Teacher Attrition and Students' Academic Performance in Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State: Implications for Sustainable Development

Ineye-Briggs, Amarachi Cynthia (Ph.D)
Ineye-briggscynthia@ust.edu.ng; amaonce@yahoo.com

Abstract

Teacher attrition rate from the profession is quite alarming when compared with other sectors. This has a great effect on student's academic performance which needs to be critically attained. Teacher attrition was viewed as the rate of change of personnel, the rate at which employees join and leave an organization, measure against a standard or over a fixed period. Also, types of teacher attrition were seen to include; voluntary attrition, involuntary attrition, retirement attrition, internal attrition and demographic specific attrition. The causes of teacher's attrition identified were: low salary, poor working condition, leadership style and rural posting. The study also analyzed the influence of teacher attrition on student academic performance. Findings revealed that high attrition rate has damaging effect on the quality of schooling. Student academic performance is not only a pointer to effectiveness and quality of schools in Nigeria, but a major determinant of the future of students in particular and the nation in general. Strategies for increasing teacher retention rate was viewed as Staff engagement in decision making, build a strong sense of community, encourage collaboration among teachers, provide a supportive environment, build a strong monitoring programme, support professional development and utilize technology to better support staff well-being. It was concluded that teacher attrition has a significant negative relationship with student academic performance in selected Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State. It was suggested amongst others that, to minimize the rate of attrition among teachers, a concerted effort from all stakeholders (Government, Ministry of Education, Principals) in the education system is required.
Keywords: Teacher, attrition, performance, private, school.

Introduction

The rate of teacher attrition from the profession is alarming when compared with other areas such as medical profession, military and even the main stream of civil service in the state and Federal Governments. This has a great influence on student's academic performance which needs to be critically examined. Teacher attrition is a deceptively simple concept that does not lend itself to a precise, empirical definition. However, various scholars have expressed their views about the concept. Ingersoll (2016) defined attrition as the rate of change of personnel, the rate at which employees join and leave an organization, measured against a standard or over a fixed period. Teacher attrition issues in education are not only of serious concern to the school environment but also among all other stakeholders in the education system. Teacher turnover is a component of attrition in which teachers either leave teaching voluntarily or involuntarily. Teachers who voluntarily leave the profession have an alternative job market while those who leave involuntarily could be as a result of age factor.

Teacher turnover refers to major changes in a teacher's assignment from one school year to the next. Turnover includes three components, the most studied of which is leaving teaching employment (commonly referred to as attrition) and moving to a different school (commonly referred to as school transfer or as teacher migration). A third, but neglected component is teaching and transfer of a teacher from an assignment in general education to one in special education (Armstrong, 2009). Mulkeen (2018) argued that teacher attrition does not have a single suitable classification until one explains the policy or study context in which it is applied. Several scholars apply various classifications as conditions of departure, exit, transfer, shortage, turnover, migration and brain drain to widely define the term. He further stated that in current study, attrition was used for all teachers who leave the profession particularly from secondary schools for whatever reasons and included those promoted to other positions (away from teaching), such as County Directors, Staffing officers and Quality Assurance and Standard officers.

Education is fundamental to socio-economic development of a country as it impacts skills and knowledge in learners and prepares them to take up roles in national development. It is established that deficiency of well competent personnel in schools is an important aspect in student learning processes in countries that are both urbanized and those that are in the process of urbanization (Craig, 2019). Teachers who are effective in teaching are significant to the contribution of quality student accomplishment. However, it has become increasingly difficult to retain them in classroom due to resignation and migration to other professions, an issue that affects performance in education. Particularly, private secondary schools in Nigeria continue to experience teacher attrition and shortages, an issue that has become critical and of great concern for policy makers and school administrators. According to Saleem (2020), a critical phenomenon is experienced nationwide when the most experienced, qualified and knowledgeable instructors leave the occupation in great numbers. This puts the most vulnerable learners at a risk in failing to realise quality education for their future career opportunities. It has been established that a good number of learning institutions have suffered educator turnover which definitely has serious negative effects on student academic achievement. In order to plan for teacher recruitment and employment, the factors that contribute to attrition issues should be considered. Ingersoll (2016) posited that unchecked teacher turnover does not only affect the academic achievement of the learner but also interferes with the effectiveness of the school organization. However, there is more concern on the disruptive effects of the underlying challenges on how healthy schools can be organized to maintain quality teachers and improve learner's academic achievement. In relation to high teacher attrition rates in the education sector, some countries have implemented a variety of compensation programmes like individualized salaries, incentives for teachers in hardship areas and allowances based on student performances in National Examinations aimed at improving teacher retention in Secondary Schools. Incentives for teachers in hardship areas was introduced in Rivers State during the period of His Excellence Dr. Peter Odili. During this period, teachers who were working in rural areas were paid a rural allowance of five thousand naira (₦5,000), an amount their counterparts in urban areas did not enjoy. This helped to reduce teacher attrition from rural to urban. However, inconsistent Government polices removed this laudable incentive hence, we have an in-

balance in staff rationalization in secondary schools in Rivers State today. High teacher mobility rates have a negative implication in the learning environment as it disrupts stability and continuity in the teaching and learning process. For instance, many private secondary schools hire applicants who lack proper qualifications to fill in gaps caused by attrition (Grissom, 2020). Ingersoll (2016) established that attrition was a major challenge that is faced by both private and public students in the education sector. However, the value given to the teaching profession is a phenomenon that has increasingly become debatable. He further stated that frequent attrition reduces the quantity of teachers available in the education sector resulting to professional shortage. At the same time, attrition has a serious impact on the quality of instruction, especially when the instructors who leave are the most qualified ones.

In the school environment, teachers compose the central part of the system, an issue confirmed globally to have an effect on the student's academic performance. They facilitate the learning process of learners as well as the quality and retention of children in schools. The need for qualified, well-inspired and maintained teachers is a vital factor for students' learning environment. Quality teaching and learning sturdily controls the learners' consumption in their academic achievement.

Types of Teacher Attrition
There are five types of teacher attrition as pointed out by Mulkeen, (2018). They are; voluntary attrition, involuntary attrition, retirement attrition, internal attrition and demographic- specific attrition.

1. Voluntary Attrition: This is the most common type of attrition, where teachers decide to simply quite their jobs due to certain reasons best known to them.
2. Involuntary Attrition: This is a type of attrition whereby the teacher is fired or asked to leave the job by the school management. This can be due to teacher's misconduct, fraudulent practices, etc. In this case, the teacher is not willing to leave but has no other choice.
3. Retirement Attrition: This is a type of attrition that occurs as a result of age. For instance, teachers who are above 60 years are not expected to still be in the profession.
4. Internal attrition: This is a situation where teachers quit their jobs in one department to join another department. In some cases, internal attrition is desirable as its routes talent towards more profitable areas. It also ensures better employee job fulfillment.
5. Demographic Specific Attrition: This is a significant concern for progressive organizations trying to build an equal opportunity work place. Demographic specific attrition means that employees from a single group-women ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, veterans or older professionals are leaving.
    Lee (2018) was of the opinion that teacher attrition contributes to teacher shortage. It increases the number of experienced teachers at least in a low resources context and limits the access of school-age children to quality education.

According to Grissom, (2020), teacher attrition is the single largest factor contributing to high rates of teacher shortage especially in mathematics, science and special education. In addition, teacher attrition aggravates the education situation in any country. Teacher attrition also becomes a major barrier towards achieving the education for all (EFA) goal and it also

causes challenge of educational quality, equality and efficiency. Findings from researchers showed that teacher attrition is higher in schools with low salaries, poor support from school administration, Students discipline problems and limited faculty input into school decision making, even after controlling student composition, and school level location (Ingersoll,2016).

Causes of Teacher Attrition in Secondary Schools

In actual fact, there is no single cause for attrition of teachers. Several scholars have identified many factors. According to Buckley (2018), there are two factors that affect teacher attrition, they include; school factors and community factors. School factors include: working conditions, organizational factors, lack of resources and accountability. Community deals with government policies, budgeting policies, public stereotypical thought about hours and mandate that has legislated for quality teachers only. He further stated that teachers career decisions (that is to stay, transfer, or exit) are influenced by external and personal factors. External factors related to attrition includes: societal, economic and institutional variables that are external to the teacher and the employing school district. Many of these variables are easily amenable to intervention. Examples of external factors include; (1) economic trends e.g. recessions, labour, market trends (2) Societal factors e.g. changing birth rates regional population shifts and (3) Institutional factors e.g. strong pre-service programmes that instil high degrees of commitment, the successes/failures of teacher union objectives and regulations promulgated by Federal or State agencies. Although, little research has been carried out on the impact of external factors on career decisions, they obviously could influence the employment or personal retention. Four major employment factors that have both direct and indirect effects on career choice as incorporated by Billingsley (2010) model include; professional qualifications, work conditions, work records and commitment. Work related variables appears to be predictors of commitment with retention.

Personal factors make up the final component in the model and encompass demographic, family and cognitive/affective variables. Among demographic variables, the age of the teacher is the most consistent correlate of the attrition with teachers under the age of 35years posing the greatest attrition risk. Although research findings are mixed, it appears that in special education, young female teachers leave the classroom at a higher rate and return at the same rate as male teachers (Saleem, 2020). The role of race as a factor in attrition is not clear. However, teachers who are racially different from the majority of their students appear to be at great risk for attrition. Family factors account for a significant amount of attrition in both general and special education. Marriage, birth of children and relocation are often cited reasons for termination or interruption of a teaching career, particularly in the early years. It is believed that persons from higher socio-economic classes are at greater risk of leaving the profession.

Richardson (2015), posited that many factors can be attributed to the cause of teacher attrition. These factors may vary within regions. For instance, the factors in the United States may not necessarily be the same in Nigeria, but despite the disparities, there are factors that are peculiar to all regions. The following are some causes of teacher's attrition.

1. Low Salary: We are in an era where money plays a vital role in our lives. To sustain yourself and your family, you must have an income that can be utilized for livelihood. Salary as a source of income is very important to every working individual. Pensionable payment can determine ones readiness for a job while low payment can also influence an employee and can even lead to his willingness to leave a job.

2. Poor Working Condition: This is another factor leading to teacher attrition. No matter how good, hardworking and committed a teacher is, if the environment is not good and conducive, there is no how they can efficiently perform their duty as expected. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (2017) categorized working conditions into, professional working condition and demographic characteristics of the school. According to them, working condition including professional teaching conditions, play a vital role in decisions to leave teaching in a particular school and they contribute to decisions to leave the profession altogether. They further added that teachers plan to remain in teaching are highly sensitive to their perceptions of their working conditions. The few teachers that reported their interest to remain in teaching are strongly associated with how teachers feel about the administrative support, resources, teacher's voice, and influence over policy in their school. Some teachers according to the second category prefer schools that are less in population as such some teachers prefer to move from densely populated schools to the schools with less population.

3. Leadership Style: A bad leadership style in a school can result to teacher dissatisfaction which can result to attrition. School leadership management style can either motivate or lower teacher morale and commitment. It was discovered that teachers are excited when consulted by the school leader regarding their work or any issue concerning them. Some school principals are autocratic in their dealings with teachers while some are democratic. When the leadership style is encouraging, accommodating, stimulating and indicate symptoms of participatory style, attrition rate becomes low (Mendazabal, 2019).

4. Rural Posting: Rural schools experience frequent teacher attrition. Research on teacher retention in rural areas showed that teachers will leave their positions for other districts because they feel isolated. This isolation is attributed to lack of social amenities, low standard of living, hence the need for improvement in these areas by the government (Ingersoll, 2016).

Teacher Attrition and Students' Academic Performance
Qualified teaching staff is the cornerstone of a successful educational system. Thus, attracting and retaining high quality teachers is a primary necessity for education. An organization's human resources are arguably the most vital category of resources that can decide the organisation's efficiency and survival. It is widely recognized that teachers are regarded as highly important school assets and consequently, education stakeholders invest substantial capital in human resource to improve the efficiency of the school system (Okeke et al, 2019). The quality of education in any given country is reflected and related to the men and women who serve as teachers in the school system. These teachers are supervisors directly in charge

of monitoring students' academic performance and quality of schools in Nigeria. They are major determinants of the future of students in particular and the nation in general.

No nation with good intention would want to see her resources on students wasted. Mendezabal (2019) saw academic performance as a key criterion to judge one's total potentialities and capacities which are frequently measured by the examination results. It is used to pass judgment on the quality of education offered by academic institutions. Similarly, Grismer (2020) described student academic performance as any performance that falls below or above the desired standard. Academic performance plays a vital role in producing the best quality individuals who will become great leaders and manpower for the society and responsible to contribute meaningfully to the sustainability of economic growth and social development of such society in the future. It occupies a very vital role in education as well as the learning process.

Therefore, the education system must be responsive and responsible enough to ensure the recruitment, training and retention of adequate, skilled and high performing teachers, and avoid attrition for the betterment of the nation's educational goals achievements. Armstrong (2009) argued that the single factor that must influence students' academic performance is the effectiveness of their teachers. But, when these important factors are shifting through constant teacher attrition, what then is the effect upon students' ability to learn and make academic gains? He agreed that there are many complex and interrelated factors such as personal student's factors, parental involvement, instructional practices and teacher preparation that influence students' academic performance.

Teacher attrition is considered as one of the most impactful factors that can decide schools' effectiveness. This imposes set back in school achievement and a lot of cost on educational system. High attrition rate has damaging impact on the quality of schooling. Schools with high attrition rate are more likely to get unqualified or inexperienced teachers who are likely to be less effective. Thus, impacting students' academic performance.

Also, teacher attrition may raise the annual salary in cost of substituting recruitment and appointments. It is observed that the loss of teachers often results in long delays before replacement which creates vacuums and loss of teaching time which sometimes could last for long period of time. When faced with difficulty in getting sufficient number of qualified teachers, school administrators hire less qualified teachers, assign non-specialized teachers in areas where they do not have competence or even hire substitute teachers on part time bases even when they cannot deliver quality teacher (Saleem, 2022).

Strategies for increasing Teacher Retention Rates

A quality education programme and a strong sense of commitment within a school is dependent on experienced staff, yet teacher attrition is a perennial challenge. The situation was exacerbated in 2020, with a spike in the number of teachers, taking early retirement during the pandemic. It even became worse when the Rivers State Government introduced the policy of contributory pension. Many teachers whose retirement period was less than five years voluntarily retired to enable them enjoy the old retirement schemes benefits. Therefore, the inconsistencies in Government Policies as it relates to retirement policies has even worsened their attrition rates leaving the system with less experienced teachers and

eventually fewer teachers. Today, many schools especially in the rural areas have less than ten teachers. The private schools further worsened the situation by not paying teachers throughout the Covid 19 era. This created more attrition (Okeke et al, 2019). However, administrators can be proactive in their staff retention efforts by addressing the issues that cause teachers to leave the profession too soon.

The following are some ways to improving retention in secondary schools as pointed out by (Billingsley, 2010):

1. Engage Staff in Decision Making: Challenges cause stress and taking-action to solve these challenges bring about relief. Teachers who are not involved in decisions that affect them may feel that their status as professionals is not recognized; a sense of autonomy is critical and schools that engage in participating decision making and policy development will have staff who are more fulfilled and satisfied with their jobs.

2. Build a strong sense of community: A sense of well-being comes from the believe that we are part of something greater than ourselves. A cohesive school community, one where leaders, staff, students and parents work together, fulfils the need for a sense of belonging. To achieve this, school administrators must develop trust through transparency and communication. Teachers should feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns to create a strong sense of community in the school.

3. Encourage collaboration among teachers: Team work should be encouraged among teachers as this will bring about job satisfaction for educators. Those who remained in the job due to these quality relationships with their colleagues find fulfillment as they work together to achieve a common goal and this contribute to their job satisfaction. Allowing time for teacher collaboration is one of the primary ways of improving staff retention.

4. Provide a Supportive Environment: In any industry, employees hesitate to admit that they are having difficulties on the job. Teachers should not feel compelled to hide challenges from their employers. Encouraging communications and implementing systems to facilitate conversations will make school administrators more approachable and ease employee stress level.

5. Build a strong monitoring programme: New teachers who are paired with capable mentors' report invased job satisfaction. They have a stronger commitment towards their school and tend to stay in the profession. This translates better outcomes for students and positively impacts overall school culture. Monitoring programmes also help build a strong sense of community, as the tenured staff takes responsibility for welcoming new teachers into the school.

6. Support Professional Development: The post Covid-19 era makes new demands on educations. Distance and hybrid learning models require new skills. These changes require teachers to learn new methods and ways of interacting with students. Investing in professional development programmes and scheduling time for teachers to share best practices with their colleagues will support teachers in these efforts.

7. Utilize Technology to Better Support Staff Well-being: Mobile technology offers ways of communicating and connecting that can reduce feelings of isolation. Waiting until end of the term or school year for survey results often creates difficulties. Schools that

incorporate routine well-being check-ins, using applications are able to address issues quietly. In addition, collecting school wide data on well- being will give secondary school administrators insight into trends for informed decision-making (Billingsley, 2010). It is worthy to note that these ways of improving teacher retention require investments in time and money, but the effort will save both in the long term. The reason for teacher's attrition can be traced back to well-being issues. To experience job satisfaction, staff must feel competent in their positions, have some control over decisions that affect their rules, and feel like they are an integral part of the school community.

Implications for Sustainable Development

High rate of teacher's attrition in secondary schools in Nigeria may have negative implications to sustainable development. In the light of this, Bromley et al (2012) posited that attrition brings about low quality of education. In most cases, teachers leave their jobs without completing their assigned tasks, thereby creating a vacuum for poor student academic performance. When this happens, school administrators are faced with the challenge of hiring a less experienced or unqualified teachers to fill in the gap, which may result to producing poor graduates who cannot contribute to sustainable national development. Moreso, teacher attrition will lead to unemployment. Since students are not properly taught, they lack the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies needed. This implies that they will not be fit to attain certain administrative or managerial functions (Bromley, et al, 2012). High teacher mobility rates will affect capacity building and hinder economic growth of the nation. Lastly, it will also have a negative effect on the social and political development of the nation.

Conclusion

Teacher's attrition has a significant negative relationship with students' academic performance in selected private secondary schools in Rivers State. The higher the attrition rates, the lower the academic performance of students.

In order to maximize student academic performance and minimize teacher's attrition rate, the secondary school system in general needs to develop long term solution to help retain efficient professional teachers.

Suggestions

The Study suggests the following;

1. To reduce together attrition in private secondary schools. The school management should implement a comprehensive induction programme and strategies which should comprise multiple types of support, including high quality monitoring, common planning time, and continual support from school leaders.
2. To minimize the rate of attrition among teachers, a concerted effort from all stakeholders (Government, ministry of Education, principals) in the education system is required.
3. State government through the ministry of education, salaries and remuneration commission should put in place functional teachers' professional development strategies

and peculiar remuneration initiatives for private school teachers to enhance teacher's efficiency and productivity that will ultimately reduce attrition.

4. The paper also suggests the urgent need by all stakeholders in education to minimize attrition rates of teachers in order to improve students' academic performance in private secondary schools.

5. The Government should legislate on issues regarding minimum wages for private school proprietors on teachers employed by these institutions.

6. The present practice where school proprietors hire at will and fire at will at the slightest provocation should be discouraged.

7. Finally, all private schools should be mandated to show evidence of retirement plans for teachers at the point of registration with the ministry of education to increase job security.

References

Armstrong, M. (2009). *A hand book of human resource management practice (11ᵗʰ Ed.)* Kogan page.

Billingsley, M. (2010). *Teachers turnover and students' academic achievement: A close look at one school over six years.* M.Ed Dissertation, California State University San Marcos.

Bromley, C.M., Martins, L. & Mcwhorter, B.A. (2012). The effects of programme structure on new teachers' employment and programme satisfaction patterns. *Action in Teachers' Education, 22* (1), 1-14.

Buckley, E. (2018). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of The Educational Research*, *2* (8), 367-411

Craig, C.J. (2014). From stories of staying to stories of leaving: A U.S. Beginning teachers' experience. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 46* (1), 81-115. doi: 10. 1080/00220272.2013.797504.

Grissmer, D. (2020). *Teacher turnover and teacher quality in South Africa*. Quick Fox Publishers.

Grissom, J.A (2020). Can good principals keep teachers in disadvantaged school? linking principal effectiveness to teacher satisfaction and turnover in hand-to-staff environments. *Teachers College Record, 113* (11), 2552- 2585.

Ingersoll, R. (2016). *Is there really a teacher shortage?* Centre for the Study of Teacher and Policy.

Lee, T. (2018). How job dissatisfaction leads to employee turnover. *Journal of Business and Psychology 2 (3)*, 263-271.

Mendezabal, M.J.N. (2019). Study habits and attitudes: The road to academic success. *Open Science Repository Education, dio:10. 7392/ Education.70081928*

Mulkeen, A. (2018). *Teachers in anglophone africa: Issues in teacher supply, training and management.* World Bank.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2017). *The high cost of teacher turnover*. Policy Brief.

Okeke, N.I., Okaforcha, C & Ekwesianya, A. (2019). Attrition and strategies for teacher retention in secondary schools in Anambra State. *Global Journal of Education, Humanities and Management Sciences, 1* (1), 148-156.

Richardson. E (2020). *Teacher motivation in low income contexts: an actionable framework for intervention teacher motivation & strategies.* Teacher motivation working group.

Saleem, T. (2020). Drivers of turnover intention in public sector organization: Pay satisfaction, organization commitment and employment opportunities. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research, 17* (6), 697-704.