

Lifelong Learning and the Professional Practice of English Teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria: A Qualitative Enquiry

By

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ABSTRACT

The study made a qualitative enquiry into lifelong learning and the professional practice of English teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria. It adopted the descriptive survey design. The sample comprised 60 English teachers from 60 Upper Basic and Senior Secondary schools in Lagos State, selected using stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using Teacher Lifelong Learning Interview Schedule and analysed using thematic analysis. The results revealed little or no awareness of lifelong learning as an education agenda and little or no value of lifelong learning as an education agenda. Thus, English teachers' perception of lifelong learning as an education agenda is generally poor. Also, English teachers' skills, competencies and attitudes are poor; English teachers' access to and participation in lifelong learning are challenging; resources for English teachers' lifelong learning are largely unavailable; and strategy and system development for English teachers' lifelong learning are inadequate. Overall, therefore, the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning is low. Ideas to improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice include creating general awareness and reorientation of stakeholders; driving awareness, reorientation and training for teachers; and providing more human, physical and financial resources. The study concludes that although lifelong learning has been captured as an education agenda in educational documents, as a viable means to improve teachers' global professional practice, it is still far from entrenched in educational practice in Nigeria. This situation can and should be changed if the recommendations following are fully adopted.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Teacher Education, Teacher Professional Practice, English Teachers, Lagos State

Introduction

The quality of English teachers' education and professional practice in Nigeria have come under severe criticism in the light of the repeated failures of students in English and other subjects which have to be examined in English, as evidenced by results of the West

African Examinations Council (WAEC) over the years (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, n.d.). Beyond school, the reported English language needs of employees expected to have been taught by English teachers (Adewumi & Owoyemi, 2012) equally question the quality of English teachers in the country. These situations are particularly worrisome because in Nigeria, English remains the lingua franca for general communication, government, business and education. Even more, a lot of policies and research efforts have been targeted at improving the teaching and learning of English over the years.

Quality of learning has always been a global concern. This, coupled with the need for the constant updating and upgrading of knowledge required to succeed in today's fast-changing global knowledge society have given impetus to lifelong learning as a more sustainable solution to the challenges of learning in and outside our classrooms, as well as beyond formal schooling (World Bank, 2003; European Commission, 2007; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UIL, 2010, cited in UIL, n.d.).

Thus, lifelong learning has been variously referred to as a new model of education and training (World Bank, 2003, p. xvii), a new approach to education and training (European Commission, 2007, p. 22), and the conceptual framework and organising principle of all forms of education in the 21st century (UIL, 2010, cited in UIL, n.d., p. 2). Drawing from this is the relevance of lifelong learning in the field of language education, especially English which is a global language. This is because, by its very nature, language is dynamic and, overtime, its use is subject to additions, modifications and extinctions.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, n.d.) posits that the “notion” of lifelong learning has existed throughout recorded human history, rooted in many cultures, societies and religions (p. 2). However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its 2004 Policy Brief, notes that lifelong learning as an “educational strategy” emerged in the latter part of the 20th century through the efforts of the OECD, UNESCO and the Council of Europe (p. 1).

The European Commission (2002) defines lifelong learning as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (p. 7). Similarly, the OECD (2004) views lifelong learning as “all purposeful learning activity, from the cradle to the grave, that aims to improve knowledge and competencies for all individuals who wish to participate in learning activities” (p. 1).

For better clarity, lifelong learning has been distinguished from traditional models, and from adult or continuing education. According to the European Commission (2000, cited in Field, 2003), “Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for participation and provision across the full continuum of learning contexts” (p. 1). The Commission (2002)

further notes that, “lifelong learning is not just a simple summing-up or integration of traditional education programmes and modern learning opportunities. Instead, [it] includes fundamental differences in educational content and perspectives...[including the fact that] the lifelong learning approach puts the emphasis on the development of individual capabilities and personal learning competencies” (p. 78). The OECD (2004) also adds that, “lifelong learning no longer refers simply to recurrent or adult education but encompasses all learning endeavours over the lifespan” (p. 1).

In their detailed account, the World Bank (2003) notes that in the traditional model, the teacher who receives just initial plus ad hoc in-service training is the source of knowledge which is received by the learners, who work by themselves, do the same thing. These learners are subjected to tests that prevent progress until complete mastery of skills, while access to further learning is rationed. In the lifelong learning model, however, Educators are lifelong learners linking initial training and on-going professional development, and act as guides to sources of knowledge. People learn by doing, in groups and from each other; with individualized learning plans based on status, motivation, interest and needs; while assessment is used to guide learning strategies and identify pathways for future learning, and there is access to learning opportunities over a lifetime (p. xx).

Not surprisingly, global, continental and even national education agenda in the millennium, as captured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, UN, 2015), Agenda 2063-The Africa We Want (African Union Commission, AUC, 2015), and the Nigeria National Policy on Education, NPE (Federal Ministry of Education, FME, 2013), all have a focus on lifelong learning. Respectively, these agenda call for quality education systems that promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; that lead to a culture of lifelong learning; and that not only lay a solid foundation for lifelong learning, but also provide lifelong learning programmes. Nigeria is a member of both the United Nations and the African Union, and a signatory to both the UN and AU agenda.

To monitor progress and assess improvements in lifelong learning, international organizations have developed global and regional indicators: Quality Indicators for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2002), Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25) Indicators (AUC, n.d.), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) Indicators (UNESCO, 2016; 2017). These indicators have focused on the provision of opportunities, as well as individual capabilities and personal learning competencies for lifelong learning. Researchers, however, have mostly focused on lifelong learning competencies. In Nigeria, studies have revealed that students are deficient in the personal competencies for lifelong learning (Akhigbe & Ikonta, 2016; Ikonta & Akhigbe, 2018). This further raises questions about teacher quality in the country, particularly with respect to teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice.

Sadly, there appears to be a dearth of data on teachers' lifelong learning in Nigeria. From other parts of the world, however, research has shown significant difference in competence perceptions of teachers for the lifelong learning approach, based on personal and occupational demography, such as age and length of service (Bozat, Bozat, & Hursen, 2014). Research has also found significant correlation between teachers' lifelong learning and school effectiveness operationalized as teaching quality and students' learning performance (Liu & Ha, 2016), as well as correlation between lifelong learning tendency and various competences, such as information literacy and self-efficacy (Oguz & Ataseven, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, English is the primary lingua franca for communication. Consequently, a lot of policy and research efforts have been targeted at improving its teaching and learning over the years. Yet, English proficiency deficit persists among students, calling to question the quality of English teacher education and professional practice. Meanwhile, global efforts to achieve sustainable success in learning for all persons in school and beyond, especially in today's dynamic world where knowledge needs are constantly changing, has led to the promotion of lifelong learning as the overarching education strategy. This seems particularly suited to English proficiency development, given the equally dynamic nature of language and the failure of isolated strategies in traditional school frameworks. Thus, lifelong learning should, ideally, be central to English teacher education and professional practice. Unfortunately, it appears there is a dearth of empirical data on the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice in Nigeria. This problem deserves attention because only English teachers with high quality lifelong learning can reasonably demonstrate high quality professional practice that will drive effective and sustainable English proficiency development for academic, economic and overall national gains. Addressing this problem is what necessitated this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to make a qualitative enquiry into lifelong learning and the professional practice of English teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria. The following were the specific objectives:

1. Ascertain how English teachers perceive lifelong learning as an education agenda.
2. Assess the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning.
3. Elicit ideas to improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice.

Research Questions

In alignment with the objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. How do English teachers perceive lifelong learning as an education agenda?
2. How do English assess the quality of their lifelong learning
3. What ideas can improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive Survey design which is suitable for describing trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population, and then generalizing from sample results to the population. The population of the study comprised all English teachers in all public Upper Basic and Senior Secondary schools in Lagos State. This population was the focus because the Upper Basic and Senior Secondary levels are the first two levels of education in Nigeria where English is used as the medium of instruction (except in the teaching of other languages). Also, English teachers at these levels are expected to have had an extended period of study (up to the degree level). This provides the opportunity to experience lifelong learning to the highest level of education. Finally, the Upper Basic and Senior Secondary levels represent terminal levels of formal education before progression into the world of work or the tertiary level. Hence, it is expedient that lifelong learning should have been mastered at these levels; so that graduates can continue to manage their learning in their chosen future paths. The study sample comprised 60 English teachers from 60 schools. The schools were selected using stratified random sampling technique, while the English teachers were selected randomly from the schools.

A semi-structured interview schedule titled Teacher Lifelong Learning Interview Schedule was developed to collect data. It contained open-ended questions used as interview guide to collect data required to answer the research questions. In order to gain constructive feedback and establish face and content validity, the instrument was subjected to review by experts in (English) Teacher Education, and Measurement and Evaluation. Data were obtained in audio-recorded and written forms, with each session lasting for between 15 and 30 minutes. The semi-structured nature of the instrument also allowed ample data to be generated, to provide an enriched perspective. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis by looking out for themes that emerged. The themes were organized as main themes and sub-themes, while excerpts from the interview were also provided.

Results

Research Question 1

How do English teachers perceive lifelong learning as an education agenda?

Table : English Teachers' Perception of Lifelong Learning as an Education Agenda

Themes	Excerpts from the Interview
1. There is little or no awareness of lifelong learning as an education agenda	<i>"I think the awareness is very low because, I will not lie to you, I'm hearing it for the first time."</i>
2. There is little or no value of lifelong learning as an education agenda	<i>"Little or no value is placed on it because... the government and society at large do not value or appreciate teachers' efforts."</i>
3. There are prospects for increased awareness and value of lifelong learning	<i>"...If the structure permits, if the system supports, if the resources are available, obviously it is something we would love to do around here..."</i>

The themes that emerged from the interview data revealed that: 1) there is little or no awareness of lifelong learning as an education agenda; 2) there is little or no value of lifelong learning as an education agenda. However, there are prospects for increased awareness and value if measures are taken to that effect. The summation of this is that English teachers' perception of lifelong learning as an education agenda is generally poor.

Research Question 2

What is the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning?

Table : Quality of English Teachers' Lifelong Learning

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Excerpts from the Interview
1. Skills, competencies and attitudes are poor	Teachers have poor language skills/competencies	<i>"You need to hear some [teachers]...they can't speak a single sentence of English."</i>
	Teachers have poor computer skills/competencies	<i>"There are a lot of us who cannot switch on a [computer] system...let alone finding information online..."</i>
2. Access to and participation in lifelong learning are challenging	Inaccessible opportunities because of financial and logistical constraints	<i>"Teachers don't participate in professional body activities because of financial and logistical constraints."</i>
	Stress and burnout from excessive workload and long commute	<i>"Most teachers are stressed." "Most of our teachers are staying very far away... Most times, when they get here, they're already tired..."</i>
	Teachers' attitude shows resistance to change, but some still take personal initiative	<i>"Some feel set in their ways and that is wrong." "A lot of us are still furthering, improving ourselves."</i>
3. Resources for lifelong learning are largely unavailable	Poor financial investment from government, organizations and teachers	<i>"The resources from government, it's just not enough. In the private sector, there's just so much competition... Even within you, the financial resource is not there."</i>
	Inadequate ICT facilities, epileptic power and high cost of data	<i>"How many...people have facilities for computer? Even when the computer is available, do we have the power to make use of it? ...Even the cost of data in Nigeria is very expensive."</i>
4. Strategy and system development for lifelong learning are inadequate	Government strategy lacks coherence and comprehensiveness	<i>"Apart from the regular formal and little non-formal education available to practitioners, lifelong learning is really not a focus of our education system."</i>
	Inadequate counselling/guidance services	<i>"People are really not aware. Many want to improve themselves, but ignorance is high."</i>
	Poor accreditation system	<i>"The assessment system is also handicapped..."</i>

The themes that emerged from the interview data revealed the following: 1) English teachers' skills, competencies and attitudes are poor; 2) English teachers' access to and participation in lifelong learning are challenging; 3) resources for English teachers' lifelong learning are largely unavailable; and 4) strategy and system development for English teachers' lifelong learning are inadequate. The situation is summed up by a participant thus: “There is actually none of those indicators or those parameters that we can take one by one and say is okay in the real sense of it. In all parameters to assess this thing, they're just not there.” It is concluded, therefore, that the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning is low.

Research Question 3

What ideas can improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice?

Table : Ideas to Improve the Quality of English Teachers' Lifelong Learning

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Excerpts from the Interview
1. Create general awareness and reorientation of stakeholders	Reorientation by government and society	“We should create more awareness on the issue...let us begin to talk about it regularly...giving proper enlightenment to the people concerning lifelong learning...”
	De-emphasize certificate; emphasize skills and merit	“Entry examination should be based on merit.” “If we emphasize more on skill that they acquire, they will focus to get the skill rather than the certificate...”
2. Drive awareness, reorientation and training for teachers	Awareness and counselling of teachers	“English... should be greatly encouraged... let there be more training, more awareness... I am so happy about this thing you’re doing. It is creating more awareness for the teachers...”
	Teacher collaboration with colleagues	“...Join associations because you can’t learn alone...” “They need to go to those who have retired to help them.”
	Policy and strategy for reorientation and training of teachers	“We had a programme...Eko Project...they used to send teachers for training...during Fashola era... it should be a continuous process.” “Maybe you use the case of some people as pilot and it comes out a success, others will also key into them.”
3. Provide more human, physical and financial resources	More school structures and facilities	“...Schools, structures too should be built.” “The comfort of the classrooms will make them learn more and the teachers will not be frustrated...”
	Increase financial support from sponsors and the government	“...Sponsors and the government should also come out and help...” “Corporate organizations that are sponsoring all those nonsense [reference to Big Brother Nigeria] should be discouraged...If you want to sponsor such thing, slam heavy tax on them...but if it is on educational something, give them tax-free holiday... Some of

The themes that emerged from the interview data revealed the following as ideas to improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice: 1) create general awareness and reorientation of stakeholders; 2) drive awareness, reorientation and training for teachers; and 3) provide more human, physical and financial resources. Specifically, these include: reorientation by government and society; de-emphasize certificate; emphasize skills and merit; increase awareness and counselling of teachers; encourage teacher collaboration with colleagues, improve policy and strategy for reorientation and training of teachers; provide more school structures and facilities; increase financial support from sponsors and the government; increase teacher supply and improve teacher resources.

Discussion of Findings

English Teachers' Perception of Lifelong Learning as an Education Agenda:

The study found that 1) there is little or no awareness of lifelong learning as an education agenda, and 2) there is little or no value of lifelong learning as an education agenda. However, there are prospects for increased awareness and value if measures are taken to that effect. The summation of this is that English teachers' perception of lifelong learning as an education agenda is generally poor. This is particularly sad considering all the efforts directed at promoting lifelong learning in Nigeria and across the world. Note that lifelong learning has been an educational strategy promoted since the 20th century through the efforts of major international organizations like the OECD, UNESCO and the Council of Europe (OECD, 2004, p. 1). It has also been on the front burner of global, continental and even national education agenda in the 21st century, as captured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), Agenda 2063-The Africa We Want (AUC, 2015), both of which Nigeria is a signatory to, and the Nigeria National Policy on Education (FME, 2013).

Quality of English Teachers' Lifelong Learning :

The study found that 1) English teachers' skills, competencies and attitudes are poor; 2) English teachers' access to and participation in lifelong learning are challenging; 3) resources for English teachers' lifelong learning are largely unavailable; and 4) strategy and system development for English teachers' lifelong learning are inadequate. It, therefore, concluded that the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning is low. The study findings largely agree with studies in Nigeria that found low level of knowledge of ICT among English Language teachers (Fakeye, 2010) and severe language deficits in the English proficiency of trainee English teachers in Nigeria universities and colleges of education (Maduekwe & Ikonta, 2010; Tom-Lawyer, 2016). However, although this study applied a qualitative measure, the findings fall short in comparison to the findings in related studies in other countries (Bozat, Bozat, & Hursen, 2014; Ozdamlia & Ozdal, 2015), where primary school teachers perceived themselves to be competent for the lifelong learning approach. The findings also contradict another study outside Nigeria that employed similar thematic analysis (Sulistiyo, Mukminin, & Yanto, 2016) where school principals indicated that beginner teachers from English teacher education

programme had adequate language knowledge and proficiency. The challenges to the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning found in the study also agree considerably with the challenges to the quality of lifelong learning identified by the European Commission (2002) which the Commission notes may very well apply to any other country outside the European Union.

Ideas to Improve the Quality of English Teachers' Lifelong Learning for Improved Professional Practice

The study found that ideas to improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice revolve around: 1) creating general awareness and reorientation of stakeholders; 2) driving awareness, reorientation and training for teachers; and 3) providing more human, physical and financial resources. Specifically, these include reorientation by government and society; de-emphasize certificate; emphasize skills and merit; increase awareness and counselling of teachers; encourage teacher collaboration with colleagues, improve policy and strategy for reorientation and training of teachers; provide more school structures and facilities; increase financial support from sponsors and the government; increase teacher supply and improve teacher resources. These findings largely agree with the European Commission (2002) on improving the quality of lifelong learning.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the study concludes that although lifelong learning has been captured as an education agenda in several documents, as a viable means to improve teachers' global professional practice, it is still far from entrenched in the educational practice in Nigeria. Fortunately, there are several ideas that can improve this situation, and the outcomes will be positive for all stakeholders, if the recommendations following are fully adopted. Improvements in English teachers' perception and quality of lifelong learning will improve the quality of English teachers' professional practice, and this will translate into increased gains in promoting students' learning across all subjects and disciplines. Ultimately, English teachers will be better positioned to drive students to thrive, learn and become relevant to participate and survive in the new global society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be programmes for massive sensitization and reorientation of English teachers, to increase the awareness and value of lifelong learning as a global, continental and national education agenda.
2. Documentary provisions on lifelong learning should be effectively implemented in English teacher education, to ensure that the reality of English teachers' lifelong learning matches the intentions spelt out in those documents. Further research should also be done to generate more knowledge to understand and improve English teachers' lifelong learning.

3. All the solutions proffered by participants in the study to improve the quality of English teachers' lifelong learning for improved professional practice should be fully adopted. These include creating general awareness and reorientation of stakeholders; driving awareness, reorientation and training for teachers; and providing more human, physical and financial resources.

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