

PARENTAL LITERACY LEVEL AS PREDICTOR OF GENDER
BEHAVIOURAL FLEXIBILITY AMONG PROFESSIONAL AND
NON- PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between literacy level and gender behavioural flexibility among selected women in Nigerian Universities. It also examined parental literacy level as a predictor of gender behavioural flexibility among the sample. The result did not show a significant flexibility. However, it was suggested that parents be encouraged to be more educated and informed so as to acquire the awareness and practice of providing quality education for their offspring.

Key words: *Predictor, gender, behavioural flexibility, professional, literacy*

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INTRODUCTION

Gender roles are important to any society. Where such roles inhibit achievement, it becomes a negative force. It is liberating to the extent that no person should be "pigeon-holed" on the basis of their gender. This is especially so in situations where achievements matter. Where a society is still stereotypical, flexibility is desirable for the maximization of human resources especially for females. A literate and enlightened background is believed to dispose one towards gender flexibility either as a male or female. For females, this could lead to a typical choice of career and field of specialization. O'Leary (1978) established that female executives tend to be gender flexible. She went further to espouse that as women move higher on the education ladder, the broader they become in outlook. This lends credence to the argument of Cassel and Walsh (1993) that where women have reached the higher echelons of organization, it has been because of gender management strategies. Aneshensel and Rosen (1980) had earlier opined that adolescents' expectations are antecedents to their attainment as adults while it is affirmed that parental influences, especially those from homes where attainment is valued may be subtle yet strong enough to affect almost

every decision taken by daughters. Given this background, it seems probable that women from literate homes would be less stereotypical in their behaviour and that this could relate significantly to one's choice of field or specialization.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Hope (1987) in her study on the Personal and Professional Characteristics and Androgynous Behaviours of High School Principals (Women) In Texas, reported that the typical female principal is forty-six years old, Caucasian and married. Women who get to the peak of their career are said to be androgynous using the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Hickey (1981) and O'Leary (1977) have also noted that the recurrent profile of professional women depict an individual who is middle-aged, non-conforming, self-reliant, flexible, self-directed and high in ego strength. Such a profile is said to be antithetical to the traditional feminine stereotype. Similarly, Graham (1970) and Helson (1971) found a significant number of career women to be either foreign born or the daughters of foreign-born parents.

Other researchers such as Ginzberg (1966), Graham (1970), Helson (1971) and Tangri (1972) have also found that non-traditional

females are usually daughters of working, professionally trained mothers and that the educational levels of both parents of such women were usually higher than average. Goldstein (1979) has also noted that male sponsors may bestow on their male protege greater responsibility, making them aware of the informal values so as to pave the way for their acceptance by others and provide feedback to support them. However, such support may not be available for women. A similar finding was reported previously by Spear (1978) to the effect that role modelling influences people in the area of occupational aspirations among others.

Lewis (1985) investigated Black female administrators in Academics: A Descriptive Analysis of their career Development and use of mentors. In this study, ten black females employed in administrative positions at both two year and four-year colleges and Universities in Washington, D. C. were interviewed. Lewis found that;

A strong achieving motivating acumen was found among the women. The women came from a nurturing home environment, which may have been literate. The women had a continuous

work history which was maintained. In spite of expanding life roles, there was no benefit of an all-purpose mentor who she could give primary credit for shaping and guiding her career.

Other studies by Almgvist and Argrist (1971), Baruch (1972) and Tangri (1972) have also supported the view that mothers can be role models. Ginzberg (1966) and Helson (1971) have also reported that Catholic women tend to be under-represented in male-dominated professions, whereas Jewish women were over-represented. Also, common in the findings is the fact that professional women tend to come from small families. All these show the importance of religious, ethnic and family affiliation to what a woman becomes.

However, varied studies abroad prove there was guidance, support and encouragement from a variety of persons who fulfilled many of the different functions of the traditional mentor. Also examined is career development of employed women enrolled in higher education. Additionally, the study investigated the influences of (i) the women's age, (ii) marital status, (iii) family composition, and (iv) educational level (which

the present study incorporates).

Three standard instruments were used namely: the Bem Sex inventory, Adult career Concerns Inventory and Vocational Identity.

The results indicated among other findings that, there is no significant difference between the career maturity status and the sex role classification groups (Androgynous, feminine etc). Women who fell under the undifferentiated and feminine sex role groups scored significantly lower in Vocational Identity than the androgynous sex-role group with education playing a significant role. Attempts to have a composite studies of women professionals in Nigeria showed a dearth of published work. Further, composite works from contexts that are culturally similar to Nigeria are not readily available. To further compound the problem, it appears that the production of such composite works on these issues no longer interest western researchers as they have moved to other aspects of gender research.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study made use of female lecturers in Nigerian Universities and women in adult education programmes in the Universities selected for the study. The women

were randomly selected because of the special class of women involved in the study. A sex-role orientation instrument (Mowaiye, 1995) was used to determine the level of flexibility of the women as regards their gender roles. A questionnaire requiring the respondents to indicate the level of education of their parents was also given. And where one of the parents had a primary school certificate, the respondent was considered as having a literate background. Thus, it was found that most of the women and respondents' parents had not achieved a higher educational level. In fact, some of the women in adult education programmes claimed that they had to marry early and come back to school later because they lacked the literate background to support their continued education after secondary school or because they lacked the financial support which again can be linked to their low literate backgrounds.

For the purpose of data analysis, the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was carried out on the results and this was complemented with the Duncan Multiple Range test.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question that guided the study and the subsequent hypothesis generated from the

question are as follows:

Is there any difference in the sex-role orientation of females whose parents are literate as compared with those whose parents are non-literate?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the sex-role orientation of females whose parents are literate as compared with those whose parents are non-literate.

For the testing of the hypothesis, the ANOVA test was used. From the tests, it was observed that the relationship between sex-role orientation and parental level of education is not significant. The hypothesis is therefore accepted based on the result. Also, it was noticed that the relationship between sex-role orientation and parental level of education is not significant $F(1/117) = 0.14 > 0.7130$, for the lecturers' group.

As revealed from the results, there is no significant relationship between the sex-role orientation of either the lecturers or students and their parental level of education.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One factor responsible for the lack of relationship could be the fact

that most of the respondent's parents never went beyond the primary school level. This was critical more so among the students. Among the lecturers, 68.3% had literate parents while 31.7% did not. This was in spite of the fact that the primary school certificate was considered literate for the purpose of the study. For the students, only 27.1% of their parents were literate, while 72.9% were not. This could explain why most of the students were more feminine in behaviour than being gender flexible, although this trend was not as critical for the lecturers. One revealing factor in the study is that the literacy level among Nigerians is still low and that efforts need be geared toward parental education to reduce the problem of low literacy levels in the country.

When parents are highly educated, they would appreciate quality education for their female children and would therefore train them to be confident and self-assured so that gender stereotype would then crumble in society gradually. It is believed this would help the nation in her developmental processes.

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NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND ITS PLACE IN LANGUAGE TEACHER
EDUCATION RESEARCHHerath S¹

ABSTRACT

Stories are the closest we can come to people's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Research in teacher education argues that teachers' knowledge is largely structured through stories and that the story is the most authentic way to understand teaching from the teachers' point of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, the story has now emerged as an accepted means of knowing what teachers know, how they know, what they believe, and how these beliefs transform into practice (Golombek & Johnson, 2004). In teacher education, the use of narrative inquiry has emerged as a predominant means of getting at what teachers know, what they do with what they know and the sociocultural contexts within which they teach and learn to teach (Golombek & Johnson, 2004). This paper builds on this claim and discusses the use of narrative inquiry in second language teacher education (SLTE) research. It first presents the theoretical underpinnings of narrative inquiry and how it lends itself to research on SLTE followed by a discussion on strengths and weaknesses of the use of narrative inquiry in SLTE. This would be illustrated with the use of two studies which use narrative inquiry as a method and phenomenon to explore teacher learning. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of the use of narrative inquiry in SLTE research.

Key words: *Narrative inquiry, second language teacher education, teacher learning, research method, phenomenon*

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, narrative inquiry has gained increasing visibility in social sciences (Squire, et. al., 2008). Some name this evolution “the narrative revolution” (Lieblich, et. al., 1998) and others like Bruner (1990) and Sarbin (1986) see this as the demise of the positivist paradigm in social science research. This paper discusses the impact and implications of narrative inquiry on one major aspect of second language education (SLE): second language teacher education (SLTE). This paper opens with a discussion on what narratives and narrative inquiry is. This is followed by a discussion of the strengths and limitations of narrative inquiry in second language teacher education (SLTE) research. The paper then reviews two studies which use narrative inquiry as a method and a phenomenon to explore teacher learning. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the potential implications of the use of narrative inquiry in second language teacher education research.

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?

In simple terms, narratives tell stories (Bruner, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Carter (1993) who, like many educational

researchers use story synonymous to narrative, states that a story consists of “events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance” (p. 6). Narrative research therefore “refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative material” (Lieblich et. al., 1998, p. 2) to study human experiences. This narrative material can be collected through oral history, life history annals, personal and family artefacts, research interviews, journals autobiographical writings, field observations and conversations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006).

Narrative inquiry can be both a phenomenon and a method of inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly distinguish the two by calling them “story” and “narrative” respectively (1994). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also frame narrative inquiry within a three dimensional space that consists of interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present and future) and situation (place). They see the relationship between the researcher, the participants and narrative and its interpretation as crucial in narrative inquiry.

Polkinghorne (1988) distinguishes between ‘descriptive’ and ‘explanatory’ narrative. Descriptive narrative aims to “render the narrative accounts already in place

which are used by individuals or groups as their means for ordering and making temporal events meaningful” and explanatory narrative aims to “construct a narrative account explaining ‘why’ a situation or event involving actions has happened” (p. 161). Lieblich, et. al. (1998) discuss the significance of voice in narrative research. They highlight the importance of dialogic listening (Bakhtin, 1981) to three voices: the voice of the narrator; the theoretical framework; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation. This is an interactive process through which the researcher/listener becomes sensitive to its narrator’s voice and meanings.

WHY USE NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION (SLTE)?

The epistemological underpinning of narrative inquiry rests on the assumption that “human beings make sense of random experiences by the imposition of story structures” (Bell, 2002, p. 207). This outlook of narrative aligns itself well with the interpretivist paradigm in educational research. During the 1990s research on professional learning processes language teacher were engaged in (for example Freeman & Richards, 1996; Woods, 1996) began to

uncover the “complexities of teachers’ mental lives” (Freeman, 2002). Particularly, research in second language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006; Freeman, 1996, 2002; Johnson & Golombek, 2002a; Woods, 1996), teachers’ personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986, 1992; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1992, 1995, 2000; Golombek, 1998, 2009; Tsang, 2004), practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983) and teachers’ maxims (Richards, 1998) gave deeper insights into the complexities of who teachers are, how they learn to teach, their beliefs, what they know, and how they carry out their work. As such, narrative inquiry with its emphasis in experience and its connectivity to one’s past, present and the future is deemed appropriate for understanding the inner workings of teachers.

Moreover, recent emphasis on research in reflective teaching practice (Lockhart & Richards, 1994; Schon, 1983; 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), action research (Edge, 2001; Wallace, 1998) and teacher research movements (Burns, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Freeman, 1998) has given legitimacy and strengthened the focus on voices of teachers. Narrative inquiry lends itself well into second language teacher

education, by looking at ways in which teachers' narratives shape and inform their teaching and learning.

STRENGTHS OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The use of narrative inquiry provides rich data that cannot be gathered from other forms of data collection such as questionnaires, experiments, or observations. Although the sample size of narrative studies is much smaller than the sample sizes employed in traditional research, the quantity of data gathered in life stories is larger. Moreover, the uniqueness of each narrative manifests rich data. Furthermore, this data can be analysed in myriad directions, such as contents, structure, style of speech, affective characteristics, motives, attitudes and beliefs of the narrator, or his or her cognitive level (Lieblich, et. al., 1998).

Bruner (1990, 1996) argues that narrative knowledge is one of the two human modes of cognition. Unlike scientific knowledge, narrative knowledge accommodates ambiguity and dilemma which is central to human experience. Furthermore, Polkinghorne (1988) claims that narrative is the "primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 1). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) reiterate that

"stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience" (p. 415). Narratives are a process through which human beings come to play an active role in constructing their own lives (Mead, 1977, cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2002b). Therefore, narratives help people to choose seemingly unconnected events and thus shape the 'plot' of their lives through time (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Another strength of narrative inquiry is that it provides an emic, or an insider perspective on the phenomenon studied. In narrative inquiry, the "participants construct stories that support their interpretations of themselves" (Bell, 2002, p. 209). Number of educational scholars whose focus is on teacher knowledge have made narrative a central element in their research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000; Doyle, 1997; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). An emic perspective gives insights into how teachers carry out their work. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) use teachers' life histories to understand the development of "professional knowledge landscapes". Canagarajah (1996) argues that narrative forms of inquiry function in opposition to elite forms of scholarly discourses and offer an opportunity for marginalized groups to make their voices heard and also to participate

in knowledge construction. Feuerwerker (1997) uses narrative to create a space for heritage language teachers in Toronto, so that the voices of these marginalized teachers can be heard in the mainstream educational context. Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) uses narratives to study the loss of self and home of immigrant teachers in Israel.

Drawing on her own research on an attempt to develop Chinese literacy, Bell (1997) states that narrative allows the researchers to understand experiences and get information that people do not consciously know themselves. She illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one's understandings of people and events change over time.

LIMITATIONS OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

One of the biggest drawbacks of doing narrative inquiry is the time commitment required for data collection. This makes it unsuitable for work with large numbers of participants. It also requires close collaboration with the participant and the understanding that the narrative and its subsequent analysis illuminates the researcher as well as the participant. Moreover, when researchers place personal stories into a larger narrative they are

imposing meaning on their participant's experiences (Bell, 2002). However, studies like the one by Barkhuizen and Wette, (2008) show that narratives can be used with a larger number of participants. In their study of teacher experiences in a teacher education program for English teachers in China, they use narrative frames to collect data from 200 participants. As the two researchers do not have much experience in the Chinese education system and were in the country for a very limited time, the narrative frames allow them to capture data in limited circumstances.

This very subjective nature of narrative inquiry raises questions about an assessment criteria for narrative research (Carter, 1993; Josselson, 1996; Lieblich et al., 1998). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) address this as follows:

Narrative researchers are concerned with the representation of experiences, causality, temporality, and the difference between the experience of time and the telling of time, narrative form, and integrity of the whole in a research document, the invitational quality of a research text, its authenticity, adequacy

and plausibility. Currently in narrative inquiry, it is important for each researcher to set forth the criteria that govern the study and by which it may be judged. It is also the case that others may quite legitimately adopt other criteria in support of, or in criticism of, the work (p. 139)

Carter (1993), in a discussion about the use of narrative in teacher education and how narrative gives voice to teachers, identifies two essential flaws in using teachers' voices as research data. First, the strong emphasis on a teacher's personal meaning could imply that the story might be of significance to that particular teacher. Secondly, it raises questions of authenticity that is unwarranted. Teachers who do not have access to truth claims to tell the whole story. The reliance on the voice of the narrator and their constructions of their own practices raises concerns about veracity and fallibility. Phillips (1997) states that we do not know of, or are conscious of, or are honest of our own actions and therefore an outsider or an etic perspective could be more reliable than a first person narrative. In relation to concerns about truth in narratives Polkinghorne (1988) states that cornerstones of

traditional research such as validity, reliability and significance need to be interpreted differently in narrative research.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION (SLTE) RESEARCH

Narrative has been placed center stage in teacher education as both a method and as an object of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Elbaz, 1983; Witherall & Noddongs, 1991). Narrative inquiry has touched almost every aspect of teacher education. Some of these include; understanding teacher learning (Beatie et. al., 2007; Craig, 2009; Esbenschade, 2002; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Hernden, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Sawyer, 2002), professional development of teachers (Boshall, 2002; Craig, 2010; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Kitchen, 2010; Mann, 2002; Tasker, et. al., 2010); teachers' life stories (Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connely, 1995); how teachers develop a teaching self (Kelchtermans, 1993); teacher identity (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Feuerverger, 1997); perceptions about instructional practices (Johnson, 1994); teacher experiences in particular contexts they teach

(Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008); teachers' visions of schools (Marble, 1997); and career development of teacher educators (Acker, 1997). Narrative inquiry has also been used as a pedagogical tool (Coulter, 2007; Dietz & Davis, 2009). The following section discusses the use of narrative as a method and a phenomenon in teacher learning and development.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN LANGUAGE TEACHER LEARNING

Empirical studies that explore teacher learning use narrative inquiry both as a method and as a phenomenon to get rich emic perspectives to the processes involved in teacher learning. In Hernden's (2002) self-authored narrative she discusses how she taught herself to let her students take ownership of their learning. Her narrative inquiry is an example of Polkinghorne's (1988) *narrative in explanation*. It is retrospectively interpretive and it reconstructs past events in the process of retelling. This is a process through which the narrator actively attempts to bring meaning to their experiences.

Hernden's narrative traces her own development as she attempted to overcome the disconnect she felt between her own philosophy and

her practice. She discusses the processes she went through as she tried to get her culturally and linguistically diverse group of students to take responsibility of their own learning while getting herself to be less dominating in the class. To address this problem she mediates her concerns with a colleague of hers and together they reconstruct their curriculum. Drawing on from theoretical constructs they introduce three approaches to reading that could "shift the balance" in the classroom: reading workshop, full class short-story unit and book groups. This new approach also requires both the teacher as well as the students to transform and internalize to the new modes of engagement. Hernden recounts how she initially wanted to "jump in and 'correct' students' initial misinterpretations" (p. 41) and the students who were not used to having so much autonomy "tended at first to look to me for answers when they disagreed with each other" (p. 41). However, they gradually internalized the new modes of engagement and their new roles in the teaching learning process. At the end of the narrative, Herndon discusses her own transformation and growth as a teacher. She learned to "step into the sidelines, allowing my students and their learning to take center stage" (p. 48).

This self-authored narrative gives insights into teachers' experiences. It gives teachers a platform to articulate and clarify the tensions in their teaching practices. This teacher-authored narrative is a systematic representation of a self-exploration conducted by a teacher through her own will to improve her own teaching practices. On one hand it reveals the complexities involved in teaching a group of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, on the other it highlights how teachers make sense of their work and change themselves and their teaching practices.

In Sawyer's (2002) ten year longitudinal study of the situated nature of teacher learning, narrative inquiry is used as a method of exploration (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). He uses narrative inquiry to examine how they situated their learning over a ten year time. In keeping with the narrative traditions his study includes two teachers. Lonnie and Susan's narratives trace how the teachers made sense of their work and became more mature teachers over the decade the study was conducted. In the first three years of Lonnie's teaching career, she uses a very independent teaching style and had very high expectations for her students, but soon realized that there was a gap between her expectations and the

class reality. This compels her to slow down her pace. In the next three years she tries to get her students more involved in the curriculum and she also gets involved in work with other teachers in the district level. In the final three years of the study, she did activities to develop and promote students' self-confidence. She also starts collaborating with other teachers on various activities. Susan, who starts teaching at the age of 22 starts by teaching in a fairly traditional and prescribed way. From years 2-5 she approached her classes in an interactive, problem solving way with real life projects. In the last three years of the study she team teaches an interdisciplinary course. Features such as student-directed projects were central elements of her teaching. And through collaborative efforts with her co-teacher they make students critical thinkers.

The findings of this study show how teachers learn and grow over a decade long period. Lonnie's and Susan's narratives also show what factors contribute to teacher learning and development in the long run. Narratives, like in Hernden's show that it is the teachers' own questions about teaching and the need to address them and find solutions that promoted their learning. These studies show the importance of

teacher agency in teacher development. Secondly, these studies highlight the importance of collaboration in the process of self-development. In both studies, it is collaboration with peers that support their learning. These collaborative efforts work because the teachers initiated them and therefore were committed to seeing them through. This study also focuses on the need to balance between agency and collegiality. Another important finding is the importance of context to teacher learning and professional development. For all the participants, the most powerful contexts for professional learning was within their own schools and communities of teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

As the studies discussed above illustrate, narrative inquiry can be used both as a useful method and as a phenomenon in second language teacher education. It gives rich detailed insights into teacher learning and development. Firstly, narrative inquiry as a method can be used to understand the cognitive and psychological processes involved in teacher learning and development. As Johnson (2007) states, “each narrative highlights the highly individualized and recursive

processes involved in teacher development” (p. 187). It allows teachers and teacher educators to understand the complexities of teacher development, make them see how the processes of teacher development looks like and the resources both physical and social that teachers use to overcome the various problems they encounter. It is important for teacher educators to include dimensions of teacher learning and development, that are revealed through narrative research into the contents of teacher education programs.

Narratives can also be used by individual teachers as a “semiotic tool” (Johnson, 2007) to facilitate and document teacher development. Both the studies discussed above use narrative to document teacher development over time and the various strategies they use to transform their pedagogical practices. It is a space where teachers can identify contradictions in their teaching and attempt to address these problems. For Hernden it is the narrative that creates a meditational space to externalize her concerns and organize her thoughts. This process of externalizing allows her to identify gaps and contradictions in her own teaching. Such findings have implications for teacher education. Teacher educators can use narratives to develop unique paths

to teacher development. They can also introduce narratives as a tool for self-reflection so teacher candidates can use it in their individual capacities to promote their own learning.

Although the above discussion focused more on teacher learning and development in second language teacher education, narrative inquiry is widely used in other aspects of second language teacher education as well. Narrative inquiry is a valuable tool that teacher educators could use to make teacher education correspond more with who teacher candidates are. The findings of narrative research can be used to bring about curricular transformations that recognize and nourish teachers' own unique paths of professional development.

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