



## The management of Nigerian primary school teachers



Hafsat Lawal Kontagora<sup>a,b</sup>, Michael Watts<sup>a,c,\*</sup>, Terry Allsop<sup>a,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> EDOREN (Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria), Nigeria

<sup>b</sup> National Teachers Institute, Kaduna, Nigeria

<sup>c</sup> Oxford Policy Management Ltd, United Kingdom

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### ABSTRACT

The effective management of teachers is an important contributor to the successful delivery of primary education. This paper reports on a qualitative research project conducted in Nigeria's Kaduna and Katsina States. Four aspects of teacher management were studied: recruitment and deployment; pay and remuneration; training and support; and aspirations and expectations. Analysis of the data highlights the need for greater transparency in all aspects of teacher management and the paper concludes with a suggested framework for enhancing the management of primary school teachers that is specific to Nigeria but relevant to other countries in the Global South.

### 1. Introduction

This paper presents the key findings of a recent study of the management of primary school teachers in Nigeria (Allsop and Watts, 2015; Kontagora, 2016; Watts and Allso, 2016). The genesis of this research was a literature review conducted by EDOREN (Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria) that highlighted the importance of further research into the management of teachers as a contribution to improving the quality of primary education (Humphreys and Crawford, 2014). This articulated with a series of stakeholder consultations conducted in 2013 and 2014 and the education sector programme priorities of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). There is broad agreement, both in Nigeria and more widely, that significant improvement in the effectiveness of primary schooling will be highly dependent on the day-to-day performance of classroom teachers. This, in turn, is affected by several factors, including: (i) the professional education of the teacher; (ii) the resources and environment provided for her/his work; and (iii) the level of support provided by state-, local government- and school-level management structures. The study reported on here was concerned with the last of these factors – the level of support provided by management structures.

Teacher management in Nigeria has been identified as a research topic in relation to which there is a clear gap in terms of quality evidence and a clear need in terms of policy development. Addressing this gap and ensuring that the research is used will enable EDOREN to contribute to improved policy-making by DFID's education portfolio and by the Government of Nigeria. While management practices across the whole educational sector deserve scrutiny, this study deliberately focuses on the primary school sub-sector, recognising both the federal

government's priorities and the reflection of those which provide the basis for DFID's contributions. Their concerns are informed by the Millennium/Sustainable Development Goals addressing the provision of quality basic education in Nigeria. Reaching out to a wider audience here contributes to the broader understanding of the struggle to achieve those goals in countries of the Global South.

The central research question asked by the study was: How effectively are teachers managed in Nigerian public primary schools? The broad objective was to establish a clear understanding of issues relating to the management of primary teachers in two states in the north of Nigeria – Kaduna and Katsina – in order to provide evidence for any necessary changes in policy and practice. An assumption under-pinning the whole study is that a well-managed teacher (or head teacher) may reasonably be expected to be a more professional and committed teacher than one without this support structure. It is about the management of teachers as public service employees. Four key areas of management were addressed in the study and reported on here:

- recruitment and deployment;
- pay and remuneration;
- training and support; and
- aspirations and expectations

The study was undertaken on the basis that it is important to clearly understand the circumstances, personal and professional needs, career expectations and aspirations and the other concerns of teachers if sensible and workable improvements in teacher management are to be introduced and sustained.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [info@edoren.org](mailto:info@edoren.org), [mfw362@gmail.com](mailto:mfw362@gmail.com) (M. Watts).

## 2. The context of teacher management in Nigeria

Primary schools in Northern Nigeria are typically overcrowded and underfunded. These problems – which are hardly unusual in the Global South – are made worse by inappropriate teacher training, low levels of commitment from many teachers and political interference in recruitment and deployment processes (Allsop and Watts, 2015; Kontagora, 2016; Watts and Allso, 2016).

The minimum qualification for teachers is the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE). This is theory-driven and, although there are moves to include practical training, it typically leaves teachers unprepared for the realities of the classroom (De et al., 2016a,b). Moreover, many teachers do not possess an NCE. So teachers usually require in-school support for even fundamental practices (e.g. lesson planning) from their head teachers and more experienced colleagues. However, not all teachers are sufficiently committed to make use of such support. Many NCE students are simply trying to obtain a recognised qualification rather than training to become teachers and/or are likely to quit teaching as soon other employment opportunities present themselves.

This situation is made worse by the political dimension. Nigeria is currently ranked joint 136th out of the 176 countries listed on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. This is better than many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa but it does indicate the endemic nature of corruption that pervades the education system (Odunayo and Olujuwon, 2010; Bennell et al., 2014; Nawait, 2016). Unscrupulous politicians have a habit of appointing unqualified relatives to teaching positions so that they can draw state salaries, even if they do not turn up to work, and scrupulous head teachers who challenge such appointments risk being moved to remote schools or simply being fired (Bennell et al., 2014).

Such practices are legitimised in Nigeria through the neopatrimonialism that emerged from the post-colonial drive for national development and unification (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Pitcher et al., 2009). The system enables one person or party to use public resources and appoint civil servants based on preference rather than merit. This vertical distribution of resources through patron-client networks based around powerful individuals or political parties is widely accepted in the hope that the wealth distributed to the clients will then trickle down to others (Osseo-Asare, 1984). In theory, whole communities can benefit from the favours granted from politicians to their clients. In practice, neopatrimonialism diverts public resources (raised from national tax revenues and aid funds) for private gain to ensure the survival of the system (Francisco, 2010). Moreover, it continues to '[undermine] development possibilities already restricted by social and economic constraints' (Cromwell and Chintedza, 2005, p. 30). Yet, although considered as inappropriate behaviour or corruption by the international community, many politicians see neopatrimonialism as a legal political system they can use to benefit their clans and kinsmen. It frames concerns about teacher recruitment and deployment in Kaduna and Katsina States (although those concerns extend throughout the region) and explains why personal connections are so important. Teachers, whether qualified or not, with connections are protected by this system of patronage. Teachers and head teachers without such protection are vulnerable to it.

This neopatrimonialism also explains the need for clear guidance on the management of teachers. There are good and effective primary school teachers in Northern Nigeria. A recent study intended to generate evidence-based education policies (Authors, 2017) identified the key characteristics of effective teachers within this context as being: (i) properly qualified and appropriately trained; and (ii) professional, resourceful and willing to invest in the learning and well-being of pupils. These teachers – as well as their less effective colleagues – need to be properly managed if they are to properly contribute to primary education in Northern Nigeria. Yet there is a lack of appropriate guidance that acknowledged the context of such management.

The range of in-depth studies of teacher management in Nigeria at

the basic education level is very narrow. Many of the available studies that cover state or zonal level issues relate to donor-funded projects (e.g. Adelabu, 2005; Sherry, 2008; Williams, 2009; Thomas, 2011). They focus on particular geographical areas and issues surrounding the project objectives, delivery and outcomes and tend to miss salient issues such as socio-cultural factors that underlie widespread practices. Adelabu (2005) reports on a study in five Southwest States (Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun and Ekiti) and the Federal Capital Territory that collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and secondary documentary sources. The study made some interesting observations but it does not include Nigeria's educationally disadvantaged states in the northern parts of the country where the greatest needs are located (see FME, 2011). It also highlights the need to examine teachers' situation in less educationally developed Nigerian regions.

Available government studies and reports on teacher management are also very limited. The *Nigeria Digest of Education Statistics* (FME, 2011) and various States' Annual School Census (ASC) reports provide information on teacher numbers by LGAs and States across Nigeria but do not have qualitative information on teacher management. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2005) reports its collaborative studies with various development agencies in Nigeria in its Education Sector Analysis (ESA) which examined problems and constraints within the general education sector. The ESA was based on 43 studies that cut across the Nigeria education system but neither focused specifically on teachers and the way they are managed nor on the basic education sub-sector. From time to time, Nigeria conducts the National Assessment of Learning Achievements in Basic Education (NALABE) which is aimed at assessing the extent to which the goals of the universal basic education programme are being achieved. The most recent studies were conducted in 2006 and 2009 across the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with samples of: public primary school pupils in primary four to six; some junior secondary classes; and teachers and head-teachers.

Most studies by Nigerian scholars tend to be quantitative and give very little attention to qualitative stories behind the statistical data. Ememe et al. (2013) report on a descriptive survey that examined teacher motivation for educational transformation in Abia State with 500 secondary school teachers (about 10% of the teacher population in the state). The report notes that the structure of teacher salary payments requires urgent attention. Similarly, Kamoh et al. (2013) surveyed 1000 adults drawn from various professional fields in Plateau State to understand factors that affect job satisfaction among Nigerian teachers. The findings note, *inter alia*, that challenges arising within the teaching profession include low wages, low social status, high pupil-teacher ratios, poor work environments, weak career advancement opportunities, inadequate fringe benefits and irregular payment of salaries.

There are also some studies that examine teacher management from particular perspectives such as gender and teacher motivation (e.g. Adeyemi and Oyetade, 2011; Nakpodia, 2011; Adeyinka et al., 2013) but they do not generally provide broad information on the state of teacher management. Other studies discuss various aspects of teacher management based on secondary data or using a small sample (see Aluede, 2009; Onuoha, 2011; Ezekiel-Hart, 2012).

In the literature, teacher management is considered very important for improved manpower supply and quality delivery of education but references to general teacher management across Nigeria suggest that the management system is weak (e.g. Sherry, 2008; Thomas, 2011; Dunne et al., 2013; Humphreys and Crawford, 2014). It is also noted in the literature that the general pattern of development in education, including the aspect of teacher management, differ across the states and geopolitical zones, pointing to the need for case-specific studies to provide detailed understandings (FME, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Humphreys and Crawford, 2014).

This paper is intended to address some of these concerns by exploring primary teacher management through the lens of qualitative research.

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