INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CULTURE, AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

Frances A. Alimigbe, Ph.D.[1]
Mejai B.M. Avoseh, Ph.D.[2]

ABSTRACT: Education is a powerful tool for bringing about desirable change in human lives, equipping them for a lifetime and contributing to general well-being and serving as a lasting means for meaningful employment. However, when such opportunities are given with qualified access, they foster inequity. Africa has been described as an epitome of diversity – especially cultural endowment. Culture is a factor in the African environment that is used to impose limitations and barriers on women. For instance, insisting that the African culture requires women are homestead upon which rest all domestic responsibilities. The cultural barrier of women as homestead reduces women to "housekeeping experts" whose task is to cater for entire family – including bearing children and ensuring their upkeep. Encumbered with these responsibilities, study time and job delivery are encroached upon, resulting in devastating consequences. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) being the regulatory body saddled with the responsibilities of regulating the teaching profession in Nigeria, determining who are teachers, setting standards that must be attained by teachers, and raising those standards from time to time, has mapped out many strategies towards the achievement of its mandates which includes, regulation and control of teaching in all its aspects and ramification. This implies that TRCN oversees the quality of teachers and teaching at all levels of education and assures quality in taught and learned content. Mandatory Continuous Professional Development is one of such tools the TRCN uses in raising the knowledge of in-service teachers from time to time. The trainings are usually done either by TRCN or at times in partnerships with International Development partners like UNESCO, UNICEF, British Council, Save the Children, and other critical education stakeholders. The MCPD usually occurs through workshops, conferences, seminars and the like. Over the years, these cultural impositions on women have adversely affected their dedication, attention, and commitment to learning. This study focuses on the interplay of gender, culture, and teachers' professional development within the context of Nigeria. It uses the role identity theory as a framework to analyze women's' narrative of lived experiences to understand how they construct themselves while learning. Findings drawn from the study will help to raise awareness of the interplay of some African cultural factors on women's performance and suggest strategies of some of these challenges especially as it relates to further interventions, time allotted for training and selection processes. The findings will enrich advocacy tools in advocating for consideration for women when planning trainings in terms of time allotment and delivery of training.

Keywords: gender cultural roles, intersection, teachers' professional development, Nigeria

The intersection of gender, culture, and teachers' professional development is a complex and multifaceted issue in Nigeria. Gender refers to the social roles, behaviors, and expectations society assigns to individuals based on their perceived sex, while culture includes the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices of a particular group. Teachers' professional development, on the other hand, encompasses the ongoing learning, training, and growth opportunities that educators engage in to enhance their skills and knowledge. NESSE (2019) cited in Nwokeocha (2012, p. 162) identified that "gendered identities are constructed and multivalent – they intersect with social class, ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, sexuality and age." The American Psychological Association (2011) (as cited in Omokhodion et al. (2015) defined gender as "attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a

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[1] Planning, Research & Statistics, Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria, Abuja, rashimama@yahoo.com
[2] School of Education, The University of South Dakota, Mejai.Avoseh@usd.edu

given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender nonconformity" (p. 159). Similarly, the UN System in Nigeria (2013), cited by Omokhodion et al. (2015) states "Gender is a set of qualities and behaviors that societies expect from men and women (p. 160). The expectations give rise to a person's social identity. Teachers' professional development, on the other hand, encompasses the ongoing learning, training, and growth opportunities that educators engage in to enhance their skills and knowledge.

In Nigeria, there are several key aspects to consider when examining the intersection of gender, culture, and teachers' professional development.

- Gender Imbalances in the Teaching Profession: The teaching profession in Nigeria is heavily dominated by female teachers, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. This gender imbalance can influence the types of professional development opportunities available to teachers, and the content and focus of these trainings. For example, there may be a lack of gender-sensitive training programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by different sexes in the classroom.

- Cultural Expectations and Gender Roles: Nigeria is a country with diverse cultural traditions and norms, which can impact teachers' professional development. Cultural expectations regarding gender roles and responsibilities may shape the types of training programs that are encouraged or discouraged for male and female teachers. For instance, traditional gender norms may discourage women from pursuing advanced professional development opportunities or leadership positions in education because of the home keeping roles expected of them.

- Gender Bias in Professional Development: Gender bias can also manifest in the delivery and content of professional development programs. For example, training sessions may be scheduled at times that are not conducive to female teachers' schedules due to their household responsibilities. Additionally, the content of professional development programs may not adequately address the unique challenges faced by male and female teachers in their specific cultural contexts.

- Addressing Gender and Cultural Issues in Professional Development: To ensure equitable and inclusive professional development opportunities for teachers in Nigeria, it is essential to address the intersecting issues of gender and culture. This can be done through the development of gender-sensitive training programs that take into account the specific needs and challenges faced by male and female teachers. Additionally, cultural norms and expectations need to be challenged and transformed to promote equal opportunities for professional development for all teachers, regardless of their gender or cultural background.

Women in the traditional African culture are designated as helpmates and support system to their husbands and as well the home keepers. This designation of the woman explains

why all the household burden rest, specifically on their shoulders. These culturally imposed burden on women is often demonstrated in domestic responsibilities associated to meals preparation, general upkeep of a home and family members, including the husbands, children school runs and assignments preparation, and attending to some other basic family concerns. Consciousness of these realities usually jolts the women back to reality while performing their professional functions, with attendant effects. Inability to match up to their male counterpart in areas of leadership, expertise are some attendant effects according to the African Union Commission (2021) explaining that women despite their huge population in Africa remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles across many borders like; financial, investment and entrepreneurial markets. Education International (2015) buttresses the underrepresentation of women in leadership with some statistical insights. Of the 775 million people in the world, 2/3 of them are women who cannot read, because of which they are more likely than men to live in poverty in 41 out of 75 countries. Thirty-two million girls are still out of school around the world, while women own only 1% of the titled land in the world. Globally, women earn on average 24% less than men do and 2.5 times more unpaid domestic work than men; Women are the majority in education trade union in most regions, but they are underrepresented in the union leadership; the higher the decision-making body, the lower the percentage of women, (Education International, 2015, p. 3).

James (1890) explains that people have many identities related to roles and groups with different expectations. and roles in society; parent, worker, spouse, or teacher role identity), or being members of specific *groups* in society (for example, a church, book club, or softball group identity), and as *persons* having specific characteristics that make them unique from others (for example, an athletic or artistic person identity), and they are of different kinds (Burke & Stets, 2009). These encumbrances have over time been discovered to have quite devastating effects on learning and work effectiveness. This could be likened to what Study.com idealized as job-role conflict.

Theoretical Framework – Role Identity Theory

This study focuses on the interplay of gender, culture, and teachers' professional development within the context of Nigeria. The study highlights the importance of valuing and understanding women's diverse experiences, voices, and perspectives in educational contexts. The role identity theory is used as a framework in this study to analyze women's narratives of lived experiences to understand how they construct themselves while learning. This is important to expound on how the different roles an African woman functions on (woman, wife, sister, mother, and teacher) interplay. Each role or position has its own meanings and expectations that are internalized as identity and have different expectations. Role identity theory suggests that the greater the commitment to an identity, the higher that identity is placed within that individual's salience hierarchy. As a result of achieving high placement within the salience hierarchy, an individual relies on an identity more often than less important ones. Women being referred in the study to avoid being found wanting in their expected roles at home, become engrossed in this role and neglect their professional life because they are repeatedly told that family is everything. sense of self or identity, the individual tends to

behave in accordance with this role identity (Callero et al., 1987) to gain verification of the identity (Petkus, 1996).

Role identity theory, also known as social identity theory or role theory, is a psychological framework that explains how individuals derive their sense of self and behavioral patterns from the roles they occupy in society. This theory suggests that people's sense of identity and behavior are shaped by their adherence to social roles and the beliefs, values, and expectations associated with those roles (Stryker, 2007). According to Stryker and Statham (1985), role identity theory posits that individuals have multiple social roles, such as being a teacher, parent, or spouse, and their behavior and self-perception are influenced by these roles. These roles provide individuals with a sense of purpose, belonging, and guidelines for behavior. As a result, individuals may adopt role-related beliefs, values, and behaviors consistent with the expectations of their social roles. In the context of teachers' professional development and the intersection of gender and culture, role identity theory can help explain how teachers internalize and enact gender and cultural norms in their professional roles. For example, female teachers in Nigeria may adopt role-related beliefs and behaviors that align with cultural expectations of femininity, such as being nurturing, supportive, and submissive (Balogun, 2019).

On the other hand, male teachers may adhere to role-related expectations of masculinity, such as being authoritative, assertive, and dominant (Adesoji & Oni, 2016). These gendered role expectations can impact teachers' professional development as they may influence the types of training and opportunities teachers pursue or are encouraged to pursue. For instance, female teachers may be more likely to engage in professional development opportunities focused on teaching methodologies, while male teachers may be directed toward leadership development programs (Oni & Adesoji, 2019).To address these gendered role expectations within teachers' professional development, it is essential to promote a more inclusive and equitable approach that challenges societal norms and supports the empowerment and advancement of all teachers, regardless of their gender or cultural background. Role identity theory suggests that the greater the commitment to an identity, the higher that identity is placed within that individual's salience hierarchy. As a result of achieving high placement within the salience hierarchy, an individual relies on an identity more often than less important ones.

Women's Existential Narratives and Learning

Exploring women's existential narratives and their impact on learning is an important area of research. The literature here sheds light on women's experiences, narratives, and learning journeys and delves into the transformative potential of women's narratives in enhancing learning outcomes and experiences.

The root base for these women's narrative sprang from observations during continuous professional development exercises for Nigerian teachers post-Covid and insights from available literature. African/Nigerian women are encumbered with domestic and cultural issues. As home keepers, all the responsibilities of the family rest on their shoulders. In general parlance, a woman's education ends in the kitchen. Narratives from women encountered during professional development exercises showed that they were doing a lot

of balancing between delivering on their jobs and motherly roles, this could be quite taxing, they admitted. Although w some agree that these were disruptions, others saw it as normal. These divergent opinions from women could be linked to the women's stage in life/perception. While some are still at childbearing age, others have passed that stage, and few others, see the role as cultural, as corroborated. personal attributes, and traits, thus highlighting the link between social structure and the self. Suffix to say that the teaching profession in Nigeria is dominated by women and this is for the basic reason that it gives some ample time allowance for the women to close early to be able to attend to their home care duties.

In this study, we examined the stories of four married women who are teaching and as well struggling to balance the home front. They admitted that they had to do some critical and dicey balancing to be able to meet up with the dictates of their teaching and stride for professional development as a way of keeping abreast with topical issues in their profession through mandatory continuous professional development strides. In this study, we have used three women being a representative of the 3 major tribes (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) in Nigeria to illustrate the similarities in the women's struggles. So, we will be using pseudonyms to represent the women: Adeze, Auta (meaning lastborn), and Omolewa (meaning child is beauty).

Adaeze: - "as a Bachelor of Education holder with 10 years of teaching experience and children between the ages of 6- 2 years, it has not been easy. I have to juggle my teaching job with domestic care which most often causes burnout. The most challenging period for me is when I have to attend trainings extending beyond my 14:00 close time."

Auta: "…I cannot deny the fact that I have to sneak out of trainings just to be able to attend to my home front duties. As a matter of fact, there was these 3 days training I attended sometime in 2021, and as usual, I left before the training ended to enable me to attend some domestic demands. The next day I had to pay dearly for it as I could not follow up with the remaining training as I had missed some critical part…."

Omolewa: "… because I determined to finish the training module I was attending, my marriage almost crumbled, as I had to make a critical choice between continuing with my job and losing my marriage. Moreover, since then, however interesting, or critical the training was, I had to leave to attend to my domestic demands…"

A recurring theme runs through the women's narrative, the clash between their roles as nurturing mothers and that of being professional teachers. This espouses the critical balancing most nurturing mothers must do daily to fulfill cultural demands.

Gender and Culture

Culture, religion, and gender (CRG) are powerful weapons being used to expand and perpetrate all forms of inequity in Nigeria. These issues can be found as largely educational, and educators are vanguards to exploring some of these issues via the power of the spoken word. Inequality diminishes social justice, and all forms of exclusion thrive in Nigeria especially using the avenue of CRG. Gender and culture have been used as tools to disempower most of the population in Nigeria at formal and informal levels. This

has resulted in the limitation of opportunities, inequality, and marginalization of women and certain cultural groups within the country. The seemingly classified access to education for women amounts to exclusion. The crux of exclusion is denying the disadvantaged access to the power of education and fencing them out of participatory development. The implication of which are that development is less human-centered, participation is restricted, which fuel gender, and culture-based exclusion. Several reports have correlated the interconnectedness of economic and gender inequality and how they serve as self-reinforcers. The report exposes a myriad of discriminatory traditional and sociocultural practices that put the life of Nigerian women at a disadvantage compared to men. Some of the ways include low-paid and unskilled jobs, high level of illiteracy and so on, which makes women more likely to be poorer than men and keep being excluded from full participation in the country's educational, economic, social, and political life.

Furthermore, Harris (2012) revealed how women have been so relegated, that the men who face economic instability use women and children as coping mechanisms. Gender-based disaggregation has immensely relegated women to the background in variety of facets. The rising religious violence and banditry in the north put women and some religious groups at most risk. Women usually being construed as second-class citizens is more evident in northeast Nigeria, where schoolgirl's abductions by the Boko Haram have taken the center stage since 2013 until the present-day, more than 1,000 children have been abducted by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, notable among which are the 276 girls taken from their school in Chibok in 2014 and the Dapchi girls, of which a Christian girl, Leah Sharibu tarries abductors custody, (UNICEF, 2018). These abduction cases, amongst others, scare parents from sending their girl children to school therefore deepening the gender divide. Data reveals that matters arising from the COVID-19 pandemic affecting women the most, thus flaring the gender disparity.

A United Nations report on women revealed women as the most vulnerable species suffering health and social issues, disproportionate job losses, heightened gender-based violence like rape, battering, and extreme poverty (add citation). A saddening event resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic school-imposed closures dealt a hard blow on girls from Northern Nigerian girls who had to stop school with the likelihood of early marriages. Save the Children (2020), highlights the reality of the risks of girls' not returning to school after the pandemic with child marriage possibility. Marriage at young ages can have devastating and lifelong consequences, beyond the immediate loss of their education, it puts girls at increased risk of a life of abuse, ill health, and poverty (Global Development, 2020).

Srivastava (2016) ascribes education as an agent of socialization, while teachers and educational institutions are socializing agents; thus, education serves as an instrument of desired change. Suppose education is a major instrument for social change, then the role of teachers in this is enormous, especially in the areas of promoting respect for the cultural diversity of students and the community. Good teaching builds upon cultural and language backgrounds. To envisage the desired change in a society, it takes a village. If well empowered, Teachers are strong vehicles for helping to resolve some issues around gender and religious based exclusion. The voices of teachers can become a formidable force in advocating for stakeholder's support. There can be no meaningful socio-

economic and political development in any country without teachers. Teachers make a difference in the success of their learners because they hold a fundamental belief that all learners believe strongly in the authority of the teachers as their leaders, mentors, guides and even seen as demi-gods in Nigerian culture.

Teachers as professionals who help disseminate knowledge can use their power of spoken words to enlighten and re-orientate, after all," knowledge is power." Little wonder, that gender issues and societal norms can be barriers to educational opportunities especially in areas where girls are expected to be seen and not heard. The girls form majority of the population of the out of schoolchildren in the northern part of Nigeria where it is largely construed that "Boko Haram" prohibition of schooling especially for women, several attacks and abductions of girls is clear evidence. Obviously, parents and guardians by these actions are petrified from sending their female children to school thus contributing to bigotry, economic hardships, and regurgitation of the circle of ignorance.

Teachers are a potent numerical force in Nigeria, and the lack of opportunities for interaction with female teachers in northern Nigeria exposes the inequity. No doubt, most women are open to new ideas especially using the classroom as a platform for exploring the power of the spoken and the written word. Interventions from International Development partners have been doing a lot in repositioning teachers for more gender-responsive pedagogy. The programs enable the use of strategies, tools, and approaches to make learning more gender responsive and aware (British Council, 2021). This is in cognizant of the fact that teachers are those voices that can open discussions around how gender inequality limits the potential of both girls and boys to fully develop their capabilities.

TRCN and Teachers Professional Development

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is an Agency of the Federal Ministry of Education established by Decree 31 of 1993 now CAP T3 of 2004 to regulate and control the teaching profession in all aspects and ramifications and at all levels of the education system in Nigeria. TRCN, over the years, continues to partner with relevant stakeholders and International Development Partners to update of teachers' knowledge. Alimigbe and Avoseh (2021) observed that TRCN recognizing the potential inherent in partnership continues to collaborate with relevant International Development Partners like World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Foreign Cooperation Development Organization (FCDO) and British Council in attaining its mandates and other objectives. These interventions have often been engendered on needs and intervention basis with some of the partnership's activities included, digital literacy to teachers, accelerated continuing learning for teachers, stopping of corporal punishment, learn to read for primary school pupils, amongst others.

Professional development strides embarked on during post-COVID-19 period brought about many disclosures regarding the plight of Nigerian women teachers. The Strive for professional growth and relevance through Mandatory professional development by the Nigerian teachers gives a neat background for this study. Mandatory Continuous

Professional Development (MCPD) is a prerequisite for professional growth and a means of keeping abreast with innovations, transformations, and topical issues in any profession. Awodjii et al. (2020) in Alimigbe and Avoseh (2021, p. 35) uphold teachers' continuous professional development as a panacea for attainment of quality teaching. Wokocha (2013) endorses MCPD as having the potential to develop teachers' personal qualities and expand their knowledge and skills for better job execution. The reason why professionals regularly update their knowledge for relevance and ability to meet with the changing demands. It then becomes worrisome when women are meant to bear the brunt of non-completion of training courses/ workshops / seminars due to home concerns.

Past observations revealed that due to no cognizance of women's domestic roles, organizers of training usually elongate training hours, thereby making the women to make irrational balancing. This explains why some women leave training venues before they terminate to be able to attend to their care duties at home, and this obviously does not promote equity. This action portends dire consequences for the women's job delivery, delivery of their cultural roles and their mental health. Bolarin (2005) advocates for relevant measures to be put in place to remove barriers hindering women's access to higher education in Nigeria. She believes that this will help to increase their enrolment rate and participation and improve their academic achievement in higher education. This description explains why regardless of whatever status the woman attains in life; her primary duties remain aligned to her successes in the management of her home. The African woman is the homestead upon which rest all the responsibilities of house chores, and family upkeep. To this end, the woman is often jolted back to reality wherever or whatever she might be engaged in as soon as the reality and demands of the home beckons.

Culture and Gender as Assets

Culture and gender are important aspects to consider in teachers' professional development in Nigeria. Understanding and valuing the diversity of cultures and gender in the Nigerian context can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of teaching practices. To better help enrich public discourses on issues around gender using the teachers' potent numerical force and words a series of discourses and studies have been carried out surrounding gender disparities, but none has explored how teachers can be powerful voice in addressing the issue. Further research should focus on how culture, gender and religion have been used as powerful weapons to expand and perpetuate all forms of inequity in Nigeria and how the teachers can help address these issues.
In conclusion, relying on the African cultural values; the central role of the woman is to ensure stability, progress, and long-term development of the family, and, by extension, the nation. Women no doubt are natural educators, doctors, caretakers, farmers, entrepreneurs, confidence-builders, prime caretakers of t families, communities, and homesteads and living consciences. Education is a social institution through which society provides its members with important knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cultural norms for the development of self and the nation. To this end, this opportunity must be open for all baring all gender barriers to ensure no one is left behind. This aligns with the findings of Onoriode (2011) who submits that, women cannot be restricted from

participating in or benefiting from higher education because of their tasks and roles at home and in the larger society. Those who provide training should ensure that the dual roles of women are taken into cognizance while planning their training in such a way that extra time is not spent, and women are not doing some unnecessary balancing between learning and their roles at home. There is need for justice through equitizing educational opportunities for all concerned, men and women, children, and adults, whether able-bodied or a person with disabilities. The use of the power of a teacher's voice brings about the desired change through our speaking out and standing up for others or for acts of injustices in society.

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