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Do Students in the Faculty of Education Choose Teaching as a Last Resort Career?

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programmes

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to scientifically evaluate the widespread belief that teachers only choose the teaching profession as a last resort career. Almost all 100-level students (N=406) in the Faculty of Education completed the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) questionnaire that was designed to determine the factors that pre-service teachers identify as being most influential in their choice of the teaching profession. The results of the study demonstrated that only 18% of the students chose teaching as a last resort career. Instead, the top two reasons for choosing teaching was to shape the future of children and to make social contribution. Overall, the students reported that they were satisfied with their choice of becoming a teacher.

### Introduction

The future development of Nigeria largely depends on the quality of education that the next generation of leaders receive. The quality of education depends on the effectiveness of the teachers. Educational research has demonstrated that the motivation for performing a task influences both performance on the task and the amount of effort that is put forth (Reeve, 2001). Consequently, the factors that influence young adults to choose the teaching profession will likely influence their effort and effectiveness as teachers. Teachers who value the teaching profession and are satisfied with their choice of becoming teachers are therefore essential to the future development of Nigeria.

However, the general belief in Nigeria is that young adults only choose the teaching profession as a last resort. This belief is common in the media with statements such as “Most teachers found themselves in the teaching profession not as a first choice but as a last resort” (Inabo, 2009; see also Abdullahi, 2008; Rigasa, 2008). University lecturers also widely disseminate this belief of teaching as a last resort career. For example, Professor Afe described student teachers choosing the teaching profession as a last resort in an inaugural lecture (Afe, 2006; see also Ejie, 2009; Owolabi, 2007).

Despite this general belief, no research has been conducted in Nigeria to empirically demonstrate that teachers choose the field of education because they are unable to gain entrance into their profession of choice. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to examine the factors that influence students in the teacher training programme to pursue a career in education. Three specific research questions were asked. The first research question was simply to rank-order factors that influence students’ choice of the field of education. The

second research question examined the effect of gender on factors that influence the choice of teaching, while the third research question examined the effect of mode of entry to the university on factors that influence the choice of teaching.

## Method

### *Research Design*

The descriptive and causal-comparative research designs were selected for this study. The descriptive research design was chosen because the first purpose of the study was to describe the factors that influence pre-service teachers in their choice of education as a career. The causal-comparative research design compares two or more groups on a dependent variable (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The second and third research questions compared the factors that influence teaching by two independent variables: gender and mode of entry.

### *Participants*

All 100-level students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Jos were assigned the questionnaire as continuous assessment credit. In all, 406 students returned the questionnaire (56% male, 44% female). Of the participants, 30% were enrolled in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences, 36% were enrolled in the Department of Science and Technology, and 34% were enrolled in the Department of Special Education. The average age of the respondents was 21.5 years. Most of the students were from minority tribes in the north central region of Nigeria. Fifty-three percent of the sample was admitted to the Faculty of Education through the remedial programme while the remaining 47% of the sample was admitted through UME.

### *Measure*

The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) scale was developed by Watt and Richardson (2007). Validity evidence was provided by the authors through factor analysis and the longitudinal relationship of the factors influencing teaching to subsequent

engagement in the teaching profession. The purpose of the FIT-Choice is to determine the factors that pre-service teachers identify as being most influential in their choice of the teaching profession. Table 1 summarizes the twelve factors that influence choice of the teaching profession as measured by the FIT-Choice. The FIT-Choice instrument was slightly modified to fit the Nigerian context. All factors were identical to the original FIT-Choice instrument except for two. Watt and Richardson identified a job transferability factor that included items such as “Teaching will be a useful job for me to have when traveling.” This factor was judged as not applicable to Nigerian pre-service teachers. Additionally, a bludging

Table 1

## Sample Items from the Factors that Influence Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) Instrument

Factor	Sample Item
Ability to Teach	I have the qualities of a good teacher.
Enhance social equity	Teaching will allow me to benefit the socially disadvantaged.
Exploitation	Teaching will allow me to work other jobs.
Fallback career	I chose teaching as a last resort career.
Intrinsic interest in teaching	I like teaching.
Job security	Teaching will provide a reliable income.
Make social contribution	Teaching enables me to give back to society.
Prior teaching experiences	I have had good teachers as role models.
Shape the future of children	Teaching will allow me to influence the next generation.
Social influences	My family thinks I should become a teacher.
Time for family	Teaching hours will fit with the responsibilities of having a family.
Work with children	I like working with children and adolescents.

factor was developed to represent choosing teaching as a lazy, easy career with items such as “As a teacher I will have a short workday.” This factor did not demonstrate adequate construct validity on the original instrument so Watts and Richardson recommended dropping this factor. However, it is commonly heard in Nigeria that students choose education for bludging reasons. Therefore, this factor was modified to include the following items: “Teaching will allow me to work other jobs,” “Teaching will allow me to collect a salary by doing little work,” and “When teaching, I can use the students for gaining money.” The factor was renamed from “bludging” to “exploitation.”

The directions on the FIT-Choice scale stated that students should rate the importance of each factor on their choice of becoming a teacher. Students responded on a seven-point Likert scale from *1 not at all* to *7 extremely*. Each of the twelve factors on the FIT-Choice was assessed by two, three, or four questions. Responses for each factor were averaged, giving an overall mean score for each participant on each of the twelve factors. In addition to the twelve factors that influenced the education students’ choice of becoming teachers, four questions also assessed students’ satisfaction with their choice of becoming a teacher, which were part of the validation study by Watts and Richardson (2007). These four questions were rated on a seven-point Likert scale from *1 strongly disagree* to *7 strongly agree*. An example question is “I am happy with my decision of becoming a teacher.” Demographic data was also collected from each participant.

### *Procedure*

The questionnaires were administered to students at the end of a 100-level general education lecture. Students had two weeks to complete the questionnaire and return to the lecturer. The lecturer strongly encouraged students to complete the questionnaire independently, both verbally before the questionnaire was administered and in the introductory statement of the questionnaire. Continuous assessment points were assigned

simply for returning the questionnaire. After the continuous assessment credit was awarded, students' responses were never linked to them personally.

### Results

The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons why students in the faculty of education choose the teaching profession. The first research question asked which factors have the strongest influence over students choosing the teaching profession. The mean and standard deviation of the scores for all 406 participants were calculated for each of the twelve factors. As seen in Table 2, the top two reasons that students chose the teaching profession were to shape the future of children and to make a social contribution. Choosing teaching as a fallback career was one of the last reasons, only above social influences and exploitation. Indeed, only 18% of the sampled students responded that they strongly agreed to choosing teaching as a last resort career. Therefore, these results strongly contradict the general belief that students only choose teaching as a last resort career. Furthermore, most students responded that they were satisfied with their choice of the teaching profession. The average score on the satisfaction scale was 5.02 (on a scale from 1 to 7;  $SD=1.65$ ). Sixty-two percent of the sample agreed with the statement "I am happy with my decision to become a teacher." To conclude, few students in the Faculty of Education chose to be in the field of education as a last resort career and most students were satisfied with their choice of becoming a teacher.

The second and third research questions examined the effects of gender and mode of entry on the factors that influence choice of the teaching profession. To ease data analysis, both gender and mode of entry were entered as independent variables into a factorial ANOVA with satisfaction and each of the twelve factors as dependent variables. The factorial ANOVA tests both the main effects of gender and mode of entry, as well as the interaction between gender and mode of entry. In other words, the factorial ANOVA tests the possibility that, for example, males in the remedial programme are more similar to females in the UME

Table 2

## Average Response on FIT-Choice Factors

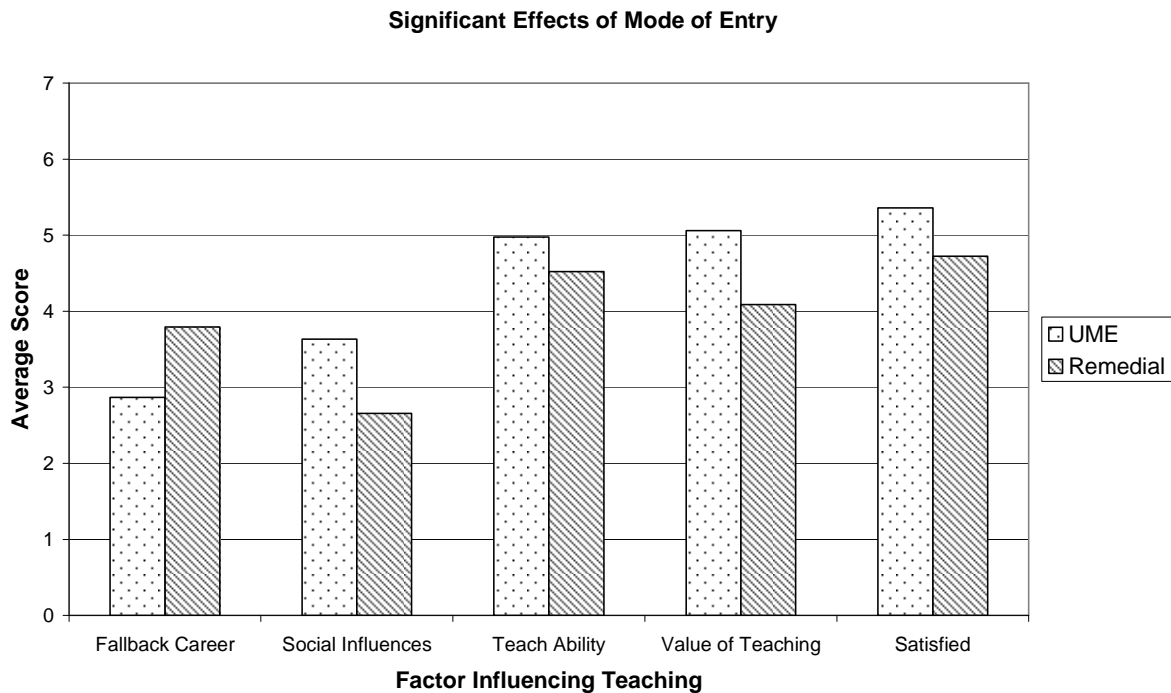
Rank	Factor	Standard	
		Mean	Deviation
1	Shape future of children	6.09	1.30
2	Make social contribution	6.06	1.88
3	Prior teaching experiences	5.49	1.39
4	Work with children	5.35	1.56
5	Enhance social equality	5.03	1.15
6	Time for family	4.74	1.47
7	Teaching ability	4.71	1.29
8	Job security	4.62	1.46
9	Intrinsic career value	4.54	1.55
10	Fallback career	3.39	1.58
11	Social influences	3.10	1.95
12	Exploitation	2.92	1.69

Note. Participants responded on the importance of each factor to their choice of becoming a teacher on a scale from 1: *Not at All* to 7: *Extremely*.

programme than males in the UME programme. Since gender had two groups (male and female) and mode of entry had two groups (UME and remedial), thirteen 2x2 factorial ANOVAs were computed, one for each dependent variable.

Because some participants did not complete all of the demographic questions on the questionnaire, only the 346 participants who responded to both the gender and mode of entry questions were included in this analysis. None of the interactions between gender and mode

Figure 1

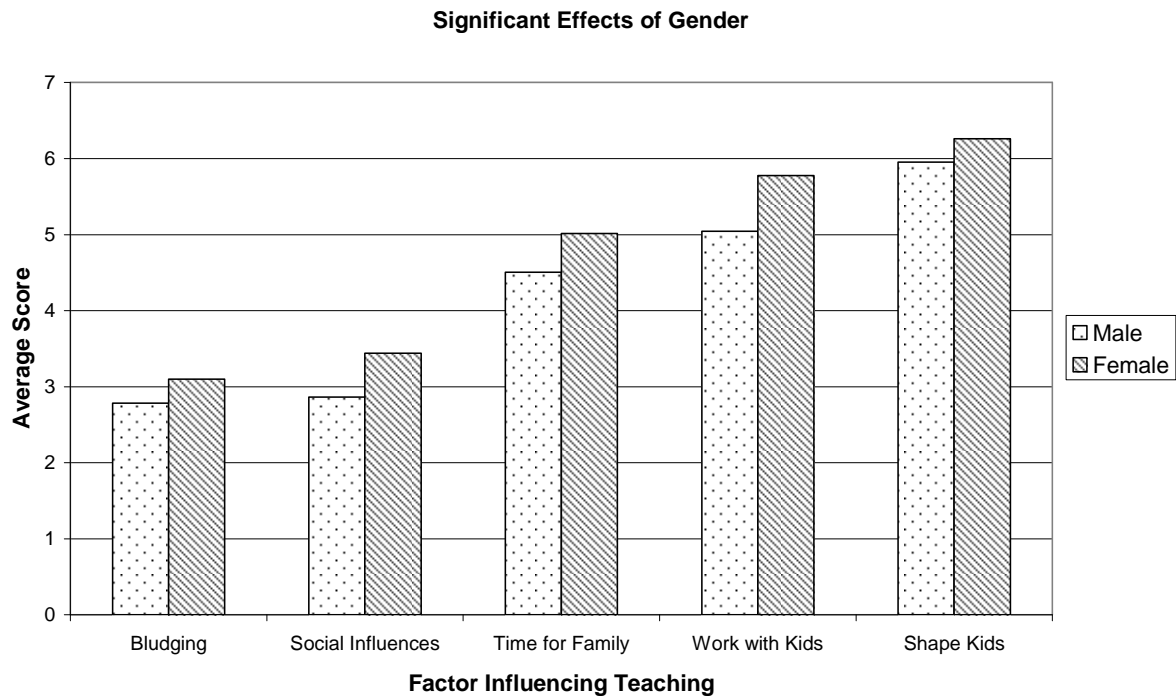


of entry were significant. Therefore, the main effects of gender and mode of entry were examined. Mode of entry was significant for the satisfaction scale ( $F(1,342) = 12.33, p=.005$ ). Students who enrolled through UME were significantly more satisfied with their choice of becoming a teacher than students who enrolled through the remedial programme (see Figure 1 for the mean scores on factors that were significant for the main effect of mode of entry). However, the mean score even for remedial students on the satisfaction scale was 4.72. As the response scale ranged from 1: *Strongly Disagree* to 4: *Neutral* to 7: *Strongly Agree*, students in the remedial programme still tended to be more satisfied with their choice of becoming a teacher than dissatisfied.

For the factors influencing teaching choice, the effect of social influences differed both by sex ( $F(1,342) = 5.25, p=.02$ ) and by mode of entry ( $F(1,342) = 21.32, p<.0001$ ). Students who enrolled through UME tended to have stronger social influences to become a



Figure 2



teacher than students who enrolled through the remedial programme. Furthermore, females reported significantly stronger social influences than males ( $F(1,342) = 5.25, p=.02$ ).

There were three other significant main effects of mode of entry. Students enrolled by UME were more strongly influenced by the factors of teaching ability ( $F(1,342) = 5.97, p=.02$ ) and the value of teaching as a career ( $F(1,342) = 22.39, p<.0001$ ). Students who enrolled by the remedial programme reported choosing teaching as a fallback career significantly more than students enrolled though UME ( $F(1,342) = 29.24, p<.0001$ ).

The main effect of gender had four significant main effects (see Figure 2 for the average scores of the factors that had a significant gender main effect). Females ranked the following factors as more influential in their choice to teach than males: time for family ( $F(1,342) = 11.06, p=.001$ ), shaping the future of children ( $F(1,342) = 5.13, p=.02$ ), working with children ( $F(1,342) = 18.16, p<.0001$ ), and exploitation ( $F(1,342) = 5.95, p=.02$ ). No

significant main effects for either gender or mode of entry were found for job security, enhance social equality, make a social contribution, or prior teaching or learning experiences.

### Discussion

Teaching is a laudable profession that has an undeniable influence on the future of Nigeria. As a result, training of future teachers in Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in universities needs to be held to a high standard so committed and effective teachers can be produced. Development of committed and effective teachers requires two conditions. First, the teachers-in-training must be motivated to be teachers. Second, the teachers-in-training need positive, constructive instruction about being effective teachers. Despite the widespread belief in Nigeria that young adults only choose teaching as a last resort career, this research provides evidence that very few students in the Faculty of Education chose to be teachers because they had no other career options. Most pre-service teachers at the University of Jos chose teaching for compassionate reasons such as shaping the future of children and desiring to make a social contribution. Since most pre-service teachers have chosen teaching as their profession of choice, the burden now falls onto teacher-training programmes at the tertiary level to provide excellent training to produce committed and effective teachers.

### *Recommendations*

As the empirical results suggest otherwise, tertiary lecturers and the media need to stop using the rhetoric that young adults only choose teaching as a last resort. This erroneous belief may influence many detrimental outcomes. First, assuming that teaching is a last resort career demeans the teaching profession. Most agree that teachers have one of the greatest influences over the future of Nigeria. Therefore, teachers should be viewed as valuable assets to society instead of being degraded as a weak career. Second, portraying teaching as a last-

resort career can inadvertently lower the standards of performance both for teachers and for lecturers in teacher training programmes.

Indeed, lecturers in teacher training programmes should view their students, the future teachers of Nigeria, as essential assets to society. As such, lecturers in education need to invest their time, energy, ability, and resources into training their students to be effective future teachers. Instead of describing teaching as a last resort career, lecturers in teacher training programmes need to focus on encouraging their students to persevere in their studies, study hard, learn well, and maintain a high standard of success. The teaching profession should be viewed as a ministry toward humanity and not as a last resort career.

Furthermore, lecturers in tertiary institutions need to be role models of commitment and excellence. Educational research provides evidence that observational learning, or learning by example, is a powerful form of learning (Bandura, 1977). If education lecturers demonstrate positive teaching characteristics such as dedication to learning and teaching, a strong command over content knowledge, commitment to their students' growth, and enthusiasm for the teaching profession, then their students – the future teachers of Nigeria – will demonstrate similar characteristics. Likewise, if education lecturers demonstrate negative teaching characteristics, then their students will also engage in these negative behaviors.

Students who entered into the university through the remedial programme do report choosing teaching as a last resort career more frequently than students who entered through UME. Therefore, an orientation to the teaching profession should be offered to the remedial students before they begin their studies about the value of the teaching profession.

Furthermore, the practice of admitting students to the Faculty of Education through the remedial programme should be reexamined as students who are forced into the teaching profession will likely be ineffective teachers in the future.

*Limitations*

Since only 100-level students were sampled, the factors that influence teaching as a career for students who gain entry to the university through direct entry were not examined. However, most students who come to the university through direct entry have already been teachers at the primary level. Because of their experience in the teaching profession, direct entry students have not likely chosen to further their studies in education as a last resort. Regardless, further research should follow the same methodology with students in a college of education.

*Conclusion*

The future of Nigeria depends on the quality of teachers that tertiary institutions produce. The purpose of teacher training programmes is to produce high-quality future teachers. Good teachers results from the combination of positive motivation of the students to become teachers and quality teaching practices at the tertiary institutions. Students in the Faculty of Education generally reported that they want to be teachers for altruistic reasons and are satisfied with their choice of the teaching profession. Therefore, the teacher training programmes need to nurture and strengthen this desire to teach through effective teaching practices at the tertiary level.

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