 2005; Afe, 2002; Cassandra, 2006; Hess, 2006; Liza et al., 2008; Usman, 2008).

#### ***Low salary***

Teachers complained of low salary as a factor which is affecting their decision to remain in teaching (Webb et al., 2004). Between 2002-2004 more than 50% of teachers who left teaching in Florida mentioned low payment as the major reasons for their leaving (Gladis et al., 2007). In Texas, Liza et al., (2008) interviewed teachers who left teaching, within three years of their entrance, all the respondents mentioned low salary as their major reason for opting out of the profession. In Africa, teachers

mostly receive less than three dollars a day (Paul, 2004). Some of these teachers cannot afford their basic needs (Paul & Kwame, 2007; Davidson, 2007). In an attempt to sustain themselves teachers combine teaching with another business (Osei, 2006). As a result of low salary, teachers easily leave teaching to another profession whenever an opportunity comes their way (Osunde & Omoruyi, 2005; Yusuf, 2010).

#### ***Poor learning environment***

Dilapidated facilities, few or inadequate science laboratories, inadequate textbooks, lack of instructional materials, class size, tight scheduled of duty are among reasons giving by teachers for their intention to leave the job (Loeb, et al., 2005; Ndukwe, 2002; Okpala, 2006). Inadequate resources limit teachers' effectiveness and affect their decision on teaching (Hess, 2006). Schneider (2003) randomly selected teachers in Chicago and Washington, D.C. Teachers were asked to rate their working conditions and how the working conditions is affecting their performance and effectiveness of their job. Among things to be evaluated, included; the degree of overcrowding, the availability and adequacy of facilities such as science laboratories and lunch rooms, other conditions to be rated, includes; indoor air quality, thermal comfort, classroom lighting, and noise levels. A-through-F scale was the rating mark. About 60% of respondents reported that science laboratories were somewhat or very inadequate, or non-existence. Nearly 40% said that their classrooms were the wrong size for the type of education they were trying to deliver, and more than 25% reported having taught in non-classroom spaces such as hallways and even closets. The respondents added that these factors can affect their decision in teaching and is enough to cause attrition among teachers.

In Nigeria, Fati (2010) discovered that apart from low salary, poor learning environment was the next major factor causing attrition among teachers. Most secondary schools in Nigeria learn in un-conducive learning atmosphere, the basic amenities are not there and this has a lot of effect in demoralising the strength of so many teachers (Ahmed 2003).

#### ***School leadership style***

Leadership style of a school has effect on teacher's decision of either to remain in teaching or not (Liza et al., 2008). Bad leadership style of a school principal can discourage teachers from the profession (Fati, 2010). Lack of teachers' involvement in decision making, lack of administrative support and attention are critical factors resulting to teacher attrition (Boyd, et al., 2009).

There are several studies that indicated lack of support from the school principal as among the factors causing attrition. For instance, in Washington

D.C, Luekens (2004) using the results of teacher follow up survey of 2000-2001, the researcher found out that nearly 40% of teachers who left teaching cited lack of administrative support from their principal as the main reason. Adamu (2010) conducted his study among secondary school teachers in Bauchi State, Nigeria. 120 teachers were purposively selected across 10 secondary schools. The selected teachers were asked to indicate support from their principals among others. 42% of the 120 respondents indicated that the support from their principal is not encouraging, 35% indicated partial support from their principal while 23% stated that the support from their principal is encouraging. The result of the study added that among those that are not encouraged and those that indicated partial support from their principals also indicated their interest of leaving the teaching profession if they should have any available opportunity.

#### ***Purpose of the study***

Niger state is one of the less educationally developed states in Nigeria, and among states with high attrition rate among secondary school teachers. In 2009 the state lost 10.9% to attrition, while in 2010 the percentage increased to 15.5%, and in 2011 the percentage rose to 21.1% (Niger State Secondary Education Board 2011). The main purpose of this study is to explore additional causes of attrition apart from the ones identified by some literatures, so as to have better and clear picture on causes of attrition in the study area.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was carried out using qualitative method. According to Creswell (2007) a qualitative research is a mean for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The purpose of qualitative studies is to describe a phenomenon from the respondents' points of view through interviews and observations. In qualitative study the intention of the researcher is to listen to the voice of respondents or observe them in their natural environments (Field & Morse, 1992). There are several designs in qualitative research ranging from Ethnography, Phenomenology, Case study, and Grounded theory (Merriam, 2009). A case study design was selected for this study so as to have an in depth description of the phenomenon under investigation. Six teachers were selected through purposive sampling. Two teachers each from the early, mid and late career in the teaching profession were considered. The main reason for choosing this group is to have their opinion and get their feelings on the phenomenon under study. Although the opinion of respondents may varies because their years of experience in teaching

profession is not the same and that was the main reason why we decided to choose our respondents across career cadre in the teaching profession. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interview with the respondents, focusing on getting additional causes of teacher attrition other than the ones commonly identified by literatures. The interview was conducted with the respondents in their various schools with each session taken between 45minutes to 1 hour. The process was repeated severally till saturation. A tape recorder was used to make sure that no single useful information was left out. In analysing the data, the transcribed interview was read severally by the researchers so as to make meanings out of it and certain codes were assigned which were later collapsed to form categories (Wilhelmina & Rhonda, 2001). The categories were later read and observed with the aim forming themes. This process was repeated severally until the themes emerged from the categories. The emerged themes are presented in the analysis below. For confidential reason the respondents were coded as Respondents 1-6 (**R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6**).

## RESULTS

After collection of data and analysis, the study identified three local factors leading to teacher attrition. These are; irregular promotion, language problem among students and late payment of salary. These factors are presented in this section. It is important to clarify that all issues regarding recruitment, promotion and salary of secondary school teachers in the study area is controlled by Niger State Secondary Education Board. The board is headed by a chairman who is answerable to the State Ministry of Education.

### *Irregular promotion*

Among the major discovery of this study on factors causing attrition among teachers is the issue of promotion, as almost all the respondents indicated that their promotion has not been regular.

**Respondent 2** commented that the issue of regular promotion has been an issue of concern to many teachers because their promotion does not come as at when due unlike other civil servants in the state who got promoted at the end of every three years of their career. She added that since she started teaching in 2006 she was only promoted once and she had to suffer before the promotion was released.

**Respondent 1** shared the same view, although he has been teaching for almost 30years but few years ago he has not been getting his promotion as expected. He expressed that;

I don't know what is wrong with the State Government, few years ago we have not been having problem with promotion after every three years you will be promoted as expected. I am referring to the period of military rule in the 80's, but when the Government of the country returned to Civilian rule, things began to change drastically, particularly the issue of promotion. There was a time I spent 5 years on a level without promotion, although mine was even fair, I know of a colleague who spent over 8 years on a level and he has not been promoted. Please, place yourself in my own shoe, if you can spend more than the expected years without being promoted will you not be discouraged with your work? And if possible start thinking of another job where you will be adequately promoted?

**Respondent 6** who joined teaching few years back has not been given any promotion yet. He said;

I thought in teaching profession everything is as smooth as in other professions; I thought at every three years I will be promoted as expected, but this is my fifth year without promotion and even the step that is supposed to be automatically added to me is no longer coming. I was told that I have to make my ways in the Secondary Education Board. I have to know someone there and I need to get ready to offer something, if not, in the next coming years I will not be promoted. This is a big problem for me because I don't know anybody in the board.

**Respondent 5** pointed out that, sometimes he ignored the issue of promotion knowing that it will be difficult to have it at the right time, so he felt that he cannot put himself in unnecessary stress of going to Secondary Education Board. He further described the process of promotion as hectic and tedious because the whole process is faulty and corrupt.

**Respondents 4 and 3** shared the same view, they all stated irregular promotion as a problem in teaching career. Although **Respondent 3** spent more years in teaching than **Respondents 4** so he suffered more on promotion. He emphasized that he has been to the Secondary Education Board but was told that they are still processing his case and after sometimes he was unable to get any positive response from the Board. **Respondent 3** also complained several times but has no option than to keep mute because many teachers are having the same problem with him and nothing has been done.

***Language problem among students***

All the respondents complained on the use of official language (English) in teaching their students, saying that, most of their students are having difficulties in receiving adequate instruction with the use of English.

**Respondent 4** explained that, majority of the students he is teaching cannot write in English, which is worrisome as it affects level of their comprehension and achievement. He also pointed that, at times he has to use the local language in teaching the students, but the major problem is that, he can only speak one local language, while the students in the class came from different ethnic background.

**Respondent 5** commented on two of his friends who left teaching because of language problem among students. He said;

John (an Igbo man) from the southern part of Nigeria came to this school for youth service and was retained to teach Economics. After some months he had to leave because he finds teaching difficult based on the fact that, he cannot combine teaching with the use of local language as he cannot speak any of the local languages in the state. The same scenario also with Adewale who also left based on language.

**Respondent 1** viewed language problem among students as a big problem which is making his teaching career so boring. He always finds it difficult to cope with the students because of the language barrier, he felt that teaching combining two languages (Local and English language) is not always the best because the students are not writing their final examinations in the local language but with English language. So if they cannot effectively understand and write English then there is a problem at the end of their studies, as they may likely fail their final examination. He concluded that, language issue is not making teaching interesting, and is among reasons why some leave teaching.

**Respondent 2** shared her experience stating that;

Many of my students are having problem in English, and being the subject I teach, I find it difficult to cope with so many topics, in fact I have to repeat some topics so many times, that is why I hardly cover my syllabus before the end of the term.

**Respondents 6** and **3** mentioned language problem among students as a problem in their teaching career. They all complained that their students

are not good in English. Although, one of the respondents mentioned that, there are few classes who can understand, but majority cannot.

***Late payment of salary***

All respondents in the study area complained of late payment of salary, stating that government does not pay their salary at the right time to teachers when compared to other civil servants in the state. In most cases teachers have to wait till middle of the month or even end of the other month before they receive their salary.

**Respondent 1** lamented that teachers have been suffering in the state in terms of constant delayed in salary payment which affects their plans, and lowered their morale in the profession. He added that even as at the time of our interview (middle of the month) the salary of the last month was not paid to them.

**Respondent 3** shared the same view with Respondent 1 on the issue of late payment of salary as a factor. He commented that, at the end of every month, teachers began to entertain fear on when to receive their salary due to constant delay which run to preceding months. The delay in salary is pathetic as they lack strong union to fight their cause. He concluded that all the Union officials are virtually bought over by the government.

**Respondent 5** has similar opinion as he stated that;

Late payment of salary is a serious issue, at times my principal cannot talk to me and many of my colleagues regarding our work particularly at the end of the month, when he knows the story that many of us are at the danger zone, you know this adage, *NO money NO friend*, that is the situation of teachers at this period. I believe if you will ask all teachers in the state none of them will escape telling you about this problem.

**Respondent 4** affirmed that, the state government is neglecting teachers in terms of salary payment, He added that, there was a time they spent over a month without salary and many of them have family that depends on them for feeding, clothing, medical bill and school fees.

**Respondent 2** shared her views on late payment of salary, saying that; As a teacher your sources of income is limited unlike politicians and other civil servants who have allowances and other benefits, with some having illegal ways of accessing government funds to enable them sustain their life



even with or without salary. So you cannot compare them with teachers and I think this could be among the reasons why teachers may want to leave teaching profession to another profession.

**Respondent 6** highlighted that for the past three years the payment of their salary has not been regular. They at times receive their salary at the beginning of the other month, while in some situations the salary of a month will be paid at the middle of the following month. He said;

You know we teachers are not like office workers who have diverse ways of getting money, we only rely on salary and no any other means. So if your salary is not paid in time you will run into trouble, you have to start looking for debt to enable you afford the necessary things.

Having presented the views of the respondents regarding the factors causing attrition, a brief discussion of the findings is presented below. The discussion was based on the three factors as identified from the study.

## **DISCUSSION**

The civil service rules on promotion of staff in the state is every three years of satisfactory performance on a rank. But it is surprising that this practiced is no longer adhered to in the teaching profession. Government do not give attention to proper promotion of teachers as indicated by all the respondents. Most of the respondents complained that they have been in one level for over 5 years while some of their colleagues spent 6 and above years without being promoted. According to the respondents the irregular promotion has caused many teachers to leave the profession to other jobs.

Language problem was among factors discovered by this study. Teachers complained of difficulties faced in their teaching because of language problem among their students. Nigeria is a country with different languages. There are more than 250 different languages (Bawa & Salahu, 2012). In Niger state alone, the area where this study was conducted, there are over 20 different languages, although Bawa & Salahu (2012) identified the existence of about 25 different languages in the state. It has been observed that, the problem of language among secondary school students in the study area is emanating from the nature of primary schools in the states, which serve as feeders to secondary schools. Most of the primary school teachers in the state use local language in teaching their pupils, while the law says English should be the language of instruction. So at the end of the

pupils' graduation and advancing to secondary schools English will now become a new thing to them because of the nature of how they were taught at the lower level.

It has been observed from the responses of all the respondents that their salary is not always paid at the right time. This issue of late payment is seriously embarrassing because from different literatures on studies conducted in different parts of the world, there has not been any literature that addresses late payment of salary in developed or even some developing societies. This case is only peculiar to under-developed societies which are commonly found in Africa, particularly Nigeria. Paul & Kwame (2007) reported late payment of salary among the low income developing countries in Africa and part of Asia, but concluded that, the case is more common within the sampled African countries. Most of the respondents in this study indicated their interest of leaving teaching job whenever they have the opportunity, because of the late payment of salary. They added that, while other categories of civil servants received their salary at the right time, teachers are the ones suffering from this mess. This issue of late payment of salary could not be far from the corrupt nature of politicians from the state, who are diverting government fund which is meant for the benefits of the masses to their personal uses.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper examined causes of attrition among teachers in secondary schools. The paper identified that teacher's attrition is affected by three factors of irregular promotion, language problem and late payment of salaries. The study also gives an impression that teaching profession is not as respected as other professions in the state hence corroborate the respondent's willingness to quit the profession to other jobs whenever the opportunities comes their way.

## **Recommendations**

- Government should give a due consideration on the welfare of teachers.
- Promotion should be regular and frequent after fulfilling the required satisfactory performance.
- Learning facilities should be provided adequately so that students with learning problem particularly on English language can be assisted.

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