TEACHING PRACTICES IN LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES IN ABEOKUTA NORTH OF OGUN STATE, NIGERIA: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF TEACHER VARIABLES

Ishola Akindele SALAMI, Ph.D
Early Childhood Unit,
Department of Teacher Education,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria
Mobile Phone line: +234806 2599060
E-mail Addresses: ia.salami@ui.edu.ng, snappy600@gmail.com, snappy600@yahoo.com

&
Folasade Florence FOLARANMI
Early Childhood Unit
Department of Teacher Education
University of Ibadan.
Mobile Phone: +2348033278466
E-mail: folasadem5@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT
The incessant decline in the learning outcomes at both primary and secondary school education in Nigeria in general and in Ogun State in particular make one look back at the quality of teaching practices at the foundation level of education. Primary school is seen as the foundation to all other education levels but the foundation is laid at the lower primary classes. Research findings as well as noticeable practices in the lower classes in public primary schools in Ogun State revealed a lot of developmentally inappropriate practices. The causes of this could either be from the government or the teachers in the school system. Considering the poor level of responsiveness of government authorities to education in Nigeria nowadays, the study determined the teacher variables that are contributing to the teaching practices in the lower classes of public schools in the State. These, if quickly addressed, will improve the quality of teaching practices which will in-turn improve the pupils learning outcomes in their present classes and in their future education.

Keywords: Learning outcomes, Teacher’s qualification, Subject matter knowledge, Instructional strategies, Teaching practices.

INTRODUCTION
There are numerous ways by which man comes about learning these days but the content learnt, the dependability, veraciousness and the effectiveness of the learning make teaching the most reliable of all sources of knowledge. Despite the level of information communication technology (ICT) development in this twenty first century, formal school system still depend heavily on teaching as a means of knowledge acquisition. As knowledge keeps growing, so is teaching with various teaching strategies and methods. That might be the reason behind the meaning of teaching which is no more seen as a process by which a knowledgeable person passing information or skills to novice but now seen as a process by which informed person passing information or skills to a less informed person and also prepare the learner to be at the right state of mind to learn (Parkay and Standford, 2004). This implies that the teaching practices of a good teacher are more than passing knowledge but includes preparation of the learner and the learning environment.
Teacher’s role, which is referred to as teaching practices in this study, is to coordinate all activities, provide an environment that empowers all individuals to become active partners in learning process, document the children’s learning and experiences (Brewer, 2007; Crowther and Wellhousen, 2004). Thus classroom teaching practices is a broad umbrella term describing a teacher’s efforts to oversee classroom activities such as learning, social interaction and pupils’ behaviour (Martin, 2009). In recent years, as scholars have been showing more concerns on the accountability and effectiveness of teaching practices through a careful analysis of variables affecting educational outcomes, teacher and its related variables have always been pointed to as the most influential school-related forces in classroom teaching practices that dictate the learning outcomes (Nwakwe, 2001; Stronge, 2002). Classroom teaching practices help shape learning experiences and increase motivation and achievement of pupils. Lowe (1999) submits that by incorporating the best classroom practices, a positive environment for learning can be created, and pupils’ knowledge will be enhanced.

Primary education, the second stage of Basic Education in Nigeria still remains the foundation upon which other levels of education are built (FRN, 2013). The lower primary classes - Primary I, II and III which is meant for pupils age 6years to 8years old, is part of early childhood stage of life that is known as the formative stage. This stage of development crucial to the basic education in that the foundation is laid and the personality of individual pupil are formed. Therefore, the teaching at these classes is expected to be functional, effective and comprehensive in order to ensure holistic development of the pupils.

A closer observation at the teaching/learning activities happening at the lower primary classes in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria reveals a lot of inadequacies that make one doubt the teaching practices of the teachers at this level of Basic Education. The teacher-pupils relationship is too formal and it is always ‘master-slave’ relationship. The communication is always from teacher to pupil, the interaction is too distance and there is a wide social gap between the teachers and the pupils. This relationship negates the submission of Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn and Downer (2007) that teacher-pupils interaction in the class which covers emotion, instruction and organisation, enhance learning in the preschool education through primary education. Another glaring and disturbing issue is the quality of the classroom environment for learning. The classrooms are without any learning resources, they are not attractive in any form and the sitting arrangement is always in a rigid column. Though, public primary schools in the State do have enough space but the space are underutilised in that there is hardly any of these schools that have a single outdoor play equipment for the pupils to use. But Jill and Joy (2009) submits that well-prepared learning environmental influences the behaviour of learners. Instruction method commonly adopted by majority of these teachers is another symptom of ineffective teaching practices. Almost all the teachers across all school subjects have resulted into the use of one common instructional method which is the teacher-centred direct instruction popularly called ‘chalk-and-talk’ or traditional method. As noted by Hiebert (2003), this traditional method has deficiencies that are contrast to the pedagogical knowledge reform advocated for in constructivist view of teaching/learning that are effective. This method, most of the time used to reduce the pupils to perceive learners that only listen and copy notes from the teacher. This eventually led to another observed problem with the teaching practices of this set of teachers. The only assessment technique used by the teachers is paper-pencil test and examination. This reveals a serious shortcoming currently inherent in Nigerian educational system. That is, lack of scientific methods to develop and assess both social and emotional development in our school system because test and examination cannot be used to assess these developmental domains. The last teaching practice observed is the classroom control. The pupils are seriously checked that they do not talk, move or use their initiation unless approved by the teacher. This strict classroom control is against the principle of learner-centred instructional methods. It has also been observed that the extent of learning that can happen in such environment is limited.

All these features of teaching practices in lower classes of public primary schools no doubt have serious influence on the total learning outcomes of the pupils. It is imperative therefore to carry out a study that will reveal the variables inherent in the teachers that are influencing their teaching practices. Past studies reveals many of such variables, but because of the status of teaching as a profession in Nigeria which is so low and also the reason many of the teachers in public primary school joining the profession was because
of no other job; the study is still considered important. This study therefore examined the attitude to teaching, teacher’s qualification, teaching experience, subject matter knowledge (SMK), job stress and job satisfaction as teacher’s variable and their influences on teaching practices.

Teacher’s attitude to teaching can dictate the extent of personal efforts the teacher will likely put into the job (Britnell, 2010) while the qualification of such teacher can determine the level of pedagogical knowledge such teacher possess in teaching activities (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It is also believed that the experience which is measured in terms of number of years in teaching service; is capable of improving (or otherwise) the teacher’s pedagogical knowledge (Akinleye, 2001) as the SMK will also dictate the extent to which such teacher can use various strategies and methods to deliver the lesson (Philipp, 2007). Job stress and job satisfaction are also strong enough to influence how well teaching is being delivered any given teacher (Colgan, 2004; Klassen, 2010). These teacher variables are selected because majority of the primary school teaches were forced into the job as a result of unemployment and state of the economy of the country; the state of the school which is poorly run by the government and the status and recognition given to teachers in Nigerian society.

Based on these premises, this study decided to determine the quality of teaching practices of teachers teaching primary I, II and III in the public primary schools, and the relative as well as composite influence of the identified teacher’s related variables on the teaching practices of the teachers in Abeokuta North Local government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. This local government is one of the largest in the State and it has all the type of public school locations. It has population of 201,329 as at 2006 population censor (5.4% of the state population) which covers land area of 808km² and the headquarter is at Akomoje, a town very close to Abeokuta town, the capital city of the State (Akinwale et al, 2008). There are 76 public primary schools in this local government area wherein 34% of them were in the suburban and the remaining 66% were in the urban setting. This local government, which is the sixth in the State in terms of population and land area, share almost all the features of human settlement in terms of social class, location of town/villages political system and the distribution of social amenities. This is the reason this area was studied in order to have insight into what obtained in the State as a whole.

Research Questions

I. What is the quality of classroom teaching practices of lower primary school teachers in Abeokuta North in terms of:
   a. Teacher/pupil relationship
   b. Environmental preparation
   c. Teaching strategies
   d. Method of evaluation
   e. Class control

II. Is the relative contribution of each of the teacher variables (attitude to teaching, qualification, experience, subject matter knowledge, teaching stress and teachers’ job satisfaction) to classroom teaching practice significant?

III. Is the composite contribution of teacher variables (teaching efficacy, qualification, experience, subject matter knowledge, teachers’ stress and teachers’ job satisfaction) to classroom teaching practices significant?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted correlational survey research design to carry out the study. All public primary schools’ teachers handling lower classes (Primary I to III) in Abeokuta North Local Government Area of Ogun State constituted the population of the study. There are 76 public primary schools in the Local Government Area which covers both urban and suburban settings in the State. Fifty percent (50%) of the population was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. The strata recognised was the location of the schools which could either be urban or suburban. Of the 76 public primary schools in the local government, 26 were located in the suburban and 50 in the urban setting. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 50% from the stratum which gave 13 schools from suburban and 25 schools from urban. Therefore a total of 38 public primary schools from the local
government area were involved in the study. Since the population of the study is lower primary classes teachers, all the teachers teaching Primary I, II or III in all the selected schools were involved in the study. Averagely, two teachers were in a class and at the end, 260 lower primary school classes’ teachers were selected as the sample for the study.

Three self-designed research instruments were used for this study namely, Lower Primary School Teacher Characteristics Questionnaire (LPSTCQ), Teacher’s Subject Matter Knowledge Test (TSMKT) and Classroom Teaching Practices Rating Scale (CTP-RS). LPSTCQ has five parts that were designed to measure some of the teachers’ variables such as qualification, experience, attitude to teaching, job stress and job satisfaction. TSMKT was designed to measure the sixth teacher variable which is subject matter knowledge (SMK). TSMKT contains 25 objective questions on Mathematics, English Language, Social studies and Basic Science. The questions were set on primary school subject contents. CTP-RS has six parts that measure school-class information such as teacher-pupil relationship, classroom environment preparation, teaching strategies, evaluation techniques and class control. This instrument has 28 items to be used by the research to rate each teacher teaching practices. The instrument used 5-point rating scale of poor, below average, average, above average and good that were rated 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The three instruments were validated and their reliabilities were tested using Cronbach alpha, Kuder Richardson formula 20 and inter-rater technique for LPSTCQ (0.80), TSMKT (0.75) and CTP-RS (0.88) respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
Research Question 1: What is the quality of teaching practices of lower primary school teachers in Abeokuta North Local Government Area in terms of:
(a) teacher/pupil relationship (b) environmental preparation (c) Teaching strategies (d) method of evaluation (e) class control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No or Respondents</th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Weighted Average/%</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/pupil relationship</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.75 (55%)</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment preparation</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.00 (40%)</td>
<td>Below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.36 (47%)</td>
<td>Below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation technique</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.92 (38%)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class control</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.90 (58%)</td>
<td>Above average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the teacher/pupil interaction that is found in the lower classes of public primary schools in Abeokuta North Local Government Area of Ogun State is average (Weighted average = 2.75). The detailed analysis revealed that the lower primary school teachers were average in welcoming pupils warmly into the classroom (\( \bar{X} = 3.09 \)), in making pupils relate with teacher freely without fear (\( \bar{X} = 2.81 \)) and in giving individual attention to the pupils (\( \bar{X} = 2.46 \)). Same was the rating in yelling and screaming on the pupils (\( \bar{X} = 3.5 \)). But the teacher were below average in calling pupils by their first names (\( \bar{X} = 1.91 \)). The weighted average is 2.75 which can be rated as 55% because 5-point Likert scale was used. It can therefore be inferred that the extent of classroom teaching practices of the teachers in the area of teacher-pupil interaction is average. This finding might be as a result of the fact that the teachers, most of the time, see the pupils as children from the poor home and found it difficult to relate with them. The only interaction they can accommodate is the teacher-pupil one which gave them the average score. Also some little interaction found between the teacher and the pupil might be as a result of the training these teachers received in the colleges. This supports the finding of Buell et al (2009) that graduate teachers were more confident than student teachers in some classroom teaching practices.

Primary school teachers in lower classes scored below average in the area of classroom preparation (Weighted average = 2.0). The detailed analysis revealed that the teachers demonstrated average skill in
classroom arrangement to allow for free movement of pupils and teachers ($\bar{X} = 2.77$) and in the process of easy re-arrangement of chairs and tables to suit classroom activities ($\bar{X} = 2.60$). The teachers demonstrated fair skill in making classroom neat and attractive to pupils ($\bar{X} = 2.04$) but they demonstrated poor skill in making educational materials and pictures available in the classroom ($\bar{X} = 1.30$) and in putting some professional touches to the class environment ($\bar{X} = 1.29$). This is as a result of the fact that public primary school teachers in Ogun State are found of expecting the government to supply all the needed resources to make a good learning environment. They cannot embark upon improvisation too because of poor salary and remuneration. The government of the state has never thought of given improvisation allowances to the teachers even when government functionaries do collect allowances to buy newspaper and mobile phone airtime. This is in support of Akinleye (2001) finding that there is poor implementation of free, compulsory universal primary education in the country.

In the area of teaching strategies, the teachers were found to be below average (Weighted average = 2.36). It was found out that the teachers’ skill of making lesson to move from known to unknown was above average ($\bar{X} = 2.91$), they demonstrated average skill in making pupils participate actively during lessons ($\bar{X} = 2.72$) and in making instruction pupil-centred ($\bar{X} = 2.45$). The teachers were only fair in frequent use of concrete examples within the lesson ($\bar{X} = 1.57$) and in employing play method as a method of teaching ($\bar{X} = 2.15$). This is as a result of the fact that traditional method is the easiest for the teachers because it requires less preparation, it could be delivered without instructional resources and it is so easy to use even for non-professional. Since there is hardly monitoring and supervision form the ministries, the teachers have rely heavily on this easy way out despite the strong advocate against it frequent use (Hiebert, 2003).

The analysis revealed that the teachers are poor in evaluation skills (Weighted average = 1.92). The teachers demonstrated fair skill in asking questions that probe pupils’ thinking ($\bar{X} = 2.19$) and in guiding pupil wrong answers with further questions ($\bar{X} = 2.23$). But they demonstrated poor skills in giving and marking homework ($\bar{X} = 1.15$) and in assessing children through other means than paper and pencil test ($\bar{X} = 1.14$). Though they demonstrated average skill in giving pupils feedback on their works ($\bar{X} = 2.90$). This result is expected in that there are research-based evidences that these teachers were not given effective training on how to design and utilise other assessment techniques while in the colleges and they have not been receiving adequate in-service training to this effect (Olosunde, 2009; Salami, 2009).

The teachers’ style in the area of class control is above average (Weighted average = 2.90). They demonstrated average skill in guiding class activities with some rules ($\bar{X} = 2.90$), in ensuring compliance to the class rules ($\bar{X} = 2.72$), in giving rewards for appropriate behaviours ($\bar{X} = 3.06$), in using negative reinforcement to control the pupils ($\bar{X} = 3.14$) and in ensuring that deviant behaviours are not predominant in class ($\bar{X} = 2.70$). This finding can be traced to the training received while in the college which is based on behaviourist theory of learning. The teachers are still hanging tenaciously on the principle that pupils learn best when the pay attention to the teacher, sit still and keep total quiet while the lesson last. This is what dictates the total control the teachers do give to the pupils in the classrooms. Their methods of teaching believed in rigid arrangement of seats; that learners must not do anything while the teaching is going on than to listen and copy notes and that the only way to assess if learning has taken place is through test and examination.
Research Question 2: Is the relative contribution of each of the teacher variables (attitude to teaching, qualification, experience, subject matter knowledge, teaching stress and teachers’ job satisfaction) to classroom teaching practice significant?

Table 2: Relative effects of Teachers’ variables on classroom Teaching Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta (β)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>2.976</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Teaching</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>2.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Qualification</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>2.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experience</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>-.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Knowledge</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>-.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Stress</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>2.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Classroom Teaching Practices

Table 2 reveals that three of the teacher’s variables examined had significant relative contribution to classroom teaching practices of the teachers in lower primary classes in public schools. These are attitude to teaching ($\beta = 0.66$; $t = 2.93$; $P < 0.05$), teaching qualification ($\beta = 0.14$; $t = -2.84$; $P < 0.05$) and job stress ($\beta = 0.11$; $t = 2.18$; $P < 0.05$). Others, such as teaching experience ($\beta = -0.01$; $t = -0.13$; $P > 0.05$), subject matter knowledge ($\beta = -0.03$; $t = -0.14$; $P > 0.05$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.02$; $t = 0.34$; $P > 0.05$) had no significant relative influence on the teaching practices of the teachers. The finding revealed that of all the six teacher variables examined in this study, teacher’s attitude towards teaching made the largest significant contribution to the quality of their teaching practices. This is followed by the qualification of the teacher and then the level of job stress experienced by the teacher. This could be as a result of the fact that one’s attitude goes a long way to determine one’s action. Positive attitude determines better action and more efforts put on towards such action. As a result of poor remuneration, lack of incentive and poor reputation of teachers in Nigerian society, teachers have evolved negative attitude towards teaching which has been influencing, significantly, the teachers teaching practices. This finding support the argument of Britnell (2010) about the strong influence attitude to work has on the extent of job performance.

Teacher’s qualification is the second largest contributor to the teaching practices of the teachers. Qualification is measured by the attainment of relevant educational certificate. In this case, school certificate was the least and Masters in Education was the highest. For this to have significant relative contribution to the teaching practices of the teachers; it means that those with higher qualification demonstrated better teaching practices. This is expected in that higher education programmes are expected to expose the recipients to more knowledge of pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The third significant contributor to the teaching practices of lower primary classes’ teachers in public primary school in Ogun State is the job stress. This might be as a result of the fact that it has been established that increase in stress experienced in workplace brings about low quality of job performed (Colgan, 2004; Klassen, 2010). The common stress confronting primary school teachers include teaching of too many subjects as a result of inadequate number of teachers; having more than adequate number of pupils in the class; lack of materials that can make the teaching easy couple with superior demands. All these will definitely influence the quality of teaching practices of the teachers.
Research Question 3: Is the composite contribution of teacher variables (teaching efficacy, qualification, experience, subject matter knowledge, teachers’ stress and teachers’ job satisfaction) to classroom teaching practices significant?

Table 3: Summary of Regression Analysis and Analysis of Variance on Teacher Variables and Classroom Teaching Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>2590.979</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>431.830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>3816.236</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>15.084</td>
<td>28.628</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6407.215</td>
<td>259</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R = .636; \ R^2 = .404; \ \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .390$

Dependent Variable: Classroom Teaching Practices

Table 3 shows that there is a joint relationship between teacher variables and the teaching practices of the teachers ($R = 0.64$). This led to the fact that the teacher variables accounted for 39% of the variance in the teaching practices of the teachers (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.390$) and this joint contribution is shown to be significant ($F_{(6, 253)} = 28.63; P < 0.05$). This finding agrees with Aghenta (2000) finding that teaching practices are a function of teacher qualifications, experience and subject matter knowledge. The finding might have being as a result of the fact that the quality of characteristics of the teachers in relation to their job, determines the quality of teaching the teachers delivered. Teacher with positive attitude towards teaching, who has good qualification and experience less job stress is expected to have a quality teaching practices. This finding is also supported by the assertion of Stronge (2002) that a careful analysis of the variables affecting educational outcomes, the teacher variables has proven, time and again to be the most influential related force in classroom teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

It is now proven, beyond reasonable doubt that the quality of teaching practices of teachers in lower primary classes in public schools in Abeokuta North Local Government Area in particular and in Ogun State in general is not good enough. The assessment and evaluation processes of the teachers in found poor, their learning environment preparation and selection and usage of effective instructional strategies were below average; the teacher-pupils relationship as well as their classroom control was found fair. The causes of these teaching practices to be below expectation were found to be some teacher variables. Prominent among these are the teachers attitude towards teaching, qualification and job stress experienced at work. Others are the teachers’ years of teaching experience, their subject matter knowledge and job satisfaction. It is therefore submitted that teacher variables in terms of their quality is having significant influence on the quality of teaching practices of teachers teaching lower primary classes in public primary schools in Ogun State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is strongly believed that improved learning outcomes can only be achieved with quality teaching practices. With these findings about teaching practices of teachers teaching lower primary classes in public schools in Ogun State of Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

- All the stakeholders to primary education such as the State and the Local Government, the Federal and State Universal Basic Education Boards, the communities/parents, non-governmental organizations need to collaborate in order to improve the condition of service in primary schools. This will in-turn improve the teachers attitude towards teaching which has been shown as major
contributor to the quality of teaching practices. This and many other benefits towards primary education can be achieved if each Local Government authority will establish a forum that will bring all the stakeholders together on this issue.

- The qualification of majority of the teachers in primary school was observed to be the minimum-NCE. This might be as a result of the fact that it was so difficult for primary school teacher to further their study and those with higher qualifications prefer to work elsewhere than primary school. This challenge can be reduced if:
  - Special grant is made available for primary school teachers that show interest to further their education.
  - Salary is based on the qualification and not place of work. That is, a situation whereby a Master Degree holder teaching in the primary school earns equal salary as the counterpart teaching in the College.
- Adequate primary school teachers should be employed with adequate blocks of classrooms and learning resources for the public schools. The will enable the proper implementation of the policy that recommend maximum 35 pupils in a class. This will eventually reduce job stress facing the teachers and improve their teaching practices.
- Finally, primary school teachers are enjoined to see their work as service to humanity than being a job that should be lucrative. They should show more interest in developing their career as professional teachers who see the lives of the pupils be in their hands. This is when they will show positive attitude to the work, interact positively with the pupils and put in their best.

REFERENCES


