

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN TEACHER CANDIDATES' USE OF STRATEGIES TO REDUCE DISSONANCE IN SUPERVISORS' FEEDBACK

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Abstract: *Teacher candidates often experience cognitive dissonance due to conflicting feedback from university-assigned supervisors during teaching practice. Previous studies have examined strategies for reducing such dissonance and the factors influencing their use, often assuming the unidimensionality of these strategies rather than considering how specific factors affect each one. This study identifies four distinct dissonance reduction strategies: minimal intervention, recourse to supervisor, significant others, and self-directed learning. Given the influence of gender on decision-making, including teaching-related decisions, this study explores its impact on the use of these strategies among pre-service teachers. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from 442 pre-service teachers at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, through the Dissonance in Supervisors' Feedback Reduction Strategies Use Questionnaire (DSFR-Q). The findings indicate that gender is not a statistically significant factor in the choice of dissonance reduction strategies. However, it is suggested that female pre-service teachers may be more inclined to use minimal intervention, significant others, and self-directed learning, whereas their male counterparts may prefer seeking recourse to supervisors. These findings are discussed in relation to the ethnographic realities of teacher education in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *cognitive dissonance; dissonance reduction strategies; gender; teacher candidates and teaching practice.*

Introduction

Teacher education refers to the programme instituted for the purpose of ensuring that pre-service and in-service teachers acquire relevant skills

and competencies needed for them to teach and facilitate learning among students. Teacher education for pre-service teachers is referred to as initial teacher education (ITE) while that for in-service teachers is called Continuing Professional Education (CPE). One essential component of teacher education is the teaching practice which allows students being trained for the teaching profession, otherwise referred to as pre-service teachers, to be exposed to practice teaching in a real school setting for single or combined duration of six weeks to one session. The merits of such practice include helping pre-service teachers translate theory to practice, acquire necessary competencies for teaching and management of the classroom and create room for evaluating the teacher education programme (Adeleke, 2008). Some of the challenges that threaten the continuous undertaking of teaching practice yet include lack of funds; lack of synergy between teacher training institution's calendar and that of cooperating schools; hostility of some schools to pre-service teachers; waning attitude and apathy of teacher education entrants to teaching and teaching profession; increasing cost of living including transportation and feeding which influences trainees absenteeism in schools during teaching practice; security concerns for pre-service teachers and supervisors among others. It is pertinent for teacher educators to seek ways of improving teaching practice component through vigorous teacher education research that focus on deficit teaching skills such as pedagogical content knowledge (Tyas, Wilujeng, Rosana, & Jumadi, 2025), the infusion of emerging innovations such as national and international virtual exchanges and field trips and continuing engagement with all concerned stakeholders. Yet, one understudied subtle issue with far reaching consequence is the cognitive dissonance emanating from feedback from supervisors with significant variations from what pre-service teachers were taught in pedagogy and teaching methodology classes and how these pre-service teachers respond to same with a view to resolving them.

Cognitive dissonance which has been credited to the scholarly work of Leon Festinger (1957) arises when individuals receive stimuli and or information that are contradictory to what they have hitherto received. Such stimuli and or information set in place an imbalance in the cognitive schemata of the receiver that need to be resolved in order to maintain balance needed for optimal human functioning. Cognitive dissonance in the case of pre-service teachers could arise when supervisors give feedback that are not in tandem with what these pre-service teachers have previously learnt in teaching methods classes. For example, cognitive dissonance might arise when a pre-service teacher who has been taught to reinforce students' behaviour was given

a feedback that s/he should use reinforcement sparingly and that clapping of hands ceases to be a motivator for students at the onset of adolescence.

Some of the realities of teacher education in Nigeria include that male and females do not have equal access to teacher education; there is disparity in terms of professional growth and; there are no school policies discriminating against gender in teacher education (Patrick, 2010). Akinbi and Akinbi (2015) added that the education of the girl child has not made appreciable and rapid progress as that of boys on account of the universal devaluation of women in Africa. Hence, there are substantive statistical evidences on the disparities between male and female enrollment across different levels of education including teacher education. The disparities according to Akinbi and Akinbi (2015) could be adduced to female sex's social role that has been traditionally linked to the home while there is the well grounded assumption that they can find happiness and fulfillment only as mothers and wives (Akinbi & Akinbi, 2015).

On the other hand, it is often believed that teaching is a job for females and they could be found in that profession than their male counterparts. Evidences, for instance as could be obtained from Nigeria in Tables 1 and 2, however reflect that this latter assertion does not hold true for all school levels except for public pre-primary schooling. In lieu of the above, there has been persistent calls for gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming means the "elimination of subtle practices, the misconceptions and myths, so that girls can dream to be whatever they want to be like anybody else" (Maroba Miriam in International Institute for Educational Planning, 2022). It means that men and women are both fairly considered and represented in decisions.

Asides the four issues jointly identified by Patrick (2010) and Akinbi and Akinbi (2015); sexual harassment is a reality of higher (teacher) education in Nigeria and other African countries. The latter statement does not seek to simply give it away as an African malaise as it has recorded high incidence rate in United Kingdom and United States of America too (Joseph *et al*, 2023). The recent video released by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (2020) and such other reports (Punch, 2019; Tyessi, 2022; African Feminist Initiative, n.d.; Mbonyinshuti, 2022) on sex for grades syndrome in higher education institutions in Africa are weighty-evidence that could not easily be discarded with the margin of committal tending towards male lecturers than female lecturers. Researchers including Thompson, *et al* (2024), Etta, Agbor & Ekpo (2024), Joseph, *et al* (2023), Olugbenga-Bello *et al* (2023), Muoghalu and Olaoye (2016), Erinosh, Femi-Oyewo and Oduwole (2018) and, Ladebo (2003) have established empirical evidence of the

prevalence and outcomes of sexual harassment in Nigeria's higher institutions. Sexual harassment has far reaching (psychological) consequences on female students than their male counterparts including a form of 'job withdrawal' behaviour involving changing of their major subject choices, avoiding a threatening situation or alteration of career plans (Schneider, *et al* in Ladebo, 2003). Again, such consequences could include distrust in significant others who are meant to provide care and support for them. In fact, they may develop phobia of seeking crucial help from male supervisors (and even female supervisors) when dissonances arise in the feedback given to them during supervisor-trainee conference during teaching practice supervision. The exposition on risk of sexual harassment becomes important as it is one of the envisaged reasons for teacher candidates deflection to dissonance reduction strategies in relation to gender.

The subject of teacher candidates' use of strategies to reduce dissonance in supervisors' feedback has been previously studied by the researcher and his associates: Oyetoro, Eyebiokin & Adesina (2020) and Oyetoro, Omoteso & Adeleke (2019). The findings of Oyetoro *et al* (2020) indicated that pre-service teachers have sophisticated epistemic beliefs; utilise the deep learning approach than the surface approach and; that both learning approaches with the epistemic beliefs of simple knowledge, omniscient authority and certain knowledge contributed positively to their use of strategies to reduce dissonance in supervisors' feedback. Oyetoro *et al* (2019), however reported that there is no significant influence of pre-service teachers' sex on their use of strategies to reduce dissonance in supervisors feedback. An evaluation of the technique utilised in these primal studies revealed the pooling of responses on the strategies as against consideration of each as a distinct strategy. More so, further exploration and classification revealed that the 14 items could be classified into four distinct strategy viz.: minimal intervention, recourse to supervisor, significant others, and self-directed learning.

Strategies employed by pre-service teachers in the resolution of dissonance arising from supervisor feedback

Preliminary investigations via exploratory data gathering and informal talks with pre-service teachers by the researcher and his associates revealed that pre-service teachers use a range of strategies to tackle in order to reduce dissonance in supervisor feedback when they occur. These strategies were as outlined in the Dissonance in Supervisors' Feedback Reduction Strategies Use Questionnaire (DSFR-Q)(Oyetoro *et al*, 2019). The items were reported to be unidimensional with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.83 (Oyetoro *et al*, 2019, 2020). Further

reflections on the strategies however reveal four distinct strategies viz.: minimal intervention, recourse to supervisor, significant others and, self-directed learning.

Minimal intervention: This strategy entails least resistance to the emanating dissonance but immediate acceptance of same by the pre-service teacher. This may be adduced to various reasons ranging from the acceptance of the authority of the supervisor in the subject matter cum pedagogy, likability of the personae of the supervisor including the tone of feedback (a form of personae worship), fear of intimidation and undue exposure leading to sexual harassment, etc.

Recourse to supervisor: This strategy involves deliberate attempt on the part of the pre-service teacher to meet the supervisor for further clarifications on the resultant area of disagreement(s). The pre-service teacher discusses what he or she believes is the current practice as taught in pedagogy courses or as read in the literature.

Significant others: This strategy could either be used in conjunction with “Recourse to supervisor” most especially where the pre-service teacher could not agree with the supervisor or it could be used singularly for reasons earlier stated for minimal intervention.

Self-directed learning: Using this strategy, pre-service teachers seek to personally engage themselves in the resolution of cognitive dissonance arising from supervisor feedback using a combination of self-curated techniques such as reading relevant texts and journals and; exploration of different personal ways of thinking and self-reflection in order to inwardly resolve the disagreement.

The above classification amends with prior established theories of More Significant Others (Andersen, Chen & Miranda, 2002; Hatteberg, 2020), More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) by Lev Vygotsky (McLeod, 2024; Abtahi, Graven & Lerman, 2017), Self-Directed Learning which is attributable to the works of Cyril Houle, Allen Tough, Malcolm Knowles, Eduard Lindeman, John Dewey, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexander Neill and Lev Vygotsky among others (Loeng, 2020). Adequate understanding of the pattern of responses to each strategy and to the sub-scales of strategies used provides scaffolds for vital decision making for instruction and improving pre-service teachers professional identities. The choice of strategies in order to reduce dissonant supervisor feedback may depend on contexts including cultural contexts and individual prejudice of the pre-service teacher. For instance, cultural context of *respect for elders* (Sesanti, 2010; Korn, 2023) which is deeply ingrained in the African cultural system impact communication patterns (Wójtowicz, 2021) that prevent trainees from querying the opinions and feedback of supervisors that are incongruent with the prior established knowledge of the students in

the content and pedagogy of the subject. Provocations have been made against the blind adherence to this culture on the premise that they are falsified version of African culture by postcolonial power-hungry dictators who benefit from it and seek ways to perpetuate their stay in power (Sesanti, 2010). In fact Idang (2015) called for a holistic reassessment of African values and culture in order to re-establish and sustain their relevance for the validation of the authentic African identity. Individual prejudice of the possibility of sexual harassment could also inhibit a student teacher from seeking a formal up-close discussion with the supervisor who gave an incongruent feedback.

One limitation of this research is the non-inclusion of direct questions that would elicit the feedback needed on risk of sexual harassment and the culture of respect in the instruments. This is because these could jeopardize the research as respondents might not respond to it due to the culture of silence on these issues.

This study thus determined gender differences on each of the strategies (items) and each of the four distinct broad-based pre-service teacher response to dissonance in supervisor feedback.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. determine the influence of gender on each of the item-by-item strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback and;
2. assess gender differences on sub-scales of identified types of strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback viz.: minimal intervention, recourse to supervisors, significant others and self-directed learning.

Table 1: National Teacher Information 2016/2017 Session

Source:<https://ubec.gov.ng/data/>

Federal Ministry of Education (2019)

NA-Not Available (Not easily deducible from the information available)

Level of Schooling	All Teachers				Public Qualify Teachers				
	M	F	MF	%F	M	F	MF	% qualified	% Female
Public	388	874	126	69.	247	603	851	67.36	70.8

Pre-Primary School Teachers	98	94	392	22	86	57	43		9
Public Primary School Teachers	247 472	232 640	472 077	49. 28	162 380	183 421	345 801	73.25	53.0 4
Public Junior Secondary School Teachers	109 410	903 62	199 772	45. 23	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Private Junior Secondary School Teachers	923 17	835 83	175 900	47. 52	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Private & Public Junior Secondary Schools	201 727	173 945	375 672	46. 30	998 88	855 85	185 473	49.37	46.1 4
Public Senior Secondary Schools	100 365	742 55	174 620	42. 52	664 63	485 46	115 009	65.86	42.2 1
Private and	318 582	274 033	592 615	46. 24	198 052	166 562	364 614	NA	NA

Public Senior Secondary Schools									
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Table 2: Summary of Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) registered members from 2015-2018

Gender/Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Primary				
Male	386896	464275	557133	569626
Female	508574	610289	732347	741362
Total	895470	1074564	1289480	1310988
Secondary				
Male	197757	217538	238293	251077
Female	201532	221687	243857	255885
Total	399289	439225	483150	506962
Tertiary				
Male	12438	12369	12491	13261
Female	7560	7737	7714	8091
Total	19998	20106	20205	21352

Source: Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (2019). Statistical Digest of teachers in Nigeria 2015-2018

Methods

Design

This study utilized the descriptive research design. This design was considered appropriate for this study as it seeks to study and describe how gender influences pre-service teachers' use of strategies to counteract dissonant supervisors' feedback without manipulating any variable.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population comprised 1,991 pre-service teachers in their third and fourth year of the four-year teacher training programme of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria between 2014/2015 and 2016/2017 academic sessions. The sample consisted of 442 pre-service teachers who were selected using the disproportionate simple random sampling technique from three Departments viz.: Arts and Social Science Education, Science and Technology Education and Physical and Health Education. The profile of the selected samples is as follows: male-196, female- 246; 274 were in their third year while 168 were in

their fourth year; age range is between 17-38 years with a mean age 23.35 years and a standard deviation of 3.16 years.

Instrument

One research instrument titled “Dissonance in Supervisors’ Feedback Reduction Strategies Use Questionnaire” (DSFR-Q) was adopted for use in this study. The instrument which had earlier been used by Oyetoro, Adeleke and Omotoso (2019) and Oyetoro, Adesina and Eyebiokin (2020) measures how pre-service teachers’ respond to dissonant supervisor feedback when they occur during their mandatory two-block teaching practice exercise. The instrument contains 14 items which were categorized into four overarching strategies viz: minimal intervention (3 items), recourse to supervisors (3 items), significant others (4 items) and self-directed learning (4 items). The items of the instrument have been reported to have good item-by-item reliability indices with overall Cronbach alpha values of .85 (Oyetoro, et al., 2019, 2020). For the present study, an overall Cronbach alpha value of .83 was obtained. Cronbach alpha values of .56, .64, .59 and .79 were also established for the minimal intervention, recourse to supervisor, significant others and self-directed learning sub-scales respectively. Three of the reliability values for the sub-scales though controversial were considered appropriate for the present study.

Procedure

The instrument was administered on the pre-service teachers after their consent was sought and the purpose of the study has been explained to them. The filled instrument was collected and collated for data analysis based on the questions asked in the study. The data analysis was done using chi-square and independent *t*-test with *V* Cramers’ and Cohen *d*’s statistics respectively to test the strength of the gendered differences observed.

Results

Research Objective One

Determine the influence of gender on each of the item-by-item strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors’ feedback

In order to determine the influence of gender on each of the item-by-item strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors’ feedback, the responses from the pre-service teachers were correlated with their gender. The responses obtained are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Item-by-item analyses of gender differences in the use of strategies to counteract dissonance in supervisors’ feedback

N=442					
S/N	Strategies to counteract dissonance	χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>V</i>	Remarks [†]

in supervisors' feedback				
Minimal Intervention				
1	accept the position of the supervisor as the current state of events in the field of teaching. (5) ^β	2.14	.83	.07 NS
2	accept the position of the supervisor without dispute if he/she is from one of the teacher education departments and not from other departments (12)	13.39	.02	.17 S
3	accommodate the new knowledge if it is offered within a constructive feedback framework. (14)	7.14	.21	.13 NS
Recourse to Supervisor				
4	ask the supervisor for further clarification on the perceived area of conflict. (3)	11.30	.05	.16 NS
5	engage the supervisor, in company of other students, in a discussion to clarify the expressed divergent opinion. (7)	1.93	.86	.066 NS
6	assimilate the new knowledge if it is backed up with reasonable explanation by the supervisor. (13)	10.23	.07	.15 NS
Significant Others				
7	discuss the area of conflict with an expert in the field of teacher education. (4)	5.72	.34	.11 NS
8	seek the opinion of senior members of the faculty on the area of conflict. (10)	4.37	.50	.099 NS
9	seek the opinion of junior members of the faculty on the area of conflict. (11)	1.86	.90	.065 NS
Self-directed Learning				
1	try to see how different facts and ideas fit together. (1)	6.94	.23	.13 NS
1	discuss the area of conflict with other students. (2)	4.07	.54	.096 NS
1	work harder as a result of the conflicting feedback (6)	4.22	.52	.098 NS
1	read articles or books on the areas of the disagreement. (8)	6.95	.22	.13 NS
1	explore different ways of thinking on the area of disagreement. (9)	2.34	.88	.06 NS

†NS=Not Significant, N=Significant

β = The numbers in brackets represents the positions of the items in the adopted instrument

Results from Table 3 above shows that there is no significant influence of gender on the choice of strategies used by pre-service teachers in the resolution and or reduction of cognitive dissonance arising from incongruent supervisor feedback. The only strategy where significant difference was observed- *accept the position of the supervisor without dispute if he/she is from one of the teacher education departments and not from other departments* with a χ^2 value of 13.39 and $p=0.02$ revealed with further analysis a weak χ^2 strength of 0.17 via V Cramers' statistics. It could therefore be said that the adoption of these strategies by both male and female would-be teachers are similar.

Research Objective Two

Assess gender differences on sub-scales of identified types of strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback

In order to determine the assess gender differences in the use of strategies used to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback, the pooled responses from the pre-service teachers in each of the distinct four strategies were compared along the lines of two gender, male and female. The responses obtained are as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: t-test analysis of gender differences in the use of strategies to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback

Strategies to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback (in variables)	Gender	N	Mean	sd	df	t	p	d
Minimal Intervention	Male	196	8.85	3.04	440.00	-	0.26	0.11
	Female	246	9.19	3.17				
Recourse to Supervisors	Male	196	9.19	2.97	437.05	.24	0.81	0.023
	Female	246	9.12	3.43				
Significant Others	Male	196	8.61	2.82	438.75	-.84	0.40	0.081
	Female	246	8.86	3.36				
Self-directed Learning	Male	196	14.84	4.92	440.00	-.33	0.74	0.032
	Female	246	15.00	5.38				

Table 4 depicts a classification of the strategies into four distinct categories of: Minimal Intervention, Recourse to supervisors, Recourse Significant Others and Self-directed Learning. Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference between the use of the strategies based on this categorization by male and female pre-service teachers (-

$1.12 \leq t \leq .24$). The results also show the effect sizes of the t-values measured by Cohen's d statistics are small ($0.023 \leq d \leq .11$). The results however show that female pre-service teachers use the minimal intervention, recourse to significant others and self-directed learning strategies more than their male counterparts with mean gains of 0.34, 0.25 and, 0.16 respectively while male pre-service teachers utilize strategies where recourse is found to the supervisors more than their female counterparts.

Discussion

Results show that there is no significant gender differences in the use of strategies to counteract dissonance in supervisors' feedback when each item is taken as a distinct strategy and when they are grouped into the four sub-scales of minimal intervention, recourse to supervisor, significant others and self-directed learning. In the case of the grouping into the four distinct strategies, female pre-service teachers use all the strategies except recourse to supervisor more than their male counterparts. The present findings is in agreement with that of Oyetoro *et al* (2019) which reported that pre-service teachers' sex has no significant influence on their use of strategies to reduce dissonance in supervisors feedback. However, the lesser use of recourse to supervisor strategy by female teacher candidates compared to their male counterparts might reveal deeply seated issues of culture of respect which disapproves younger pre-service teachers disagreeing with the older supervisors on the incongruent feedback provided and the need to avoid contact with male supervisors for risk of sexual harassment. These two postulations are probable as teacher education is not immune and mutually exclusive to the values and malaise of society. The need for strategic collaborations for the training of the students in multicultural literacy and negotiation of meaning in difficult circumstances thus arises. In addition to this, the university management should ensure a free and safe environment where mutual respect thrives and risk of sexual harassment are minimized.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there is need for the promotion of a free and fair environment devoid of the malaise of risk of sexual harassment. Such environment would enable pre-service teachers develop transversal skills that would enable them navigate the anticipated complexities of negotiating meaning in their present and future communities of practice within the ambit of authentic African heritage which include respect for the More Significant and More Knowledgeable Others.

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