Men who Teach and Leave: An Investigation into Factors that Push Men Out of the Classroom

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Abstract. Feminization of the Trinidad and Tobago teaching profession has been well known for decades with male teachers accounting for approximately one quarter of the teaching service. Several studies have highlighted the value of male teachers as role models for boys. Yet, men continue to exit the teaching service in quest of alternative forms of employment. This study investigated factors that push men out of the classroom in search of alternative forms of employment. Four hundred and fifty-three (453) participants were randomly selected from the northern and southern parts of Trinidad where they once taught. Findings of the study revealed that while approximately 20% of the sample left the teaching service as a result of compulsory retirement, the majority left because of individual and contextual factors ranging from low salary and the desire to explore opportunities for upward mobility, to lack of parental and administrative support. Results of this study have implications for a more robust education policy formation aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago government primary and secondary school system.

Keywords: men; teach; leave; classroom; push factors

1. Introduction

Like other territories, Trinidad and Tobago has experienced an acute shortage of male teachers in the school system for decades. Data from the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education reveal that male teachers account for only twenty-six percent (26%) of the thirteen thousand, three hundred and sixty-six (13, 366) teachers currently in the primary and secondary school system (Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education [MOE], 2014). This situation is further exacerbated by the haemorrhaging of male teachers from the classroom and the concomitant hiring of female teachers to fill the gap. Indeed, the feminization of the teaching profession has been the concern of scholars as well as several governments and media practitioners worldwide (Drudy, 2008; Fischman, 2007; Albisetti, 1993; Trouvé-Finding, 2005). Writing some six years ago, Drudy (2008) reports that, women make up more than ninety percent (90%) of primary teachers in Brazil, Russian Federation, Italy, and Slovakia. A similar trend exists in the United States, United Kingdom, and Ireland where eighty percent (80%) of all primary school teachers are women. In Trinidad and Tobago, women

account for seventy-eight percent (78%) of primary teachers and sixty-nine (69%) of secondary teachers in the school system (MOE, 2014).

1.1   Conceptualizations of Teacher Attrition

When viewed on a macro level, the problem of teacher attrition is significant because of its far reaching impact on the school system. Studies show that attrition rates for beginning teachers are higher than those of more experienced teachers (Liu, 2007). Some of these new teachers identify a number of factors that contribute to their decision to leave. These include factors such as poor working conditions, disruptive students, work overload, lack of acknowledgement and support, and negative school politics (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Kardos, Johnson, Reske, Kauffman & Lui, 2001).

Some novice teachers also complain about the lonely struggle to grapple with the complexities of classroom teaching and management (Cameron, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McCormack & Thomas, 2003). Other researchers report that the most promising and gifted among the beginning teachers appear to be those that are likely leave the profession (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

In attempting to provide explanations for teacher attrition, researchers have identified two broad conceptualizations. The first positions attrition as a problem related to individual and personal factors such as burnout, and family issues. The second conceptualization points to contextual factors of support, salary, professional development, collaboration, and other related factors (Schaefer et al., 2012). Studies show that the problem of burnout may occur more commonly in teaching due to the sense of isolation that the individual sometimes experiences in the profession (Schlichte, Yssel & Merbler, 2005; Yoo, 2011). Burnout also occurs when there is an absence of administrative support, role conflict, and unclear expectations (Schaefer et al., 2012).

The literature also identifies contextual factors as contributing to the flight of teachers from the classroom. Some of these factors include salary, lack of professional development opportunities, lack of collaboration, and student issues (Schaefer et al., 2012; Scherff, 2008; Elfers, Plecki & Knapp, 2006; Patterson, Roehrig & Luft, 2003). Although the discourse on teacher attrition has intensified in North America and Europe since the 1990s, very little has been written about male attrition in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region. This exploratory study aims to fill that gap as it extends the conversation to the Caribbean context. Perhaps the study will also inspire the formulation of an education policy regarding the attraction, recruitment, and retention of male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago government education system.

2.   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate why men choose to leave the Trinidad and Tobago teaching profession in search of employment outside of the classroom. Three research questions set the parameters for this study:

- What are the reasons for men leaving the teaching profession?
- Does a relationship exist between the demographic and individual or contextual factors given for leaving the teaching profession?
- Are there significant differences in the endorsement of personal or contextual attrition factors between northern(urban) and southern (rural) male teachers in Trinidad?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

In a random sample, 453 participants were selected to participate in the study. These men were former teachers in both primary and secondary schools located in the northern and southern parts of Trinidad.

3.2 Measures

This study utilized a survey instrument with 17 items covering three objectives arising from the research questions outlined above. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, respondents were required to express their opinions regarding both personal and contextual reasons for leaving the teaching profession. The following items related to personal factors:

- ✓ I became tired of teaching young children
- ✓ I got a better paying job
- ✓ I wanted to explore better opportunities for upward mobility
- ✓ I felt that I was over-qualified for the job
- ✓ I was burnt out.

Survey items relating to contextual factors included:

- ✓ I was tired of poor student behavior
- ✓ There was too much testing
- ✓ There was inadequate administrative support
- ✓ My students performed poorly at examinations
- ✓ My students complained about my teaching
- ✓ There was little parental support.

The instrument was pilot-tested and feedback from that activity was used to improve the instrument before formally distributing the questionnaires to the research sample.

3.3 Procedure and Analyses

As part of the survey, participants were asked their reasons for leaving the teaching service. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were conducted to provide information about the sample used in the study. Frequency tables were also developed for recording and tabulating demographic responses with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The demographic responses included questions related to teaching experience, qualifications, and level of teaching. Additionally, statistical procedures such as Spearman's rho correlations were used to explore relationships among demographic, personal and contextual factors in the study. In order to determine whether there were significant differences between urban and rural participants in terms of their endorsement of personal or contextual reasons for leaving the

profession, Chi square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) were conducted.

4. Results

Frequency analysis of the data revealed that participants in the study taught in schools in the north and south of Trinidad. This means that they could be classified mainly as teachers from urban (north) and rural (south) areas. As shown in Table 1 there were about 10% more male teachers from the rural region (n=248) than those from the urban area.

The participants were also fairly evenly distributed among primary and secondary school teachers. A breakdown of each sub-grouping had about a quarter of the sample except for lower secondary school that was less than 15% (n=63).

Additionally, the sample was categorized according to teaching experience. The majority of teachers, 42% (n=193), were identified as *developing professionals* while the novice and veterans were about equal with 27% (n=123) and 29% (n=133) respectively. Data were also collected about the ex-teachers' qualifications. As shown in Table 1, the majority had Bachelor's degrees (45%) and one in five had Master's degrees; another 27% (n=123) possessed teacher training qualifications *(teachers diplomas, diplomas in education and technicians diplomas)* and others with lesser qualifications were about 10%.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

Demographic	N (%)
Geographic Location	
North (Urban)	205 (45.3)
South (Rural)	248 (54.7)
Total	453 (100)
Level of Teaching	
Lower Primary (K- Std3)	115 (25.4)
Upper Primary (Std 4&5)	125 (27.6)
Lower Secondary (Forms 1 – 3)	63 (13.9)
Upper Secondary (Forms 4 -6)	139 (30.7)
Teaching Experience	
Novice (0-4yrs)	123 (27.2)
Developing Professional (5-20 yrs)	193 (42.6)
Veteran (>20 yrs)	133 (29.4)
Academic Qualifications	
Master's Degree	92 (20.3)
Bachelor's Degree	205 (45.3)
Teachers' Diploma	97 (21.4)
Diploma in Education	13 (2.9)
Technician's Diploma	13 (2.9)
CXC/Advanced Level Certificate	27 (6.0)
Other	5 (1.1)

The continuous variables depicting reasons for leaving the teaching service were converted to discrete variables in order to conduct frequency counts and percentages of the reasons that teachers gave for leaving the profession. Each reason was converted to a discrete variable as either 'Yes' or 'No' as having been chosen or not chosen as a factor for leaving teaching. More specifically, participants who selected *agree or strongly agree* for any particular reason were identified, creating the discrete variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The demographic factors such as teaching experience (novice, developing professional and veteran), level of teaching (lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary and upper secondary), and qualifications (CXC: CSEC or CAPE, Teacher training certification, Bachelor's degrees and Masters degrees) were used to relate to the reasons in terms of Spearman's rho correlations.

In order to accurately account for the various reasons for leaving the teaching service, those who left because they had reached the retirement age were removed from the data set. This means that data for 81participants were excluded. The remaining participants, minus those with missing data, totaled about 353. Data for these 353 participants were subjected to frequency analyses to account for the reasons given for leaving the teaching service. From Table 2 below, it can be seen that just over one thousand responses were categorized as personal reasons for leaving the teaching service. This means that each of the 353 participants identified an average of 3 out of the 5 personal reasons seen in the Table 2 headings below as being responsible for their departure from the teaching service.

Additionally, it appears that the desire to explore opportunities for upward mobility and jobs offering better remuneration were the two prime reasons that accounted for almost 60% (n=591) of all the personal reasons given for leaving the profession. The third most advanced reason was "burn out" (16%) which was followed by being "over qualified' (14%), and least among the personal reasons given was being "tired of teaching (12.5%)."

Table 2. Personal Reasons for Leaving the Teaching Service

Demographic	Personal Reasons				
	Better paying job	Exploring Upward Mobility	Tired Teaching	Burn-out	Over Qualified
Level of Teaching Lower Primary (K- Std. 3)	80/102	93/101	45/102	55/102	39/101
Upper Primary (Std. 4&5)	69/91	79/91	26/91	50/92	30/92
Lower Secondary (Forms 1 – 3)	39/54	44/55	18/55	20/55	16/54
Upper Secondary (Forms 4 -6)	88/106	99/106	40/105	39/104	58/106
Totals	**276/**353	**315/**353	**129/**353	**164/**353	**143/**353

The data also reveal that participants identified *contextual reasons* for leaving teaching. There were at least 6 contextual reasons: *inadequate administrative*

support, little parental support, student complaints, poor student behaviour, poor student performance and too much testing. Similar to the personal reasons, participants' data were subjected to frequency analyses to account for the contextual reasons given for leaving the teaching service. Table 3 below shows that there were 763 responses. This means that each of the353 participants identified an average of 2 out of the 6 contextual reasons as factors responsible for their departure from the profession.

From the frequency analyses conducted, *lack of parental support* and *inadequate administrative Support* emerged as the two main reasons of all the contextual reasons given for leaving the profession. These two factors accounted for 60% (n=439) of the contextual reasons. The third most advanced reason was "poor student behaviour" with approximately 22%; *too much testing was next with* 13%, and least among the contextual reasons was "student complaints" (2.2%).

Table 3. Contextual Reasons for Leaving the Teaching Service

Demographic	Inadequate Admin Support	Little Parental Support	Student Complaints	Poor Student Behaviour	Poor Student Performance	Too Much Testing
Level of Teaching Lower Primary (K- Std3)	71/102	75/102	6/102	55/101	11/102	32/102
Upper Primary (Std. 4&5)	52/90	59/92	3/92	36/91	8/92	34/92
Lower Secondary (Forms 1 – 3)	27/55	32/55	4/54	27/55	9/55	8/55
Upper Secondary (Forms 4-6)	60/103	63/104	4/106	48/105	15/105	24/104
Totals	**210/**350	**229/**353	**17**/354	**166/**352	**43/**354	**98/**353

In order to explore further relationships among the factors in the study (and answer research question 2 in the study), the data were subjected to Spearman's rho correlations since the variables were ordinal and categorical. Two such correlations were conducted with the personal and contextual factors separately. The first Spearman's rho correlation sought to identify relations among demographic factors such as teaching experience, teacher qualifications and the level of teaching with the personal factors identified earlier (seeking better pay, exploring opportunities for upward mobility, being over-qualified, burn out or being tired of teaching).

The results of the first Spearman's rho correlation revealed that there were negative correlations between teaching experience and leaving the profession for better remuneration and upward mobility. This suggests that the less teaching experience (re: novice and developing professionals) an individual had, the more likely he would explore financial or upwardly mobile opportunities in greener pastures.

While participants' teaching qualifications were positively correlated to exiting the profession because of over-qualification, they were negatively correlated with responses relating to burn-out. This suggests that the higher the qualification above the basic requirement for the teaching post they occupied, the more likely they would leave. However, the more qualified they were, the less they would proffer being *burnt-out* as a reason for leaving.

Analysis of the data revealed that teaching level was also positively associated with leaving teaching due to *over-qualification* but negatively associated with being *burnt-out*. This means that teachers at the secondary level were most likely to leave because they felt *over-qualified* for the job, while those at the lower primary level school were inclined to leave the profession because of *burn-out*.

Table 4. Correlations among Demographic Factors and Personal Reasons for Leaving Teaching

	Better Paying Job	Exploring Upward Mobility	Over Qualified	Tired Teaching	BurnOut
Teaching Experience	-.175**	-.121*	-.075	-.056	.080
Qualifications	.094	-.034	.327**	-.006	-.121*
Teaching Level	.037	.003	.121*	-.039	-.149**
Better Paying Job	____	.388**	.324**	.077	-.041
Exploring Upward Mobility		____	.167**	.015	.001
Over-Qualified			____	.154**	.017
Tired of Teaching				____	.351**
Burn-Out					____

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The second Spearman's rho correlation was conducted using the same demographic factors and the six contextual reasons identified earlier. The correlations revealed that the less qualified participants were more likely to leave because of too much testing. The analysis also reveals that those teaching at lower levels were more likely to leave due to little parental support and too much testing. There were also many interrelations among the six contextual factors, since, as established before, most participants identified multiple contextual factors (see Table 5 for full details).

Table 5. Correlations Among Demographic Factors and Contextual Reasons for Leaving Teaching

Demographics	Poor Student Behaviour	Inadequate Admin Support	Little Parental Support	Student Complaints	Too Much Testing	Poor Student Performance
Teach Experience	.032	-.051	-.033	-.035	.005	-.031
Qualifications	-.031	.097	.043	-.017	-.135*	-.013
Teaching Level	-.050	-.099	-.109*	-.023	-.105*	.057
Poor Student Behaviour	____	.322**	.345**	.186**	.328**	.208**
Inadequate admin Support		____	.350**	.156**	.224**	.143**
Little Parental Support			____	.164**	.127*	.144**
Student Complaints				____	.126*	.241**
Too much Testing					____	.098
Poor Student Performance						____

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In order to answer research question 3 of this study (Are there significant differences in the endorsement of personal or contextual attrition factors between northern (urban) and southern (rural) male teachers in Trinidad?), Chi square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) were conducted using the location demographic and each of the personal and contextual factors.

The results indicated significant findings for only two of the personal factors identified in the study. These factors were *overqualified* and *burn-out*. The results revealed that there was a significant association between location and over-qualification, x^2(1, n=359) = 4.01, p=.045, *phi* =.11 with more teachers in the rural region (45.4%) leaving due to over qualification than those in urban areas (34.5%). With respect to burn-out, the results revealed that there was a significant association between location and burn-out, x^2(1, n=359) = 4.99, p=.025, *phi* =.12 with more teachers in the urban region (52.8%) leaving due to burn-out than those in rural areas (40.5%). These findings mirror those in the Spearman's rho correlations delineated above.

5.   Discussion

This study sought to answer three main questions: (1) What are the reasons for men leaving the teaching profession? (2) Does a relationship exist between the demographic and individual or contextual factors given for leaving the teaching profession? (3) Are there significant differences in the endorsement of personal or contextual attrition factors between northern (urban) and southern (rural) male teachers in Trinidad?

5.1   Reasons for leaving teaching
On a macro level, participants identified personal and contextual reasons for leaving the teaching service. However, more participants identified personal rather than contextual reasons for leaving. This mix of factors was also gleaned from researchers who identified factors that ranged from *work overload to lack of acknowledgement* and *administrative support,* to negative school politics (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Kardos, Johnson, Reske, Kauffman & Lui, 2001). It was also seen that the majority participants who left the profession were categorized as novices and developing professionals (approximately 70% n=316) compared with the veterans (30%). This is similar to findings by Lui (2007) who found that less experienced teachers show higher attrition rates than the more experienced ones.

As a development that departs from previous studies, this research revealed that most, if not all, participants submitted a combination of both personal and contextual reasons for leaving the teaching profession. While these findings might be gleaned from a range of previous papers, this work captures them in one study.

A closer examination of the reasons given reveals that economic and status factors were the most important push or pull factors in the study. Both were identified as personal factors in this study. Schaefer et. al. (2012) reported similar findings where attrition factors included salary and professional development issues.

In this study, those who identified burn-out and 'over-qualified' as attrition reasons were also a significant subset of those advancing personal reasons. Schlichte, Yssel and Merber (2005) and Eflers, Plecki and Knapp (2006) conducted previous research which found that burn-out and a lack of professional development opportunities were critical attrition factors among male teachers as well.

The study also highlighted lack of parental and administrative support as two major contextual factors influencing male flight from the classroom. These findings confirm results of earlier studies where lack of administrative support also featured as an attrition factor (Schaefer, 2012). However, the lack of parental support as an attrition factor appears to be an extension of previous findings.

Issues related to research questions two (2) and three (3) were explored simultaneously as they were more or less the same. The findings for both questions revealed that more than their counterparts in urban areas, male teachers in rural areas tended to leave the profession if they felt overqualified for the job. This is probably due to rural- urban migration where they sought better job prospects nearer to the capital or its environs. Analyses conducted for this question also revealed that urban teachers were more likely than their rural counterparts to leave due to burn-out. This probably suggests that the stress associated with working in inner city schools or those in greater proximity to the city has a telling effect on urban teachers. Conversely, it might suggest that greater support mechanisms for stress related issues are present in the rural rather than the urban educational environment. Nonetheless, these are critical issues for further research and exploration as well as institutional support and policy development.

Classroom and behaviour management as well as assessment issues also came to the fore in terms of other contextual matters that precipitated male teachers' decision to leave teaching. These findings are similar to the results of previous research where it was found that complexities in teaching and classroom management were attrition factors (Cameron, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McCormack & Thomas, 2003).

Further investigation may be needed to examine the most and least important reasons among the personal and contextual factors for leaving the profession. More light also needs to be shed on the areas of support that male teachers require from parents and administrators. There is need also for school administrators to carefully interrogate issues regarding male attrition in order to provide appropriate support at various levels of the school system.

6.   Concluding Comments

This research is important because it addresses the vexing problem of male attrition in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago and by extension the Caribbean region. The situation is compounded when viewed in relation to other social issues such as fatherless homes, the complexity of male identity development, crime, delinquency, and male underachievement in schools. This study has started the discourse in the right direction and should be seen as a catalyst for a more robust education policy formation aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago government primary and secondary school system.

Notwithstanding what has been advised by international researchers, as regional scholars, we propose contextual suggestions that may prove effective. Firstly, education policy makers in Trinidad and Tobago and the region need to find ways to maximize the use of male teachers in the profession who possess advanced academic qualifications. Findings of the study revealed that the desire to explore opportunities for upward mobility and jobs offering better remuneration were the two prime reasons that accounted for almost 60% (n=591) of all the personal reasons given for male flight from the classroom. If we are to retain the services of these male teachers, then some attempts must be

made to categorize these individuals at higher teacher grades with appropriate and competitive remuneration packages.

School administrators also need to be trained to provide the kind of support that male teachers need to function effectively in the classroom. More training and professional development work must be done to equip teachers at all levels with modern classroom management strategies and behaviour management techniques to deal with the complexity of teaching and learning in the 21st century. Assessment strategies, especially those that employ ICT competencies, should be considered an indispensable part of the skill set of the modern teacher. This has the potential to enhance the competencies of those who are inclined to leave because of the multi-testing nature of today's classroom and education systems.

We feel that given the present state of affairs, these and other suggestions from the teachers themselves will go a long way in finding meaningful solutions to the existing problem of male attrition in the Trinidad and Tobago education system.

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