



Research Article

## Personality Traits, Subject Matter, Knowledge, and Teaching Skills of Secondary Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined the personality trait, subject matter, knowledge of the subject, and teaching skills of secondary school teachers. The major goal of the study was to examine the teaching profession concerning the knowledge of the subject matter, teaching skills, and personality traits of Nigerian secondary school teachers. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all the public secondary school teachers in South East Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was used to draw 150 teachers from the five states. The instrument for data collection was a four-point scale researchers' developed questionnaire. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study showed that teachers have adequate knowledge of their subject matter with teaching skills and personality traits that improve teaching and learning in schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Occupation is an activity undertaken by the person to earn a livelihood. An occupation is when a professional is paid for his skill or talent. For an occupational group to be classified as a professional occupation, it is necessary that it provides services in a determined field, goes through formal training which offers expert knowledge, possesses professional culture, has admission control, possesses professional ethics, owns professional establishments and is considered as a profession by the society (Erden, 2007 cited in Victor, 2019).

A profession is an activity that requires specialized training, knowledge, qualification, and skills. It implies membership in a professional body and a certificate of practice. Amaele and Amaele (2003) defined a profession as a service occupation, which applies a systematic body of knowledge to problems that are of great relevance to the needs and yearnings of society. Ani (2020) and Dela Fuente (2021) described a profession as an occupation that has its basis on specialized and organized skills, knowledge, and intellectual competence. He further stated that the profession derives its raw materials from society and utilizes the raw materials to achieve set and desired objectives. The individuals who undertake a profession of rendering personalized services are called professionals, who are guided by a certain code of conduct, set up by the respective body. The line of demarcation between occupation and profession is thin and blurred. Thus professionals usually have clients who seek their services and terminate such relationship at will. A profession is, therefore, an occupation that renders services useful for the survival of individuals and society, these valuable services are vital to survival and it is knowledge-based, problem-solving, rare, managerial, and full of expertise (Victor, 2019; Dela Fuente & Biñas, 2020).

Teaching is a complex and ill-structured job that requires teachers to be equipped with the necessary and most relevant kinds of knowledge and expertise to be competently qualified for helping students develop in all aspects of their lives (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011; Liang & Akiba, 2017; Victor, 2019). The teaching profession began to develop with the emergence of education as a field of profession and vocation. According to Ani (2020) and Dela Fuente (2021) teaching is a distinctive profession, and it possesses all of the qualities that a profession should possess. Professional teaching knowledge might include at least, knowledge of the characteristics of students, subject matter, cultural differences among groups of students, learning, and pedagogy. The teaching profession has been handed a lot of criticism, maybe it is a profession or not. These criticisms have been making needed changes difficult and often incur resentment. Critics of the teaching profession have said, teaching lacks the germane characteristics of a viable profession. For example, entrance and certification are not strictly controlled by the set standards. This is believed to open the floodgate for cheaters and unqualified staff to erode the standard of the teaching profession. In Nigeria, teachers are poorly motivated and less paid. This makes the profession replete with some features of other occupations that make life worth living for the practitioners. Okunloye (2003) opined that teachers, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), and others who have put up advocacy for teaching as a profession have identified those features of a real profession that are true of teaching in Nigeria. The characteristics possessed by the teaching profession include being an occupation, an activity that requires basic skills, acquisition of a systematic body of knowledge, a professional code of ethics, and by various tiers of government.

In retrospect, the teaching profession since the ages has been an occupation that enjoys the unpleasant nickname of an “ungrateful trade” a profession for the “never-do-well, or an occupation for the downtrodden (Victor, 2019). Other members of society regard the teaching profession with contempt, feeling that it is a refuge camp for mediocrity; people who are industrious but unimaginative and uncreative; people with an average drive for power, average ambition, and escapism (Onyeabor, 2018; Dela Fuente, 2021). According to Oyekan (2000), the situation was worsened by the lingering social, economic, and political crisis in Nigeria. Hence, the teachers were compelled to demand: full professionalization of teaching, better condition of service, full



professionalization of teaching, prompt payment of gratuities and pensions on retirement; adequate public recognition for the teacher that nurture all the productive citizens of the society, special teacher's salary structure (TSS)

Teachers as professionals in their field are expected to process and evaluate new knowledge relevant to their core professional practice and to regularly update their knowledge base to improve their practice and meet new teaching demands. Teacher knowledge is certainly a component of teacher professionalism, professional competence involves more than just knowledge. Skills, attitudes, and motivational variables also contribute to the mastery of teaching and learning. Teacher professional knowledge is the teacher's repertoire of different types of knowledge and skills that qualifies him or her to deliver his knowledge of the subject matter and distinguishes him or her from subject matter experts. Teacher content knowledge is very significant to the enhancement of teaching and learning, it was not given enough attention to its development according to Leach and (Dela Fuente, 2019; Moon, 2000). The pedagogical knowledge base of teachers includes all the required cognitive knowledge for creating effective teaching and learning environments. Conceptualizing teacher knowledge is a complex issue that involves understanding key underlying phenomena such as the process of teaching and learning, the concept of knowledge, as well as the way teachers' knowledge is put into action in the classroom. Every teacher should have the ability to transform his subject matter knowledge to be delivered to students in a simple form that could be easily captured by students. A teacher cannot succeed if he cannot convey his knowledge to his students no matter how competent he is in the subject matter

The foundational work of Shulman (1987) provides a conceptual framework and set of analytic distinctions to the knowledge needed for effective teaching. This framework incorporates seven categories of teacher knowledge across the curriculum: general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of the purpose of education, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. Over the past two decades, research into teacher knowledge has focused on two overlapping and interdependent domains: pedagogical content knowledge and content knowledge. Good teachers know both content and "how to get it across" to the students they are teaching (Ball & Hill, 2009). The knowledge teachers require to teach is partly domain specific rather than a single construct of general factors such as a teacher's overall intelligence or teaching ability (Ball, Hill, & Schilling, 2008). Hence, teacher knowledge of teaching subject matter is multidimensional and consists of both general knowledge of content and more specific domain knowledge (i.e., specialized content knowledge). The latter is considered a deeper knowledge of specific content including knowledge of student misconceptions, analyzing unusual procedures, and providing explanations for rules. The teacher's knowledge of the subject represents the common content knowledge which includes the use of correct terms and notation and recognizing when students give an incorrect answer. This type of knowledge implies that teachers "must be able to do the work that they assign to their students" (Ball et al., 2009). Teachers need to recognize an incorrect answer, whereas knowing the nature of the error is specialized content knowledge. Beswick, Callingham, and Watson (2011) extended the work of Shulman (1987) by suggesting that the existence of horizontal content knowledge involves knowing how "current" teacher choices of their knowledge and practice may "facilitate or obstruct" the future learning of their students.

The art of teaching does not merely involve a simple transfer of knowledge from one to other. Instead, it is a complex process that facilitates and influences the process of learning. The quality of a teacher is estimated by how much the students understand from his/her teaching. A set of teaching behaviors that are especially effective in bringing about desired changes in students is referred to as a teaching skill. Teachers acquire teaching skills through educational courses and practices included in teacher education programs. Some of the teaching skills that make a teacher

effective include: effective time management, planning the teaching process, offering variety, creating a participatory learning environment, monitoring the development of the students, and ensuring the students' self-control. (Cangelosi, 2000; Jones, 2000; Hotman, 2004; Erdwn, 2007 and Sonmer, 2007)

A personality trait is a relatively stable characteristic that causes individuals to behave in certain ways. The word "effective" stems from the Latin word "effectivus" which means creative or productive (Douglas, 2010; Moemeka, 2017). Effective teachers, in the sense of being able to produce a desired result, can be thought of as those who can engage students in the learning process and maximize student academic achievement and other school outcomes. Effective teachers demonstrate a commonwealth of personality traits, such as adaptability, agreeableness, caring, collegiality, enthusiasm, fairness, friendliness, good humor, high expectations, honesty, patience, respectfulness, responsibility, etc.

Teachers' personality traits are reflected not only in their classroom performance, especially in their selection of instructional activities, materials, strategies, and classroom management techniques but in their interaction with students as well (Henson & Chambers, 2002). The various personality traits that enhance teacher effectiveness include: being open-minded, flexible and adaptive, high success expectancy, affectionate, Caring, Enthusiasm or Intensity, professional responsibility, understanding, and humorous. Other teachers' personality traits include extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism, tolerance, patience, and being encouraging and supportive: (Erden, 2007; Zhang, 2004; Liu & Meng, 2009). These teaching traits lead to teaching effectiveness that produces successful students. The measurement of teaching effectiveness according to Layne (2012) is based on two criteria. First is the selection of a good teaching method and the second is the suitability of the teaching method with the personality. Therefore, there is a need to examine the teaching profession as it concerns the knowledge of the subject matter, teaching skills, and personality traits of Nigerian secondary school teachers.

## Objectives

The study, therefore, examined the teaching profession concerning the knowledge of the subject matter, teaching skills, and personality traits of Nigerian secondary school teachers. Specifically, the study examined the personality traits of teachers that enhance secondary school teachers' effectiveness. The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study.

1. What subject matter contributes to teacher effectiveness in secondary schools?
2. What are the teaching skills and personality traits of teachers that enhance secondary school teachers' effectiveness?

## Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the perception of private and government-owned teachers on the knowledge of subject matter and its effectiveness in secondary schools

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the perception of private and government-owned teachers on the teaching skills and personality traits exhibited by secondary school teachers.

## METHODS

The study adopted a survey research design. A survey research design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group (Nworgu, 2015).



### Respondents

The population of the study comprised all the public secondary school teachers in South East Nigeria. Purposive sampling was used to select 150 respondents made up of 30 teachers each from the five states that made up South East Nigeria. 15 teachers each from private and government-owned secondary schools were purposively selected from the five states in South East Nigeria.

### Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a four-point scale researcher’s developed questionnaire. The instrument was face and content validated by three experts in curriculum and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Nigeria Nsukka and Alex Ekwueme Federal University respectively. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was carried out by administering the validated instrument to 20 teachers from secondary schools in Benue State outside the study area. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient method was used to obtain the internal reliability estimate of 0.81 which shows that the instrument is reliable and would measure what it was supposed to measure.

### Ethical Consideration

The researchers obtained full consent from the participants before the study. The participants were fully informed of what will be asked of them, how the data will be used, and what (if any) consequences there could be. The participants were also provided explicit and active consent to taking part in the research, including understanding their rights to access their information and the right to withdraw at any point.

### Data Collection

Five research assistants were used in administering the questionnaire. A face-to-face method was employed in administering the questionnaire. The direct delivery approach was used to enable the researchers to thoroughly explain the purpose, importance, and confidentiality of all information to the respondents and also, and enable the collection of completed copies of the questionnaire immediately to avoid loss.

### Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A cut-off point of 2.50 and above representing a positive response was accepted. Whereas, any means less than 2.50 was regarded as a negative response and was rejected. The t-test statistics were used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of response of teachers on the knowledge of subject matter contributes to teacher effectiveness in secondary schools

S/N	Item Statement	Private Teachers			Government Owned Teachers		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	A professional teacher should have a good knowledge of his subject	2.84	1.16	Agree	3.28	0.72	Agree

	matter.						
2	Good knowledge of the subject matter makes a teacher an expert in his/her field	3.46	0.54	Agree	3.27	0.73	Agree
3	The concept of teachers' knowledge of subject matter is put into action in the classroom.	2.84	1.16	Agree	2.80	1.20	Agree
4	Teacher should have the ability to transform subject matter knowledge to be delivered to students in a simple form that could be easily captured by students.	3.68	0.32	Agree	4.00	0.01	Agree
5	A teacher cannot succeed if he cannot convey his knowledge to his students.	3.46	0.54	Agree	4.00	0.01	Agree
6	Teacher knowledge is certainly a component of teacher professionalism.	2.93	1.07	Agree	2.77	1.23	Agree
7	Teachers as professionals are expected to process and evaluate new knowledge relevant for their core professional practice	3.48	0.52	Agree	3.24	0.76	Agree
8	Teacher professional knowledge is the teacher's repertoire of different types of knowledge and skills that qualifies the teacher to deliver his knowledge of the subject matter.	3.52	0.48	Agree	3.27	0.73	Agree
9	Teacher content knowledge is very significant to the enhancement of teaching and learning.	2.88	1.12	Agree	2.77	1.23	Agree
10	The pedagogical knowledge base of teachers includes all the required cognitive knowledge for creating effective teaching and learning environments.	3.49	0.51	Agree	3.40	0.60	Agree
11	The knowledge base of teachers helps to improve on new teaching demands. Skills, attitudes, and motivational variables which contribute to the mastery of teaching and	3.64	0.36	Agree	3.00	1.00	Agree

12	learning. Effective time management, offering variety and creating a participatory learning environment indicates teachers' knowledge of subject matter.	3.76	0.24	Agree	4.00	0.01	Agree
	Average Mean	3.33	2.32	Agree	3.38	2.37	Agree

Table 1 show that, the teachers in private secondary schools have an average mean of 3.33 with a standard deviation of 2.32 while government-owned secondary school teachers have an average mean of 3.38 with a standard deviation of 2.37. All the items have a mean above the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, table 1 shows that teachers in both private and government-owned secondary schools have adequate knowledge of the subject matter that contributes to teacher effectiveness.

**Table 2.** Responses of the perception of private and government owned teachers on the knowledge of subject matter and its effectiveness in secondary schools

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	DF	t <sub>cal</sub>	t <sub>crit</sub>	alpha	Decision
Private	75	3.33	2.32	148	-0.135	1.96	0.05	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
Government Owned	75	3.38	2.37					

Table 2 shows that the t-critical value of 1.96 is greater than the t-calculate value of -0.135 at a 0.05 level of significance. The result is not significant hence the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the perception of private and government-owned teachers on the knowledge of subject matter and its effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

**Table 3:** Response of teachers on the teaching skills and personality traits of teachers that enhance secondary school teachers' effectiveness

S/ N	Item Statement	Private Teachers			Government Owned Teachers		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Measurement of teaching effectiveness is based on the selection of good teaching method and the suitability of the teaching method with the personality.	3.52	0.48	Agree	3.00	1.00	Agree
2	Effective teacher shows concern for students' emotional and physical well-being	3.33	0.67	Agree	3.68	0.32	Agree
3	Effective teacher displays interest in and concern about the students' live	3.70	0.30	Agree	3.62	0.33	Agree

	outside school						
4	Effective teacher creates a supportive and warm climate	4.00	0.01	Agree	3.68	0.32	Agree
5	Effective teacher responds to misbehavior on an individual level	3.48	0.52	Agree	3.74	0.26	Agree
6	Effective teacher prevents situations in which a student loses peer respect	3.48	0.52	Agree	3.84	0.16	Agree
7	Effective teacher creates situations for all students to succeed	3.26	0.74	Agree	3.68	0.32	Agree
8	Effective teacher maintains professional role while being friendly	2.70	1.30	Agree	3.24	0.76	Agree
9	Effective teacher demonstrates active listening	3.02	0.98	Agree	2.16	1.84	Disagree
10	Effective teacher treats student equally and values students' opinion	3.73	0.27	Agree	3.38	0.72	Agree
11	Effective teacher shows joy for the content material and takes pleasure in teaching	3.52	0.48	Agree	3.44	0.56	Agree
12	Effective teacher knows students' interests both in and out of school	3.24	0.78	Agree	3.48	0.52	Agree
13	Effective teacher give students responsibility	2.26	1.74	Disagree	3.68	0.32	Agree
14	Effective teacher interacts in fun, playful manner; jokes when appropriate	3.50	0.50	Agree	3.12	0.88	Agree
15	Effective teacher provides students with meaningful feedback	3.54	0.46	Agree	3.68	0.32	Agree
16	Effective teacher returns student work in a timely manner	3.76	0.24	Agree	2.88	1.12	Agree
17	Effective teacher demonstrates involvement in learning activities outside school	2.76	1.24	Agree	3.36	0.64	Agree
18	Effective teacher seeks professional development	3.26	0.74	Agree	3.52	0.48	Agree
19	Effective teacher possess a positive attitude about life and teaching	3.27	0.85	Agree	3.52	0.48	Agree
20	Effective teacher maintains high-quality work	3.25	0.75	Agree	3.84	0.16	Agree
	Average Mean	3.34	2.80	Agree	3.36	2.57	Agree

Table 3 show that, the teachers in private secondary schools have an average mean of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 3.36 while government-owned secondary school teachers have an average mean of 3.36 with a standard deviation of 2.57. All the items in private and government-owned secondary schools have a mean above the criterion mean of 2.50 except items 13 and 9 respectively. This indicates high possession of teaching skills and personality attributes increase teaching effectiveness, quality, commitment, and expertise of secondary school teachers which influences and enhance students' outcome positively.

**Table 4.** Responses of the perception of private and government owned teachers on the teaching skills and personality traits exhibited by secondary school teachers

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	DF	t <sub>cal</sub>	t <sub>crit</sub>	alpha	Decision
Private	75	3.34	2.80					



			148	0.045	1.96	0.05	Accept $H_0$
Government Owned	75	3.36	2.57				

Table 4 shows that the t-critical value of 1.96 is greater than the t-calculate value of 0.045 at a 0.05 level of significance. The result is not significant hence the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the perception of private and government-owned secondary school teachers on the teaching skills and personality traits exhibited by secondary school teachers in South East Nigeria.

**DISCUSSION**

The study found that the knowledge base of teachers helps to improve new teaching demands. Skills, attitudes, and motivational variables that broaden teachers' knowledge of subject matter and contribute to the mastery of teaching and learning.

This is shown by the high cluster mean score for both the private and government-owned secondary school teachers. These findings agree with the views of Onyeabor (2019) on the need that teachers to build their capacities because of its positive impact on teacher effectiveness. The finding is also supported by the fact that professional competence involves more than just knowledge as a teacher cannot succeed if he cannot convey his knowledge to his students no matter how competent he is in the subject matter. The finding is also in line with the views of Ball & Hill (2009) who stated that good teachers should know both content and how to get it across to the students for effective teaching and learning.

The study also sought to examine the teaching skills and personality traits of teachers that enhance secondary school effectiveness. The findings in table 2 and 4 indicate that high possession of teaching skills and personality attributes increases teaching effectiveness, quality, commitment, and expertise of secondary school teachers which influences and enhance students' outcome positively. The finding is in line with Layne (2012) who states that the measurement of teaching effectiveness is based on the selection of a good teaching method and the suitability of the teaching method with the personality of teachers. This finding is also supported by the fact that the art of teaching does not merely involve a simple transfer of knowledge from one to other. Instead, it is a complex process that involves a set of teaching behaviors/skills that facilitates and influences the process of learning. This finding is also in line with Henson & Chambers (2002) who states that teachers' personality traits are reflected not only in their classroom performance, especially in their selection of instructional activities, materials, strategies, and classroom management techniques but their interaction with students as well. This implies that effective teachers demonstrate a commonwealth of personality traits, such as adaptability, agreeableness, caring, collegiality, enthusiasm, fairness, friendliness, good humor, high expectations, honesty, patience, respectfulness, responsibility, etc. Therefore, teachers provide personal, caring service to students by diagnosing their needs and by planning, selecting, and using methods and evaluation procedures designed to promote learning.

**CONCLUSION**

The success of any educational process depends on the quality, commitment, and expertise of the teacher. The certificated teacher is the essential element in the delivery of instruction to students, regardless of the mode of instruction. Many believe that teacher is born and some believe that teachers are made. Anyway, the services of good teachers are essential for the improvement of society. The classroom transaction by the teacher is quite essential and this can be improved by the expertise practice of professional teachers. A professional conforms to the technical and ethical standards of a profession. Teachers have a great responsibility for possessing and improving the knowledge and skills of the profession and deciding about how to do what. Teachers who possess

such personality traits provide emotional support for their students. The traits serve as rudimentary predictors of teacher effectiveness. This implies that there is a close relation between the fact that individuals who select the teaching profession possess the knowledge of the subject matter, teaching skills, and suitable personality traits. Therefore, a teacher has professional knowledge and skills gained through formal preparation and experience.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should use the required syllabus document to underpin common content knowledge and specialized content knowledge during teaching and learning.
2. Government should pay teachers using a special teacher's salary structure (TSS), and make prompt payment of the gratuities and pensions on retirement.
3. Full professionalization of teaching should be recognized and non-certified teachers should not be allowed to practice.
4. Teachers should build key, conceptual links from existing knowledge to new, providing students with a base for becoming proficient.
5. Re-training of secondary school teachers on pedagogical content knowledge through workshop seminars and conferences should be regular and must be taken seriously.

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