

Attitude of Students in Obio-Akpor and Ehomua Local Government Areas towards the Teaching Profession: Implications for Guidance Counsellors

Dr. Bruno Uchenna Onyekuru

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

This is a descriptive study that investigated the attitude of secondary school students towards the teaching profession. A sample of 520 SS111 students from two local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria participated in the study. Three research questions and two hypotheses were designed to guide the study. The research questions were answered using mean and hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test. The instrument for data collection was Attitude to Teaching Profession Questionnaire (ATPQ) validated by three senior lecturers in the Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Its reliability coefficient as obtained using test-retest method was 0.82. The data generated from the instrument were analyzed using SPSS. The results revealed that the students irrespective of gender and location of their schools had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. There was a significant difference in attitude towards the teaching profession between male and female students in favour of the female students. Also significant difference towards the teaching profession existed between students whose schools were situated in rural areas and those whose schools were situated in urban centres in favour of those whose schools were situated in rural areas. The implication of the finding of a negative attitude towards the teaching profession among the students is that the government has not done enough to improve the salary and condition of service of the teachers. Again, the efforts of career counsellors to make secondary school students realize that no nation can have sound economic and technological development without quality teachers have not yielded the desired results.

Keywords: Attitude, negative, positive, favourable, unfavourable, intense, salient, acquired and inferred.

Introduction

Attitude was defined by Smith and Mackie (2007) as a learned tendency to evaluate things in a certain way. Fishbein (1997) defined it as a mental disposition of an individual to act for or against a definite object. While Lowery (2002) defined it as mental and neural representations, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on behaviour, Allport (2005) defined it as a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related. In common terms, attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike of an item. Again, Mehrens and Lehmann (2000) see it as a predisposition to respond overtly to social objects and phenomena in a particular manner. Furthermore, attitudes are individual mental processes which determine actual and potential responses of a person in social world (Burns, 2004). As attitude is directed towards an object, it may be looked upon as a state of mind of the individual towards a value (Allport, 2005). Values are social in nature as they are objects of societal regard which may include religion, education, teaching profession, family size, politics, money, fame, etc.

Attitude as a construct is not directly observable but is inferred from the person's overt behaviour which may be verbal or non-verbal. Hence, we cannot see hatred, but we can notice when someone is hated. On the basis of observations of a person's consistent behaviour patterns to the stimulus object, person, event or idea, we may conclude he displays a negative or positive attitude to the reference objects or events (Shaw, 1998).

Attitudes may be formed from direct personal experience, or they may result from observations. Social roles and norms can have a strong influence on attitudes. Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2007) are of the opinion that attitudes of individuals have strong influence on their behaviours. They noted that people are more likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes under the following conditions- when their attitudes are the result of their personal experiences; when they are experts in the subject in question; when they expect a favourable outcome; when the attitudes are repeatedly stressed and when they stand to win or lose something as a result of the issue in question. As experience and observation moulds attitudes so attitudes invariably mould behaviour. Attitudes can be favourable or unfavourable, negative or positive, intense, salient, acquired and inferred. Since attitudes are more or less permanent, an individual's future behaviour can be predicted on the basis of his/her attitudes (Smith and Mackie, 2007). Components of attitude as outlined by Allport (2005) include emotional component, cognitive component and behavioural component.

Teaching is regarded as a noble profession the world over. In the early years of formal education in

Nigeria, teaching was largely done by the “whiteman”. Gradually, Nigerians replaced the white men and started to pilot the affairs of the schools (Madu, 1991). At that time, teachers were respected, honoured and worshiped, and teaching profession was very attractive. Children would like to grow up to become teachers.

However, in post-civil-war Nigeria, the regard and respect for professional teachers started waning (Clark, 2006). In the eighties and nineties when the regard for teachers was at all-time low, successive governments in Nigeria relegated teachers and their welfare to the background. Salaries of teachers became peanuts when compared to what other professionals earned. Besides, the teacher’s salary as meager as it was, was not paid promptly. Teachers went for months on end without salary. The working conditions of teachers were deplorable as classrooms and staffrooms were in a very poor state. Teachers were associated with tattered or shabby dresses. In fact, there appeared to be a stigma attached to the teaching profession. Children would no longer want to grow up to become teachers. Students transiting from secondary schools to universities preferred non-teaching professions. The attitude of secondary school students towards teaching as a profession was unfavourable (Madu, 1991).

With the activities of Nigerian Union of Teachers and the emergence of civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999, there has been a steady improvement in dignity with which teachers are treated. The federal and state governments have increased appreciably the salaries of teachers and conditions of service. Besides, teachers’ salaries are promptly paid now, though they are still not at par with those of their counterparts in other professions. On this basis, the researcher embarks on this investigation of the current attitudes of secondary school students towards the teaching profession.

In Emohua and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria which were the areas of study, there are a good number of secondary schools located in rural and urban centres. Male and female students in the schools in these local government areas are of appreciable number to constitute a sample for the study. In rural areas, general unemployment, poverty and ignorance is common. The students in schools located in rural areas may or may not be well informed about the state of affairs of teachers. They may be unaware of elaborately furnished offices and nice working conditions which non-teachers are privileged to enjoy. In schools in urban centres, students may be more informed than those in rural areas. They may have encountered wealthy teachers or teachers of various social standings. The encounter may have contributed to mould their attitudes towards teaching as a profession.

Some sections of the society hold that teaching profession is ideal for women. It is less strenuous, less time consuming as less time is spent in schools in a day than in other offices and women have more penchants for caring for children than the men. Men appear to be more intolerant to some conditions to which the teachers are subjected. Men also appear to have more need for money than women as men are heads of the families and as such should be bread winners capable of taking adequate care of their family needs with or without the assistance from their wives. Some people are of the view that sufficient money to provide adequately for the family may not be earned through teaching. A study involving a sample of freshman and sophomore classes of student-teachers in Ohio, USA by Lowery (2002) revealed that more than 90% of the participants were women. Less than 25% of those preparing to teach in high school were men. The percentage of men interested in teaching decreased from the senior year down to freshman. Money was a background element accounting for this changing ratio.

Ige, Toyobo and Oyegoke (2011) conducted a study on the analysis of urban secondary school interest in teaching profession in south-western Nigeria. Specifically, the study was conducted in Oyo city with a sample of 270 senior secondary school 11 students. The instruments for data collection were a researcher-made questionnaire and structured interview. The findings from the study revealed that the percentage of student respondents who had interest in teaching as a career was very low. They also found that there was no significant influence of gender on the students’ interest in teaching as a profession. Similarly, Torvy (2012) studied the attitude of students to teaching as a career in Cape Town, South Africa. A sample of 193 secondary school students participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was a validated questionnaire of reliability index of 0.88. It was found that an appreciable proportion (48%) of the students had a positive attitude to teaching as a career, 52% of the students had a negative attitude to the teaching profession. Though more girls than boys showed positive attitude to teaching as a career, there was no significant difference in attitude to teaching profession between these two groups of students. It was also found that students from schools in rural areas significantly showed more positive attitude to teaching profession than those from schools in urban centres.

This present study is designed to investigate the attitude of male and female students as well as students from schools in rural and urban areas towards the teaching profession. To give direction to this study, three research questions and two hypotheses were formulated. They are presented below.

Research questions

1. What is the attitude of students towards the teaching profession?
2. What are the attitudes of male and female students towards the teaching profession?

3. What are the attitudes of students from schools in rural and urban centres towards the teaching profession?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in attitudes between male and female students towards the teaching profession.
2. There is no significant difference in attitudes between students from schools in rural and urban centres towards the teaching profession.

Method

Two hundred and forty eight (248) registered secondary schools in Emohua and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas (From the Department of Statistics, Rivers State Ministry of Education, 2013) were divided into ten clusters. Four schools were drawn from each cluster using simple random sampling technique. Then 13 SS111 students from each school drawn through simple random sampling technique participated in the study. Hence, a sample of 520 SS111 students from secondary schools in Emohua and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas was involved in the study. The SS111 students were at the terminal year of study and might have encountered all manners of teachers. They might have noted the respect or lack of it accorded to the teachers. They might even have the knowledge of the salaries of the teachers, their conditions of service and the social standing of the teachers. The information they have acquired over the years about the teachers might have helped in their attitude formation about the teaching profession.

The instrument for data collection was Attitude to Teaching Profession Questionnaire (ATPQ). It was a ten-item questionnaire of 4-point likert scale. It was researcher made, but was validated by three senior lecturers in the Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. Its reliability coefficient as obtained through test-retest method was 0.82. A teacher from each participating school was engaged as a research assistant. The research assistants helped to administer the instruments to the students in their respective schools and score them when they had been responded to. The data generated from the instrument were subjected to analyses using SPSS. The research questions were answered using the mean and percentage, while the hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the study are presented below.

RQ₁. What is the attitude of students towards the teaching profession?

Table 1: Attitude of students towards the teaching profession

Attitude	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Sd
Positive	27	25	31	16.02	4.54
Negative	493	10	24		

Based on the criterion mean of 25, table 1 shows that 27 students representing 5.19% of the 520 students who participated in this study had a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. Similarly, 493 students representing 94.81% of the students had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. The minimum points obtained by the students who had positive and negative attitudes towards the teaching profession are 25 and 10 respectively. On the same hand, the maximum points obtained by the students with positive and negative attitudes towards the teaching profession are 31 and 24 respectively. Overall the mean value for the students is 16.02 and the standard deviation is 4.54. Since the mean value of 16.02 is less than the criterion mean of 25, it can be inferred that the students had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession.

RQ₂. What are the attitudes of male and female students towards the teaching profession?

HO₁. There is no significant difference in attitudes between male and female students towards the teaching profession

Table 2: Attitude of male and female students towards the teaching profession

Gender	Response	N	%	Mean	Sd	Df	t _{cal}	t _{crit}
Male	Positive	7	2.69	15.11	4.03	518	4.64	1.96
	Negative	253	97.31					
Female	Positive	20	7.69	16.92	4.84			
	Negative	240	92.31					

Table 2 shows that seven male students representing 2.69% of the male respondents and twenty female students representing 7.69% of the female respondents had a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. Similarly, 253 male students representing 97.31% of the male respondents and 240 female students representing 92.31% of the female respondents had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. The overall mean values for male and female respondents are 15.11 and 16.92 respectively, while the standard deviations are 4.03 and 4.84 for male and female respondents respectively. Since the mean values for male and female students are

less than the criterion mean value of 25, it was inferred that both male and female respondents had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession.

The calculated t-value is 4.64 while the critical t-value obtained at 518 degrees of freedom and alpha level of 0.05 is 1.96. The calculated t-value is comparatively greater than the critical t-value, hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there was a significant difference in attitudes between male and female students towards the teaching profession with female students being more positively disposed towards the teaching profession than the male students.

RQ₃. What are the attitudes of students from schools in rural and urban centres towards the teaching profession?

HO₂. There is no significant difference in attitudes between students from schools in rural and urban centres towards the teaching profession.

Table 3: Attitude of students from urban and rural schools towards the teaching profession

Location	Response	N	%	Mean	Sd	Df	t _{cal}	t _{crit}
Urban	Positive	9	3.46	15.33	4.15	518	3.51	1.96
	Negative	251	96.54					
Rural	Positive	18	6.92	16.71	4.80			
	Negative	242	93.08					

Table 3 shows that nine students who represented 3.46% of students from schools in urban centres and 18 students who represented 6.92% of the students from schools in rural areas had a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. It also shows that 251 students who represented 96.54% of the students from schools in urban centres and 242 students who represented 93.08% of students from schools in rural areas had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. The overall means for students from schools in urban centres and rural areas are 15.33 and 16.71 respectively. The standard deviation for students from schools in urban centres is 4.15 while that of those from schools in rural areas is 4.80. The mean values for students from schools in urban centres and rural areas are both less than the criterion mean of 25. This implies that both students from schools in urban centres and schools in rural areas had negative attitude towards the teaching profession. The calculated t-value is 3.51 while the tabulated t-value obtained at 518 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.96. The calculated t-value is greater than the tabulated t-value implying that the null hypothesis was rejected. Hence, significant difference in attitudes towards teaching profession existed between students from schools in rural areas and those from schools in urban centres with students from schools in rural areas being more positively disposed towards the teaching profession than the students from schools in urban centres.

Discussion of findings

It was found that only a small proportion (5.19%) of the 520 student sample had a positive attitude towards the teaching profession, while majority of the students (94.81%) had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. This finding is similar to that of Ige, Toyobo and Oyegoke (2011) who found that the percentage of student respondents who had interest in teaching as a career was very low. The negative attitude of the students to the teaching profession may be connected to the fact that the efforts of the government and other employers of teachers towards improving teachers' salary and working conditions are not enough. The respect accorded the teachers is not at par with that of their counterparts in other professions. The welfare of the teachers is not given priority by the employers of teachers.

It was also found that though both male and female students had negative attitude towards the teaching profession, a higher proportion of female students compared to male students had a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. There was a significant difference in attitudes between male and female students towards the teaching profession in favour of the female respondents. The finding that there was a significant difference in attitudes between male and female students towards the teaching profession in favour of the female respondents is slightly different from the finding of Ige, Toyobo and Oyegoke (2011) who found that there was no significant relationship between gender and interest of students in the teaching as a career. The difference in findings in these two studies may be explained from the fact that this study is more recent and was conducted in towns in Rivers State of Nigeria when the rate of unemployment is high compared with what it was in 2011 when Ige, Toyobo and Oyegoke conducted their study in Oyo city of the south-western Nigeria. Again, it differs slightly from the finding of Torvy (2012) who found that there was no significant difference in attitude to teaching profession between the male and female students. The difference in findings between Torvy's (2012) work and the present study may be explained from the fact that the study by Torvy (2012) was conducted in Cape Town area of South Africa where the respect, remunerations and conditions of service for teachers may be at par with those of their counterparts in other professions.

It was found that both students from schools in rural areas and those from schools in urban centres had a negative attitude to teaching profession, though the mean value for students from schools in rural areas was significantly higher than that of the students from schools in urban centres. This finding is similar to that of Torvy (2012) who found that students from schools in rural areas significantly showed more positive attitude to

teaching profession than those from schools in urban centres. The reason why higher proportion of students from schools in urban centres had more negative attitude than those from schools in rural areas towards the teaching profession may be explained from the fact that students from rural areas might not have sufficient information about the low regard, poor remunerations and poor conditions of service accorded the teachers compared with their counterparts in other professions.

Conclusion

Students in Emohua and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas irrespective of gender and location of their schools had a negative attitude towards the teaching profession. There was a significant difference in attitude towards the teaching profession when male and female students were considered and this was in favour of the female students. Also significant difference towards the teaching profession existed between students whose schools were situated in rural areas and those whose schools were situated in urban centres in favour of those whose schools were situated in rural areas.

Implications of the findings for guidance counsellors

Education is a veritable tool for economic and technological development of any nation. In the field of education, teaching is indispensable as it is an integral part of education. The negative attitude to teaching shown by the students portends a grave danger to our economic and technological development as a nation. If our economic condition improves and there is equally improved employment opportunities, when graduates have the opportunities to select the type of job they would like to do, one wonders what will be the faith of children of school going age in the land. Are they going to be left on their own or are they going to be left in the hands of unqualified impostors who masquerade as teachers? The governments at local as well as other levels must take the initiative to arrest this ugly trend of negative attitude to teaching profession. This they can do by providing the good conditions of service to the teachers. The salary for the teachers should be attractive and comparable to those in other professions. Then the responsibilities will be shifted to the guidance counsellors to complement the effort of the government. They can do this by taking enlightenment campaigns to the schools to appeal to the students to see the need to opt for teaching as a career. They should portray teaching profession in a very positive light to make the profession appear once again attractive to the children. If they carry out this responsibility creditably well, there is no doubt in the mind of the researcher that there will be a return to the good old days when children would like to grow up to become teachers.

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