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Becoming a teacher: Experiences of female trainees in pre-service teacher education in northern Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Abstract:

This article foregrounds the experiences of female trainees on a scholarship programme for pre-service teacher education aimed at increasing the number of qualified female teachers from rural northern Nigeria, and boosting female pupil enrolments. Challenging conditions in colleges of education, including curricular shortcomings, overcrowding, limited resources and inadequate learning support were compounded by non-academic factors – especially financial, and gendered constraints. Collectively, they threatened student retention, learning and attainment, and the programme's gender equity goals. Findings highlight the need to move beyond increasing numbers of female student-teachers, to improving quality in teacher education, paying attention to out-of-college conditions too.

The worldwide expansion of formal education in the Global South, driven by the Education For All (EFA), Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agendas, has created an increased demand for qualified teachers. This is particularly the case in Nigeria, in West Africa, which is the continent's most populous country – estimated at over 180 million people (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016) – and is said to have the largest number of primary-school-age children out of school worldwide (www.uis.unesco.org). After the return to democratic civilian rule in 1999, following 16 years of military dictatorships – during which spending on education was a low priority – Nigeria became one of the world's fastest growing economies, primarily on the back of its oil and gas revenues. This, however, has done little to alleviate widespread poverty (Litwack et al. 2013), stall escalating unemployment, or address social inequalities that exist between urban and rural areas, and southern and northern states (World Bank, 2017). Attendance rates at primary school in the North West and North East zones are about half of those for southern regions, and are lower in rural areas and for girls (National Population Commission (NPC) and RTI International, 2016). In addition, in the North East, communities and schools have been severely affected by the ongoing violence related to Boko Haram.

Politically, Nigeria is divided into 36 states (plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja), clustered into six geo-political zones, which are further sub-divided into Local Government Areas (LGAs). This arrangement, it has been argued, is a way to 'manage ethnic diversity', with estimates on the country's ethnic groups ranging from 150 to 500 (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Out of the 500 plus languages and dialects identified in Nigeria (www.ethnologue.com), the three main languages, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, reflect the most numerous ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani

(predominantly in the north) Yoruba (originating from the South West), and Igbo (concentrated in the South South). English, however, is the most used official language in government communiqués, and, according to policy, the language of schooling from Grade 4, though inevitably practice varies widely. Religious identities¹ are also important in Nigeria (Dunne et al., 2017); in oversimplified broad terms, the Muslim population predominantly inhabits the northern states whereas the Christian population primarily lives in southern regions.

As highlighted above, Nigeria has a vast out-of-school population. Low levels of access to basic education are most acute in the northern states, and especially for females, though the Nigerian Government, in tandem with international agencies, has made concerted efforts in recent years to boost school enrolment in these areas, especially among girls (Humphreys with Crawford, 2014). The Female Teacher Training Scholarship Scheme (FTTSS)², which we report on here, was one such strategy, devised to improve teacher supply and also address the under-representation of female teachers in rural areas. This, in turn, it was assumed, would increase the number of girls in school since, although empirical evidence in Africa is sparse (Haugen et al., 2017), research in the Global South suggests that qualified female teachers encourage greater female enrolment and participation (Mujahid–Mukhtar, 2000; Handa, 2002; Kirk, 2006; Haugen et al., 2017). To achieve this, scholarships were awarded to young women from rural areas to undertake a three-year course of initial teacher education (ITE) in the state college of education, in order to gain the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE). They were then to return to teach in their own rural community for at least two years after they had qualified. The scheme started operating in 2008, and was eventually implemented in five northern states in Nigeria, though the operational research study we draw on in this paper took place in only two of the states: Niger and Bauchi (Education, Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria (EDOREN), 2015). Over the course of the programme (2008–2015), 7,800 women undertook training: 30 percent sponsored by UNICEF, and 70 percent supported by state government funding. Of the scholarship students in the two research states, only 45 percent of trainees graduated after four years in college in Bauchi, and only 17 percent in Niger, a point we return to later in the paper. More positively, it was claimed that all those that succeeded in graduating across the states were eventually deployed (EDOREN, 2016). Moreover, Katsina and Niger States were reported to be continuing with the programme even after donor funding had ceased (Pellens et al., 2016).

Our focus is on the experiences of the FTTSS trainees both inside and out of the colleges of education, and what they can tell us about the quality of ITE. Although our data collection was centred around the FTTSS and the scholarship students, the research offers wider insights about non-scholarship female and male trainees who were part of the college context and whose conditions for learning were broadly similar to those in our sample. Our findings also have wider implications for similar

¹ The last official census in 2006 did not ask for religious affiliation; the 2016 census intended to enquire but so far has not been conducted.

² This was part of a joint programme between DfID, UK, Nigerian state governments and UNICEF, a core component of the Girls' Education Project (GEP) Phases II (2008–2011) & III (2012–2016), which aimed to improve school access, retention and learning outcomes for girls across five states in northern Nigeria.

scholarship schemes aimed at redressing gender disparities, and for ITE in other resource-constrained contexts.

In the next section of the paper, by way of setting the conceptual and policy context for our study, we consider definitions of quality in education, including the inclusion of equality in the quality debate, and review some of the literature on quality in ITE in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The following section summarises the research methodology, describing the research methods and our approach to data collection and analysis. The findings section comprises two main parts: the first explores the experiences of the trainees in their colleges, and the second looks at their lives outside college while they are training. In the final section, we consider the implications for quality in initial teacher education more generally and the potential of schemes such as the FTTSS to help achieve the educational goals of widening school access, and increasing female participation in Nigeria, and in SSA more generally.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of our paper is of particular interest at a time when questions have been raised about the relevance of ITE to the realities of teaching in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa (Buckler, 2011; Hardman et al., 2011; Ayeampong et al., 2013), and ITE's lack of capacity to accommodate the necessary, yet ever increasing, numbers of trainee teachers in the twenty-first century (Mulkeen, 2010; Moon and Wolfenden, 2012).

2.1 Conceptualising quality

The 2005 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) rightly pointed out that any debate about quality in education relates to its perceived goals and 'embodies moral, political, and epistemological issues that are frequently invisible or ignored' (UNESCO 2004: 37). Thus, value-laden definitions of quality are generally presented as value-neutral (Alexander, 2008; Nickel and Lowe, 2010; Sayed and Ahmed, 2011).

Such is the case with the global expansion of universal primary (and later basic) education, which has relied heavily on human capital approaches – concerned with formal schooling's contribution to economic growth. Though they do not offer frameworks for understanding quality per se, their emphasis on school efficiency and reliance on quantifiable indicators and standardised tests measuring cognitive outcomes fit with the dominant school effectiveness discourse on quality (Alexander, 2008; Tikly and Barrett, 2009). This is epitomised in World Bank texts (e.g. Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991) focused on 'inputs', 'and 'outcomes', in which school processes are conceived in broadly behaviourist terms as linear and decontextualized (Nickel and Lowe, 2010). Though labelled a process model of quality, it actually says very little about process (Alexander, 2008; Tickly and Barrett, 2009).

In recent years, rights-based approaches to quality, evident in the EFA and UNESCO literature, have come to the fore, but have been criticised for being too individualised – even as they recognise diversity – and lacking in contextual analysis (Aikman and Rao, 2012), as well as constituting a Western-imported and top-down approach (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011). Moreover, the overemphasis on reading,

writing, technology and science and measurable indicators (ibid.; Alexander, 2015) suggest that human capital theory and the ideology of neoliberalism are never far away, even as equity and equality are included in the global development agenda. The complicated UNESCO model for understanding quality (UNESCO, 2004: 36) attempts to combine an expanded input/output model with a notion of more contextually situated learning, which includes learner characteristics as well as 'enabling inputs', 'outputs' and a large mixed bag of sweets labelled 'context', which includes social, cultural and economic factors; these are shown both to influence, and be influenced by, the various inputs and outcomes. Curiously, the complex processes of teaching and learning are reduced to a sub-set of 'enabling inputs' (Alexander, 2008, p.7).

Culture, context, equality and inclusion play a more prominent role in other conceptualizations of quality, such as Stephens and Hawes' four pillars of relevance (to context, needs and humanity), efficiency, inclusion and 'something special' (Stephens, 2003), which they state will vary according to the 'contextual and cultural landscape'. The inclusion of 'relevance to humanity' highlights a social justice imperative even as the concept itself remains vague. Building on these pillars, Nickel and Lowe (2010) add other dimensions of quality. The seven dimensions they outline are:

- Effectiveness (the extent to which the stated aims are met);
- Efficiency (which they emphasise does not necessarily relate to monetary inputs; and though more usually applied at the macro-economic level, could equally relate to individual family of community cost-benefit analysis of whether it's worth their while to stay in school);
- Equity (conceived as both a dimension and an overall judgement, but with the potential to redress balances, recognising both individual and structural disadvantage);
- Responsiveness (alongside equity, it's grounded in notions of diversity; though related to the uniqueness of the individual);
- Relevance (this relates to the extent to which an education system or experience addresses 'user' (at whatever level) needs, envisaged as being complex, often contradictory, competing and contestable.
- Reflexivity (relates to theories of modernity and the role of education in a rapidly changing and challenging social environment);
- Sustainability (relates to environmental sustainable development).

The interaction among these various dimensions is explained through the metaphor of quality as 'a piece of fabric', which is at its strongest when 'stretched', suggesting relations of both tension and complementarity (ibid.: 594–5). Further, the dimensions are dynamic; any change in the forces stretching the fabric will be felt by and have an effect on the other dimensions. In addition, the authors recognise that the relative balance of dimensions will vary according to context, and will likely reflect national and global power relations, which are open to contestation. More critical and contingent than the frameworks discussed so far, this conceptualisation of quality recognises social inequality and structural disadvantage as well as individual agency.

Critical approaches to quality necessarily entail a concern for equity (fairness) and equality (sameness of outcomes) as well as institutional processes, raising fundamental questions about whose knowledge counts, and the nature and purpose of learning and education, as well as highlighting the social reproduction of inequalities inherent in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2004: 33–34). Within a critical theorisation, notions of quality are concerned with ways of confronting and redressing historical inequalities, and transforming formal education in order to disrupt the ontological and epistemological hierarchies, such as those embedded in colonial education systems, and indeed in the global development goals themselves (Kanu, 2007; Unterhalter and North, 2011; Sayed, Motala and Hoffman, 2017).

We align ourselves broadly with critical approaches to quality as we also take from Nickel and Lowe's more complex, dynamic and contingent notion of quality, in which equity is both a dimension and an overarching concern; we will selectively pick up on some of these dimensions, in our analysis, as they relate to our research questions.

2.2. Quality and gender equality

The dominant discourse on gender in the quality debate is epitomized in the global development goals and UNICEF's focus on girls' schooling and gender parity. Their five pillars of quality comprise:

- What learners bring to school (social background and individual characteristics);
- Learning environments (conditions inside and outside the classroom);
- Content (what is being taught);
- Processes (teaching and learning);
- Outcomes (reading, writing, technology and science & life skills) (UNICEF, 2002).

Although this framework gives scope for an interrogation of gendered processes, and pays attention to context, it does not challenge the structural inequalities of the system. Furthermore, the narrow input/output framing is still apparent in the first and last pillars, as is an instrumental view of schooling in the expressed desire that 'more women will have skills and will contribute to society in new ways' (ibid.:15)

In contrast, a critical approach to quality from a gender perspective entails a focus on gender equality, which draws on feminist analysis to help identify and challenge the inherently gendered power structures and processes within formal education, and their connections with gendered power relations in wider society (Connell, 1987; Stromquist, 2001; Unterhalter and North, 2011). These include the global power dynamics implied in the development discourses of which the expansion of formal schooling is a part. As Aikman and Rao (2012: 211) succinctly put it: 'gender equality is complex, multi-faceted and situated rather than a series of barriers to be overcome through linear input–output processes focused on isolated dimensions of quality'. Taking this broader and more nuanced view of a quality-gender equality nexus, as we do, can help illuminate the complex ways in which different groups of females and males can be disadvantaged, or privileged in particular contexts, at different times. This also necessitates looking at differences *within* as well as *between* gender categories since gender interacts with other markers of social identity such as

ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status etc., and is constructed within specific historical and political processes (Mohanty, 1991; Nnaemeka, 2005).

However, notwithstanding our own post-colonial, critical perspectives on quality and gender, the research brief for the study on which this paper is based was firmly situated within a liberal gender framework, in its focus on a female-only intervention, namely the FTTSS, whose rationale was both to address gender disparities in numbers of trained teachers graduating from teacher training college, as well as helping to increase access to primary schooling among young females from poor rural areas. This narrower gender-parity agenda is in line with Nigeria's National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), 2007), and the international development gender agenda more generally.

2.3 Quality in teacher education in SSA

The importance of quality in teacher education in SSA has only been recognized relatively recently as being crucial to improving the quality of student learning in schools (Lewin and Stuart, 2003), despite the more widespread recognition of the centrality of teachers to the success of the teaching-learning process (Schwille and Dembélé with Schubert, 2007; Zeichner and Ndimande, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2010; Hardman et al., 2011). Wang et al. (2011) note that just as there's a lack of conceptual clarity about quality in teaching in schools, so it is unclear how particular notions of quality in teaching are related to specific teacher learning opportunities in teacher education. Using the analogy of a turning kaleidoscope to emphasize the 'evanescent' nature of quality in such contexts, they describe teacher education programmes thus:

'typically form[ing] beguiling patterns composed of disparate bits of course work and experience. Instead of providing clarity of purpose, these various notions further complicate the transformation of teacher education programs into purveyors of quality teaching.' (ibid: 333).

Pre-service education is still the most common mode of 'delivering' teacher training in SSA, and has been subject of several multi-country research programmes (e.g. Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Akyeampong et al., 2013) as well as several literature reviews (e.g. Colley, 2014; Mulkeen, 2010). However, critiques of ITE in SSA are generally conceptualised within a discursive amalgam of school effectiveness, efficiency and school improvement, which includes equity and equality concerns but leaves the fundamental structures of formal schooling untouched.

In particular, the ITE curriculum – understood in the narrow sense of the syllabus – in various SSA countries has come in for a lot of criticism. Researchers have highlighted the frequent misalignment between the theory-heavy curriculum in ITE and the practical skills needed for school teaching (Lefoka with Sebatane, 2003; Umar, 2006; Adekola, 2007; Thomas, 2011; Pryor et al., 2012; Akyeampong et al., 2013; Westbrook et al., 2013), though it has been noted that in some countries this is beginning to change (Mulkeen, 2010). In addition, there is often a disconnect between theory and practice (Schwille and Dembélé with Schubert, 2007), which are often taught as separate subjects (Lefoka with Sebatane, 2003). Though curricula are frequently charged with being overloaded, there is general agreement that insufficient attention is paid to pedagogical content knowledge, which is deemed to be more critical to enabling trainees to teach (Lefoka with Sebatane, 2003; Lewin

and Stuart, 2003; Akyeampong, 2013; Westbrook et al., 2013). There are also varying degrees of criticism about the uncritical adoption of Northern theories of learning – especially from the UK and US – that fill ITE curricula in SSA (e.g. Mtika and Gates 2010; Sayed, Motala and Hoffman, 2017).

In a similar vein, Akyeampong et al. (2013), in their six-country study across West and East Africa, found that too much time was spent on summative assessments of propositional knowledge rather than more practical assessments of pedagogical know-how. Irrespective of the content, trainees' learning in ITE is also frequently hampered by lack of proficiency in the language of teaching and learning, to which they may have had little exposure outside schooling (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Allsop and Howard, 2009; Mulkeen, 2010). At the same time, ITE often fails to prepare students for the multi-lingual environment of the primary classroom (Adekola, 2007; Akyeampong et al., 2013).

Another major curricular concern is the 'time lag' between curriculum reform in schools and the concomitant changes necessary in ITE to prepare teachers for this (Akyeampong et al., 2013). This disjunction has been particularly detrimental to ITE effectiveness when school reforms in recent decades have often entailed different epistemological assumptions and a different role for the teacher in the classroom (Lewin and Stuart, 2003).

The teaching practicum (TP), has also come under scrutiny. Usually placed at the end of the programme in SSA, the general view is that it is more effective when sandwiched between periods on campus, to allow for more reflection on the experience (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Akyeampong et al. 2013). In Nigeria it is also said to be too short (Adekola, 2007). For TP to be effective, however, genuine, collaborative relations need to be established between teacher education institutions and TP schools (Mattson, 2006; Mtika, 2011). Akyeampong (2017) found that in Ghana the hierarchical relationship between lecturers and school mentoring staff was preventing them valuing the knowledge of experienced teachers in their support of trainee teachers. TP has also been difficult to manage effectively, especially in under resourced systems, where there are insufficient supervisors for the number of trainees and inadequate funds to cover transport costs (Adekola, 2007). What's more, in many contexts there is a dearth of sufficiently skilled and experienced school teachers that can mentor (Lewin and Stuart, 2003) prompting calls for more support and training to be provided (Mtika, 2011; Mukuredzi, 2013).

Concern has also been expressed about the teacher educators in ITE institutions, who often lack experience in primary school teaching (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Adekola, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2010; Mulkeen, 2010), or, as has been reported in Nigeria, have no teaching qualifications or experience at all (Burke, 2009; Thomas, 2011). Crucially, teacher educators often do not teach in ways that they want their trainees to teach, employing transmission modes of curriculum 'delivery' and treating student teachers as 'empty vessels', rather than relating their teaching to trainees' prior learning (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Akyeampong et al., 2013). Related to this is a lack of recognition on the part of many teacher educators of their students' diverse needs, and the need to adapt their teaching accordingly (Schwille and Dembélé, 2007). This is hardly surprising given that teacher educators in SSA have rarely undergone any training themselves on how to educate future teachers (UNESCO,

2004). Moreover, vastly overcrowded lecture halls make it harder for teacher educators to engage in any form of participatory teaching (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Akyeampong et al., 2013).

Critical analyses point to more fundamental structural issues undermining quality in teacher education institutions and other higher education institutions – namely the persistence of social inequalities, including racial (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011) and gender inequalities (Mama, 2003; Bakari and Leach, 2008). A body of work on African higher education institutions, including a couple of colleges of education, highlights entrenched gender inequalities, from inequitable procedures for staff appointments and promotions, to endemic bullying and harassment of female staff and students by male lecturers (see Bakari, 2004; Barnes, 2007; Endeley and Ngaling, 2007; Olejide, 2007; Morley, 2011).

Post-colonial critiques note how higher education institutions in Africa – including colleges of education – rely on predominantly ‘Western’ knowledge (Kanu, 2007; Sayed, Motala and Hoffman, 2017). Quality therefore entails an agenda for social transformation, involving expanded curricula, drawing on indigenous knowledges, and engagement with critical pedagogy that encourages critical thinking among student teachers, who in turn, can encourage the same among school learners, in a collective project of social transformation (Sayed, Motala and Hoffman, 2017). Similar notions of quality are invoked in the literature on reconstructing teacher education in conflict or post-conflict societies (e.g. Sayed and Novelli, 2016). Relatively little of what has been published on ITE in SSA has placed the perspective of the trainees at the centre of enquiry (e.g. although see Mtika, 2011, on TP in Malawi, and Adu-Yeboah and Yaw Kwaah, 2018, on micro-teaching in Ghana), and even less has been written about trainees’ non-academic concerns. This paper aims to contribute towards filling this gap in the literature.

Here, we use a subset of the data drawn from the original study to answer the following three research questions:

1. What were the experiences of the FTTSS trainees both inside and out of the colleges of education?
2. What do they tell us about the quality of initial teacher education?
3. What are the implications for similar scholarship schemes, and for ITE in Nigeria, and more broadly within SSA?

3. METHODS

The FTTSS study was a collaborative research project involving a team of both Nigerian and international researchers who worked together throughout the research programme: from design to instrument development and piloting; data collection; data analysis and writing (EDOREN, 2015). The overall research aim was to provide formative feedback on all aspects of the operationalisation of the FTTSS, from selection of awardees to their posting and retention as teachers in school, including identifying their main constraints at all stages of the programme.

The research mainly took place in two colleges of education, one in Niger State and one in Bauchi State, which are located in the North Central and the North East zones

respectively. In both states, female teachers constituted less than 40% of the primary school workforce, and female enrolment stood at just over 40% of pupils at primary level in 2009–2010 (FME, 2011b), but well over half of primary school-age children were out of school. These two states were purposively sampled because they had the highest number of FTTSS trainees in college at the time, and could therefore provide the largest pool of potential respondents.

The research was a concurrent mixed-methods design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) with qualitative and quantitative data integrated at the analysis stage (Tashakkori and Cresswell, 2007). It was primarily a qualitative study, relying on observation and interview data: semi-structured individual and group interviews, combined with multiple in- and out- of class observations in the colleges of education, and in the schools where trainees were on teaching practice (TP).

Interviews were conducted with trainees, college staff, key informant officials at local, and state level who had some connection with the programme, TP school staff and community members, as well as FTTSS project staff, in order to get multiple perspectives. Structured questionnaires with closed questions and a range of options to tick (though most items also had an open 'other' option) were also administered to trainees, for reasons of complementarity and triangulation – in the sense of adding breadth and depth to the investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) – and to reach a greater number of respondents (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, secondary data included national, state and college policies and guidelines as well as statistical reports, where available. These provided important background and current quantitative data on each of the colleges and their students, where available.

While our primary respondents were FTTSS awardees, they were learning and living alongside other teacher trainees not on that scheme. In this sense, their gendered experiences of everyday life in college were similar to those of other female students. Indeed, the responses of some college lecturers in particular often referred to female trainees more generally since they were unaware which students were scholarship awardees. Thus, insights from the data analysis presented here are more broadly relevant to the wider body of students, and to some extent, to colleges of education in other locations in Nigeria, though we are mindful about generalizing and universalizing findings and strategies from a particular context to the general (Usher, 1996).

3.1 Data collection and analysis

Qualitative instruments were piloted during the research methods training workshop held in Niger State; the study data were collected later by the Nigerian research teams in both states over a two-week period. The structured questionnaires were administered in both English and Hausa to 338 FTTSS trainees drawn roughly equally from the two colleges and from years 1–3 of their NCE course. More than 90% were aged 25 or younger and 70% were unmarried, although 44% had dependents. They were predominantly Muslim (74%) and represented several different ethnic groups, the largest of which was Hausa overall, though Nupe were the most numerous in Niger State.

The survey questions were designed to collect information and views from trainees in five sections: biography; scholarships; the academic programme; non-academic life and future career trajectories. Items were informed both by the research questions, and the issues that arose in the pilot interviews. The survey responses were entered into SPSS and analysed for frequency and percentage distribution as, with few exceptions, the variables largely comprised nominal/categorical variables.

Following this, the group interviews, selected through opportunity sampling from questionnaire respondents, involved 49 female FTTSS awardees in all, three of whom had dropped out of the programme; five of the scheme's graduates were also interviewed individually. Consent was given in almost all cases to audio-record the interviews; in the few cases where it was not given, notes were taken. In addition to the informal observations made during interviews, formal observations were carried out around the college sites guided by a schedule, and 11 lecturers were observed teaching. Further, classroom observations were made in the schools where trainees were carrying out their practicum, but we do not draw upon that data in this paper since the focus is on the college experience.

The qualitative data analysis was an iterative process between the 'stages' of data collection, analysis and representation (Cresswell, 2013), and involved concurrent data reduction, display and interpretation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). At the initial research methods workshop, a thematic analytical template was devised collectively for both interview and observational data, with broad categories and prompts informed by the research literature in relation to the research questions, which were modified following piloting and after data collection to include emergent categories (Cresswell, 2013). After data collection, interview tapes were listened to repeatedly, as 'low-inference' notes, reflective comments and illustrative quotes for each observation and interview were transferred to the analytical matrix under the relevant thematic heading. Comparisons were then made within and across respondent categories, combining interview and observational data, looking for patterns and divergences, before being compared with the survey data. Preliminary analysis occurred both within the state research teams during and after data collection, and later through discussion and further examination and reflection by all research team members at the analysis workshop. The lack of computer experience of several team members, and limited access to computers, plus lack of time and budget for the relevant training, precluded any use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis.

3.2 Limitations

A major limitation is the paucity of data from the perspectives of FTTSS dropouts, both because the questionnaire respondents were all students still on the programme, and because tracking down FTTSS graduates and dropouts willing to be interviewed proved difficult. No dropouts could be accessed in Niger State and only three were located in Bauchi. Never the less, some data are presented on dropout from other respondents. Since FTTSS record-keeping was patchy at the colleges, and programme M&E in general was sparse, it was not possible to state what percentage of trainees had completed the programme. Numbers on completion and deployment were only made available after the study had been concluded.

A further limitation relates to the inexperience of some of the early-career researchers, who had little or no experience of qualitative research. This resulted in their sometimes not probing much beyond stock answers given by some institutional respondents, and understanding interviews as 'reality reports' rather than social events (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 127).

In the Findings section below, we offer 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the trainees' experiences of college life during their training. Using both qualitative and survey data, we begin with a focus on the academic conditions and experiences in the colleges of education. Following this, we consider the non-academic experiences of the awardees during their period in training.

4. FINDINGS

In this section we present the findings within an understanding of quality as being inseparable from issues of gender equality, while also drawing selectively on some of Nikel and Lowe's (2010) dimensions of quality.

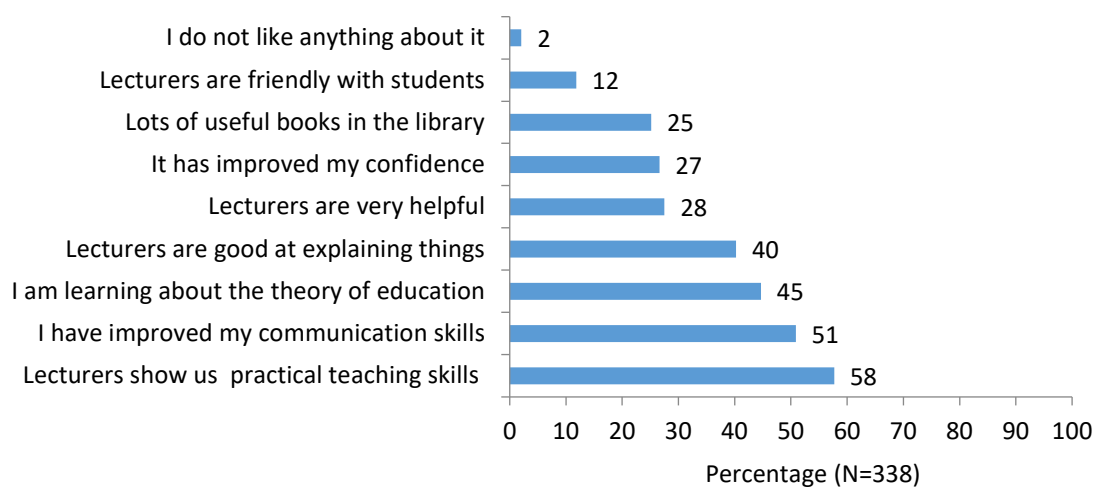
4.1 Trainees' experiences in college

When considering the trainees' academic and professional experiences, where possible we present the relevant survey results and then use the group interview data and researcher observations to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the quality of education on offer within the colleges of education.

Academic and professional experiences

According to the survey, FTTSS students were happy to be in college and spoke about their experience in generally positive terms (see Figure 1). This was substantiated in the group discussions in which they reported feeling that they were treated like all other students. There were, however, suggestions that some staff and students were negative towards them because awardees did not have to pay their own fees and/or were perceived to be weaker or lazier students:

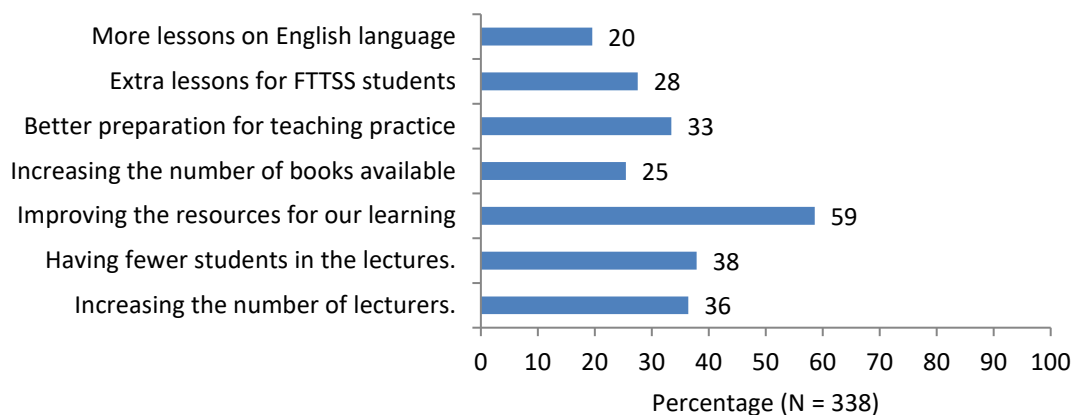
...some lecturers and students said we would all be dropped because we would not pass the exams. They said we didn't know the value of education because we were not paying for it. This troubled me. (FTTSS dropout)



* A maximum of three boxes could be ticked by respondents

Figure 1: Reasons FTTSS trainees gave for liking the NCE course* (EDOREN, 2015).

Despite their generally positive responses, the trainees made several suggestions for course improvements. The top two suggestions in the survey results, were to improve learning resources and reduce overcrowding in classes (see Figure 2).



* A maximum of three boxes could be ticked by respondents

Figure 2: FTTSS trainees' suggestions for improving the NCE course* (EDOREN, 2015)

In the group interviews, the trainees were given the opportunity to elaborate on their academic experiences during the course. Thematic analysis of the transcripts produced three main areas of concern: college facilities; curriculum and teaching; and learning support. Each will be discussed in turn below, drawing on the survey, group interviews and researcher observations.

College facilities

Overcrowded lecture halls constituted the predominant challenge to learning reported by the FTTSS trainees in interviews, echoing the survey results, in which overcrowded lecture halls was the second most cited complaint about the course, confirmed by other respondents and by researcher observations. Evidence indicated that lecture halls designed to take 400–600 students sometimes hosted classes twice or three times this size (EDOREN, 2015). This was particularly the case in the compulsory courses, General Studies in Education (GSE) and General Education, which awardees considered to be the most relevant in terms of preparing them for teaching. Other research indicates that overcrowded conditions characterise the conditions in teacher training elsewhere in Nigeria (e.g. Adekola, 2007; Sherry, 2008; Allsop and Howard, 2009; FME, 2009).

The implications for the students are articulated by one respondent:

I find it very difficult because of that overpopulation.... heat, as I am short I can't even see the lecturer, I can't even hear what he is saying....I am not comfortable anytime I am attending that lecture...They use a microphone, but those at the back don't

hear....population inside, population outside...people are not hearing what he is saying and they expect everyone to pass the course. (FTTSS trainee)

Students were observed sitting or standing in cramped conditions within the lecture halls while others attended lectures by standing outside. Students often ended up running to class in order to get a seat within the hall and preferably near the front so that they could hear:

If we do not run to get front benches during combined class like education we cannot hear the lecture from the back because the hall is large. (FTTSS trainee)

The consequence for the quality of learning and teaching was summed up by one college staff member:

Actually, it affects the quality of the NCE programme, because at the end, because of all these problems, we may not likely produce good teachers. Let me give you an example, I used to have a class that was about 1,600 and those that will be seated in the class will not be more than 400, that means about a thousand have to be outside the class, definitely they will not hear what I am saying, they will not understand the lesson, they will not even be available to contribute meaningfully to the lesson. At the end the exam will come, they will not perform very well ... and they will not have that stuff that makes them good teachers.

Inadequate learning resources were also cited as a major challenge to student learning, echoing findings from other teacher education institutions in Nigeria (Adekola, 2007; Burke, 2009; Edelenbosch and Short, 2009; FME, 2009). The survey results showed that trainees overwhelmingly identified (59%) improving learning resources as the most critical factor for improving the NCE course (see Figure 2). They specified the need to increase the number of available books and the relevance and quality of the books available in the library. Similarly, limited access to computers was reported for a variety of reasons that ranged from their availability only for specific courses to insufficient seats. It was therefore very common for college students to use cybercafés either on or off campus.

Curriculum, teaching and learning materials

The teacher training curriculum was another area of trainee dissatisfaction; 43% of the trainees surveyed thought it comprised too many courses, each having too much material to cover, as reported elsewhere in SSA (Lewin and Stuart, 2003). This was exacerbated for the trainees by the lack of consultation with them over their allocation to specific courses. This lack of choice resulted from an allocation process based on their school examination results and prescription made by the state, thereby falling short on the Nickel and Lowe's quality dimension of responsiveness to individual needs. The limited interview data from awardees (including the dropouts) and college lecturers on course dropout ascribed it to such curricular issues as well as to the resultant exam failure and course repetition:

It was difficult for me because it was not the way I was used to in the secondary school. I did not tell anybody in school about the difficulties. Nothing was done to help me. I dropped out due to many carry-overs [courses that had to be repeated] when the results came out. (FTTSS dropout)

Students are not offered courses they can cope with. They are not consulted either before courses are offered to them. Some students find it difficult to cope with courses offered them which leads to them dropping out. I was made to study maths/economics; I found it very difficult. I know I could change to another department but I didn't. (FTTSS dropout)

She was withdrawn from the school; she could not make the [CGPA] points [grades] that the school wanted... (FTTSS awardee)

Unsurprisingly, given the overcrowded lecture halls, college observations revealed that most lectures lacked practical elements or the use of teaching aids and were largely non-participatory, as in many other pre-service institutions in the Global South (Westbrook et al., 2013). Apart from one case in which chorus answers were chanted in response to lecturer questions, there was generally no time for student questions. Nevertheless, the survey responses indicated that the trainees liked learning about education theory (45%) and liked the fact that lecturers showed them practical teaching skills (58%). This last statistic is somewhat surprising and contradicts the observational data reported above, but perhaps the responses relate to the micro-teaching preparation for teaching practice (TP), discussed below, rather than the course lectures.

Textbooks were generally not used in class and although most students were seen bringing notebooks and pens to the classes, they took minimal notes, though the fact that many could not hear the lecturer (as reported above), or understand English (as reported below) might partly explain this. Where learning materials were available, they had to be purchased at around 600–2,600 Naira (GBP 2–10) for handouts and handbooks (compilations of learning materials). In one college, it was reported that some lecturers threatened to deduct marks from students if they did not purchase the materials, which would obviously disadvantage the poorest students most.

Some lecturers will tell you that if you don't buy the hand book, you will not pass the exam and not all of us have the money to buy the book ... Some [lecturers] are using the handbook as marks; if you have [the handbook] you will have 20 marks. (FTTSS awardee)

Assessment was another area of concern for the trainees, who pointed to a mismatch with what had been taught. College staff, on the other hand, described the overwhelming demand of marking large numbers of student papers. They saw the assessment process and teaching in overcrowded classrooms as major threats to the quality of the teacher training courses. Indeed, in one state it was reported that students are sometimes asked to mark the papers:

There is overpopulation ... In a class you will see that we are having up to 500–1,000 students and only one lecturer; one lecturer cannot mark all those papers. (FTTSS trainee)

...one of the lecturers in education, he gave some of the students our scripts to mark, and I came in and saw them marking... (FTTSS trainee)

Records of student assessment were not made available or seen by the research teams in the colleges, or in the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEA).

This may be associated with the difficulties of the enormous workload associated with marking.

Beyond the college-based elements of teacher education, students were required to undertake supervised TP. Micro-teaching in college appeared to be an important aspect of preparation for this. In interviews, trainees in general, said they felt well prepared for TP and described being taught how to prepare schemes of work, create lesson plans, make teaching aids, organise classes, maintain discipline and assess pupils. However, logistical problems caused by large number of students meant that they did not get the National Teacher Education Policy-recommended 20-hour allocation of micro-teaching. Trainee views on micro-teaching were mixed. Most found it useful, some enjoyed it, although most interviewees felt they needed to have done more. In the survey (see Figure 1), a third of respondents suggested better preparation for TP as a necessary improvement to the course.

We do teaching practice with our fellow students before we come for teaching practice... micro-teaching...we teach one by one...so I think we are well prepared... (FTTSS trainee)

They taught us how to write lesson plans and lesson notes, how to use the scheme of work and make instructional materials like this one [she displays it]. (FTTSS trainee)

... micro-teaching is not enough for a student to go for TP as a first timer. (FTTSS trainee)

Similar issues of quality were raised in relation to teaching practice, which in most cases was supported by the head teacher and senior teachers in the host school. The high numbers of teacher trainees, lack of funds for transport costs and a shortage of lecturing staff often resulted in very limited lecturer supervision, as has been observed elsewhere in Nigeria (Adekola, 2007; Allsop and Howard, 2009). In one of the colleges in which trainees, college lecturers and LGEA staff confirmed that supervisory visits were made three or four times during TP, the trainees regarded this as insufficient:

There is the need to make further provision. ... The supervision should be made frequently. This should be done by CoE [College of Education] lecturers. CoE staff visited us during TP about four times. They observed us in class, collected our lesson plan and correct where necessary both in written and oral. I feel the four times visit is not enough. (FTTSS graduate)

Student support

FTTSS trainees consistently reported difficulties with various aspects of college academic life. They contrasted the conditions for learning when they were at school with their very different experiences in college of large, overcrowded lectures, having classes spread over a long period of time (6am–6pm) and moving to different venues for different courses. Although college lecturers did not raise the issue of students' need for study skills, the trainees reported difficulties in note-taking in lectures, forming reading groups to study for exams, and using the library.

The lack of academic support in colleges of education has been identified as a common problem in Nigeria (FME, 2009). Both colleges participating in this research claimed to have some support services in place for all students and extra support for FTTSS awardees. In practice, however, a number of these services were either not operational, lacking resources and/or were inadequate for the large number of students. It is fair to note that lecturers were often dealing with hundreds of students on their courses. Nevertheless, from the trainees' perspective, they did not feel supported by lecturers and the survey results show only 28% found lecturers helpful.

Most of the lecturers, if you do not understand what they are saying, they will say you are on your own.... (FTTSS awardee)

College should arrange for a specific time to help us outside the lecture hours ... the programme is very difficult; one has to study very hard. (FTTSS trainee)

These major challenges to the quality of teacher education were recognised by the college staff and the effects were evident in the high repetition and low completion rates of FTTSS students. The problems are described below by an awardee who had dropped out from the course:

The programme was difficult. One has to study hard to the best of my ability. I don't know why I was asked to repeat because I studied hard to the best of my ability. I was not married; I did not have other problems. I went home and informed my father, he told me to go back if I wanted to, I said no. I lost interest in the studies. They should have helped me by finding out the cause of the problem. Extra lessons should be given in CoE to those that are weak. (FTTSS dropout)

Interactions with FTTSS trainees during the study strongly indicated that most faced challenges in communicating in English in their speaking, reading and aural comprehension skills (see also Garuba, 2010; UNICEF, 2012) – a common problem among teacher education students and some staff in northern Nigeria (Burke, 2009; Edelenbosch and Short, 2009; Allsop and Howard, 2009), as in other parts of Africa (Mulkeen, 2010). In the pilot survey, it was evident that students struggled to write in English, which resulted in the survey being developed in both English and Hausa. Feedback suggested that in some cases students in their third or fourth year of college were unable to read passably in either English or Hausa. The need for English language support was recognised by college staff and awardees alike.

This issue of communication, honestly, we are finding it very difficult... Most of them can hardly construct very good English, especially our indigenous students compared with students from other states, and I believe the problem is from the grassroots. (College staff member)

The most difficult aspect is English and lectures are done in English though some lecturers do repeat themselves when students do not understand the lesson. I felt like leaving the school but I had to endure to graduate. (FTTSS trainee)

English was very difficult, especially speaking. (FTTSS graduate)

Both colleges reported plans for remedial English classes and student support particularly for the funded FTTSS trainees, however, these plans had been in place

but not acted upon for several years (see Garuba, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). In these sub-optimal conditions for learning in the colleges the trainees made extra efforts to handle academic demands. In addition to coming to college early, attending lectures, reading handouts and completing their assignments, they engaged in peer-support or reading groups, organising extra tutorials amongst themselves, to help with areas where they were struggling. These tutorials were led by students who were seen to be good.

In this section, we have presented key challenges to educational quality in teacher training colleges based largely on trainee teacher perspectives. There were three main sets of issues: college facilities; curriculum, teaching and learning materials; and student support. These relate to several of Nickel and Lowe's dimensions of quality. The numerous course repetitions and dropouts (EDOREN, 2016), inevitably raise questions about the system's efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, the curricular shortcomings and lack of study skills and language support also point to a lack of relevance and responsiveness to the needs of students, especially those from rural areas with no exposure to English outside the school, which has implications for equity. These academic constraints were also compounded by multiple issues outside the college that have a bearing on learning outcomes and the successful completion of the NCE. We discuss these in the following section, to provide a more holistic account of the pathway to becoming a teacher.

4.2 Trainees' experiences outside college during training

In this section, we explore how the students managed their home life during their time at college. This is particularly important for understanding the challenges of students living away from their community, especially for the relatively vulnerable young females from rural areas, who were specifically targeted for FTTSS awards. Five broad interrelated areas of concern were raised by the teacher trainees: finances, accommodation, transport, everyday life – which included safety issues – and family. These are considered in turn below.

Finances

Expense was identified as being by far the main difficulty of college life (40%) – see Figure 3 – which ranked higher than academic or family-related difficulties. For 46% of the survey respondents, financial difficulties were cited as a major concern causing them anxiety and threatening their completion of the course, echoing earlier findings among students from poor backgrounds in South Africa (Robinson, Vergnani and Sayed, 2002). FTTSS awardees reported that the stipends were insufficient (28%) and further they were often paid late (37%). These problems were referred to by both students and lecturers:

NGN 5,000 (GBP 20) per month is grossly inadequate. (College staff member)

More money should be given since beneficiaries are poor and some parents cannot afford to send their children to school. (FTTSS dropout)

I spend more than 450 Naira, that is what I use to spend every day, and up till now they have not paid us our allowance to help ourselves and our parents. (FTTSS trainee)

These problems resulted in many awardees receiving financial assistance from either their family or their community despite some having dependents. Contrary to

this, claims were made by a government official that the stipend funds flowed rather to home and families of awardees and in one group interview, most trainees said they would still be able to afford to study if they had not been sponsored. This latter claim suggests that the criteria for the selection of FTTSS awardees – rural females from the very poorest communities – may not have been adhered to in all cases.

Accommodation

There was a shortage of on-campus accommodation in both colleges, which was an issue for the students. Although there was special hostel allocation for the FTTSS trainees and in one college new hostels had been built, these were not always on or very near campus. The respondents regarded their housing as problematic, as illustrated here:

Please we want them to work on this accommodation, it is really affecting us, to rent a house outside is a big deal to us. (FTTSS trainee)

Despite its critical importance to trainees, there was one case in which places were available but had not been allocated due to administrative tardiness. The shortage of on-campus housing meant many trainees living off-campus spending most of their annual stipend on rent. In addition, they were subject to travel costs to get to college. Many trainees were left having to manage a trade-off between higher rents more locally or higher transport costs and longer travel times. The findings from the interview data resonate with the survey results in which more than three-quarters of respondents (78%) said life in college would be better if there was more on-campus accommodation (see Fig 3). Nearly a quarter cited difficulties with off-campus lodgings (24%) and the travelling distance to and from college (23%). Thus, accommodation evidently constituted an important dimension of the quality of life for students during training.

Transport costs

Transport costs related to travel between off-campus accommodation and college were highlighted as a key difficulty by trainees and recognised by staff as directly affecting student participation in college. Those trainees with limited funds often walked long distances to avoid paying for transport and as a result they often arrived at lectures tired and/or late and sometimes missed the lectures altogether.

Some students could not attend lectures due to lack of transport money from their hostel to the lecture venues. (College staff member)

I am squatting with a friend of mine, and the distance is too far, from where I am staying, to this school. Sometimes I used to spend NGN 300 every day ... sometimes I miss my morning lecture... sometimes before I get home I used to be tired. I don't used to have time to read my book very well. (FTTSS trainee)

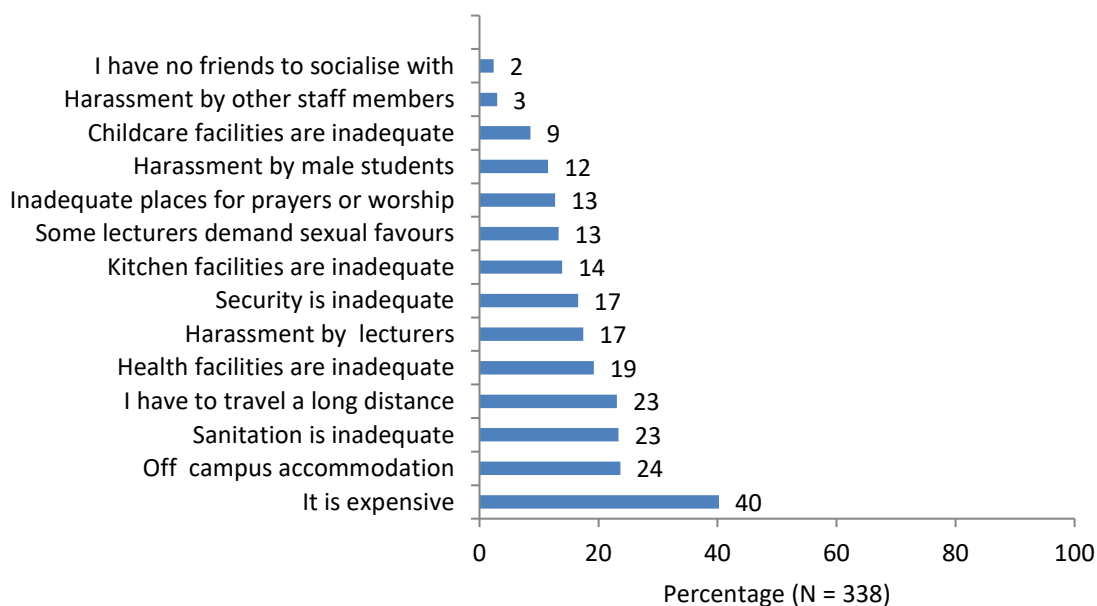
Accommodation is a problem ... the population of girls in this school [college of education] are more than the boys and they just have one hostel for girls ... sometimes I pity them; they have to trek long distance and before they come they are tired, and it affects their academic performance. (College staff member)

To add to this, the trainees also experienced transport costs associated with TP. This was especially problematic for the FTTSS awardees who were supposed to do

their placement in their home communities, even though there was no budget allocation for the transport costs in their stipend (UNICEF, 2012). These problems combine with lack of college transport funds for lecturers on TP supervision, reported in the previous section, raise considerable questions about the quality of learning during TP. The shortage of lecturers further compounded the difficulties experienced with this vital element of the teacher education programme. Those students who had been given a FTTSS award, but were not from a rural area, had more serious problems since instead of returning to their 'home' to do their placement they were faced with commuting.

Everyday life

Everyday life while attending college has an important bearing on the experiences of teacher training. As illustrated above, in relation to the costs associated with accommodation and travel while at college, these factors influence learning and the quality of the teacher education outcomes. There was also some dissatisfaction with the quality of the accommodation (UNICEF, 2012). The main issues were with sanitation (23%) kitchen facilities (14%) and, for a minority of respondents, other amenities such as places for worship, shops, health and childcare facilities were regarded as inadequate. This last issue is perhaps more of an issue than this percentage (9%) indicates, given that it represents the concerns of over a third of the respondents with children. In interviews, the trainees were generally happy about electricity and water supply and the general quality of the accommodation.



* A maximum of four boxes could be ticked by respondents

Figure 3: Difficulties experienced by FTTSS awardees in college life* (EDOREN, 2015)

Safety in campus accommodation was also a concern; of the 20% of respondents who answered that they felt unsafe in college, over 60% said they did not feel safe in their lodgings. Safety issues are discussed in more detail below.

Although most trainees interviewed said they felt safe on campus in both Bauchi and Niger – citing sufficient lighting at night, and the presence of security men – almost a

fifth (17%) of survey respondents identified inadequate security as a difficulty experienced in college, and almost half (47%) said life in college would be better with improved security. Evidence from both the qualitative data and survey highlighted safety as a threat to awardees' attendance and programme completion. The lack of security in some places of accommodation, and when travelling between lodgings and campus, was emphasised in interviews in both Niger and Bauchi. Awardees were left vulnerable to intimidation by 'bad boys', and sexual harassment and violence, as explained in this extract from a group interview with awardees who discussed reports of robbery and rape of some fellow trainees:

Like the first time we were paid, some students were paid in the evening; they stay in this area – Baobab³ area; some Baobab boys collected [stole] their money and some [students], they were raped, I heard, but I don't know how serious it was.

...

Even this time, one girl – as she said – oh, she come reading, on her way going back, so some Baobab boys now block her before she gets to the gate and collected [stole] her phone with her purse.

Some government officials also voiced concerns about security in off-campus accommodation. In one college, although the hostel was only a few hundred metres from the college, it was in such a dangerous area that trainees were said to be afraid to walk to classes:

Men and robbers come into the hostel ... security should be improved ... the lack of a fence leads to intrusion by community members. (Government official)

Moreover, the survey also indicated the existence of sexual and other unspecified forms of harassment in college, echoing findings in other research in Nigeria (Bakari, 2004; Bakari and Leach, 2008) and in other Higher Education institutions in SSA (see Bennett, 2009; Morley, 2011). When asked to identify difficulties encountered in college (selecting up to four choices), just over a third of female awardees complained of one or more types of harassment by staff or male peers. Specifically, 17% reported harassment coming from lecturers, 17% accused male students, while 3% pointed the finger at 'other staff members'. 13% of respondents reported that lecturers demanded sexual favours, which was also alluded to in two interviews:

Most of our lecturers they have these feelings for women, female students and when they approach you and you try to tell them you are not interested, they will put you in mind [they will remember who you are] ... (FTTSS awardee)

Selling exam papers to students and/or accepting bribes of sexual favours or cash to pass students has been reported in other studies in Nigeria (Bakari, 2004; Sherry, 2008; Burke, 2009), as elsewhere in SSA (Morley, 2011).

Security in accommodation and issues around sexual harassment were also reported in the GEP II evaluation (UNICEF, 2012). Although there were structures in place to deal with such grievances, such as the college Moral Conduct Committee in

³ The name of the area has been changed.

Niger, as specified in the college student handbook and advertised on the college website, awardees seemed generally unaware of grievance procedures beyond being encouraged to report any problems to the FTTSS office.

Family issues

Echoing other research in SSA (see Stromquist et al., 2017), the survey data, however, suggest that marriage and having children are challenges to trainees completing the programme, although not as serious as the lack of finances. Some respondents identified marriage as a potential barrier to course completion (14%), as well as a lack of support by the family/husband (9%). Although only 7% considered childcare to be a potential threat, trainees with children had, on average, repeated a greater number of courses than trainees without children. Similarly, a greater proportion of married trainees had repeated a course compared to single trainees. Within the survey cohort, seven in ten respondents were single and around three-quarters had no children, meaning that for the majority, getting married and having children would remain potential future barriers to programme completion and retention in the profession after graduation.

Even so, there were also accounts of awardees being supported by their families, and of awardees whose studies were seemingly unaffected by marriage. The following quotes illustrate the range of experiences and views:

The girls are asked by their husbands to choose between their education and their husbands. (Government official)

We prefer married women in the programme because when the single girls marry the husbands will ask them to leave. (UNICEF officer)

There are only two trainees that got married and they are still in the college continuing with their studies. The marriage did not affect them; they are in NCE II now. (Government official)

I started the NCE programme before I got married. After my marriage my husband removed me, that is my only reason for dropping out ... My family members felt bitter about this. My parents were bitter about this problem because they are interested in my education and know the importance of formal education. My husband right now, after so much pressure from myself and my parents, has accepted – against his wish – that I would go back to school. (FTTSS dropout)

To summarise, survey and interview data indicated that a number of non-academic issues had an impact on trainees' academic lives, causing anxiety and threatening their learning and likely programme completion. Primarily, these concerned financial matters, caused by the non- or late payment of stipends, as they related to transport and accommodation costs. Safety was the other worry for some trainees, be it in their lodgings, or travelling to and from campus, as well as experiences of being harassed by male peers or lecturers. Although awardees did not anticipate that marriage or having children would negatively affect their studies, the higher rates for course failure and repetition among married trainees or trainees with children suggest otherwise. This is not surprising given that in SSA women generally shoulder more of the domestic labour within households, including childcare, which is more acute in poorer households (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). The administrative

shortcomings that result in the late disbursement of inadequate stipends, or delays in allocation of accommodation are both efficiency and gender equality issues, since the greatest adverse effects will be felt by the poorest female students, especially those with dependents and/or from rural areas, who are unlikely to have family in the city that can provide support. The persistence of gender violence in and around the colleges and accommodation, and the apparent absence of an effective institutional response to it, constitute further non-academic gender equality-quality issues, which can threaten trainees' programme completion.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The under-representation of women within the teaching workforce in northern Nigeria is significant, especially in rural areas; it both raises gender equity concerns about the availability of teaching as a career for women and, more indirectly, has been related to the low levels of girls enrolled in school. The FTTSS, which we have reported on here, aims to address such concerns by getting more females from rural backgrounds into initial teacher education as a key preliminary to increasing the number of qualified female teachers in rural areas and encouraging more girls to go to school. In this paper, we have focused on two interrelated issues: the experiences of the FTTSS trainees both inside and out of the colleges of education, and what they can tell us about the quality of initial teacher education. Implicit in our conceptualisation of quality is the centrality of gender equality and the primacy of the female students' experiences. In foregrounding the awardees' experiences and focusing on the non-academic as well as the academic, we bring new insights on quality in ITE.

Considering the trainee academic experiences first, interview, survey and observational data all confirmed that conditions in the colleges of education were extremely difficult. The findings reiterate the concerns raised by the research reviewed earlier in the paper about the quality of pre-service teacher education in Nigeria, and SSA more broadly, as regards the curriculum (including TP, assessment, teaching and learning in English) and pedagogy (including the transmission-style lectures) – such as the disconnect between them and the skills and knowledge needed for school teaching. In addition, the colleges demonstrated a lack of responsiveness (one of Nikel and Lowe's dimensions of quality) in meeting the students' diverse needs, by allocating trainees to courses that they either did not want, or felt unable, to pursue, and/or by failing to provide sufficient language and study skills support to enable them to succeed. Our findings also echo earlier research in Nigeria that has highlighted problems with dilapidated and overcrowded lecture halls, a lack of resources, and the professional development needs of the lecturers (Adelabu, 2005; Umar, 2006; Adekola, 2007; Allsop and Howard, 2009; FME, 2011b). Many trainees struggled academically, resulting in high course repetition, which in turn threatened student retention, learning, attainment and course completion.

For many trainees, however, the main threats to course completion were financial, predominantly due to delayed payments/or non-payments by some sponsors, resulting in stress for awardees and their families, and in some cases withdrawal and drop-out. In addition, and often related to the awardee's precarious financial situation, difficulties with accommodation, transport and living arrangements were reported – which can result in poor college attendance, further stress, which is also

likely to lead to poor concentration, and lost study time – as well as security concerns both on and off campus. These gendered non-academic constraints interacted with, and exacerbated, the academic challenges that awardees faced in a myriad of ways.

Our second major conclusion relates to the specifics of the FTTSS, though with wider implications for the success of other similar scholarship schemes. The FTTSS has reportedly gained widespread appreciation in northern Nigeria and acknowledgment of its positive impact on schools and community members as well as of a projected enhanced position of women in society (EDOREN, 2015). Despite this, and the positive news that all graduates from the programme are reportedly now working as teachers (EDOREN, 2016), the fact that only 45 percent of trainees were reported to have graduated after four years in college in Bauchi, and only 17 percent in Niger (*ibid.*), as mentioned earlier, calls into question both the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme, and ultimately, its sustainability. These figures confirm, as has been noted elsewhere in the Global South, that the awarding of stipends and scholarships, within a narrow gender parity agenda, is not in itself sufficient for achieving the broader aim of gender equality (Aikman and Rao, 2012). In other words, any push to expand the cadre of qualified female teachers needs to be accompanied by improvements to the quality of teacher education. This notion of quality, as emphasised above, relates both to academic and non-academic matters; it needs to take account of, and address, both the genderedness of student experiences – be it the necessity for better childcare services, or secure on-campus accommodation – and the inequitable gendered structures of institution – such as the normalisation of sexual harassment, and lack of effective systems of redress – as well as the ways in which they can all interact and compound social disadvantage.

The perceived failure of ITE to train teachers satisfactorily in SSA, and the increased pressure on pre-service institutions, has resulted in a more recent emphasis on alternative modes of training, such as distance or school-based training (Mattson, 2006; Moon, 2007; Hardman et al., 2011). In Nigeria too, Adekola (2007) has noted a need for research into the relative costs and benefits of different ways of delivering teacher education. We would concur, but argue also that any consideration of the 'benefits' should put the trainees at the centre of the debate, rather than considerations of system efficiency. That said, it is obvious both that more financial investment needs to be made in teacher education, and that resources – such as the disbursement of stipends – need to be administered more efficiently and transparently.

Finally, this study also has implications for research into teacher education more broadly as it underlines the need for studies focusing on the quality of ITE to foreground the experiences of trainees, which are often absent from critiques of pre-service teacher education in Nigeria (Humphreys with Crawford, 2014) and across Sub-Saharan Africa more generally. An analysis of their gendered experiences – including the interaction with rurality, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc – both in and out of college, can offer lessons for future initiatives to increase the number of qualified female teachers in northern Nigeria – and in other similar contexts – as well as offering insights that can help address quality issues within the country's colleges of education more generally. If the quality of teacher education does not improve, to

expand the cadre of better trained, qualified teachers, then the fundamental educational development targets agreed in the MDGs and SDGs, and enshrined in national government policy in Nigeria, will not be achieved.

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