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TEACHER RECRUITMENT PRACTICES, EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, AND LEARNING POVERTY IN NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Learning poverty refers to the inability of learners to read and understand a simple age-appropriate text by age ten, and it remains a profound challenge in Nigeria's public secondary schools. Despite substantial investments in educational reforms, foundational learning deficits continue to rise, largely due to inconsistencies in teacher recruitment and uneven educational quality. This study examined the influence of teacher recruitment practices on educational quality and learning poverty in Nigeria's public secondary schools. Guided by a mixed-method research design, the study sampled 450 teachers and 30 administrators across Lagos State using stratified random sampling. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. Results revealed that teacher recruitment practices significantly predict educational quality ($r = .63$, $p < .01$), and both recruitment practices ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$) and educational quality ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$) significantly predict learning poverty, jointly explaining 46% of its variance. Qualitative findings highlighted systemic constraints such as favouritism, underqualification, resource shortages, and overcrowded classrooms, all of which contribute to poor learning outcomes. The study concludes that transparent, merit-based recruitment and strengthened teacher preparation are essential to reducing learning poverty and improving educational quality. It recommends digitalised recruitment systems, enforcement of TRCN certification, structured mentoring programmes, and enhanced professional development as key strategies for strengthening Nigeria's teacher workforce and achieving SDG 4.

Key Words:
Teacher Recruitment Practices, Educational Quality and Learning Poverty

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Introduction

Education is globally recognised as a central driver of economic competitiveness, social mobility, and human capital development. However, the extent to which education enables these outcomes depends largely on the quality of teaching and learning that occurs within schools. In Nigeria, learning outcomes among students in public secondary schools have continued to decline, with the country experiencing one of the highest learning-poverty rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Learning poverty reflects the inability of learners to acquire foundational literacy and comprehension skills. Teacher recruitment practices lie at the heart of this challenge. When schools recruit unqualified or underqualified teachers, learning quality declines, and learning poverty becomes more pronounced. Conversely, transparent and merit-driven recruitment practices ensure that competent teachers enter the system and deliver high-quality instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Despite various educational reforms, Nigeria's public secondary schools continue to record weak learning outcomes, low literacy levels, poor reading comprehension, and limited mastery of key subjects. A critical factor is the quality of teachers entering the school system. Reports reveal that teacher recruitment in many states, including Lagos, is often influenced by political patronage, favouritism, and irregular screening processes.

Consequently, schools face poor lesson delivery, ineffective assessment strategies, low student engagement, and widening learning disparities. These issues feed directly into learning poverty.

Research Questions

Q1: What teacher recruitment practices exist in public secondary schools?
Q2: How do teacher recruitment practices influence educational quality?
Q3: To what extent does educational quality affect learning poverty?
Q4: What challenges hinder effective teacher recruitment?

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: Teacher recruitment practices have no significant influence on educational quality.
Ho2: Educational quality has no significant effect on learning poverty among students.

Review of Related Literature

Teacher Recruitment Practices

Teacher recruitment practices refer to the processes of attracting, selecting, and appointing qualified individuals into teaching positions. Transparent recruitment involves merit-based assessments, professional vetting, competency testing, and adherence to clear criteria. Teacher recruitment in Nigeria is fraught with bureaucratic bottlenecks, flaws in transparency, nepotism, and inadequate funding (Umar et al., 2024). These issues lead to unequal distribution

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of teachers, shortages in critical subject areas, and failure to match teacher supply with demand. Studies show a significant supply deficit of teachers (about 38.7%), particularly for Nigerian languages and science subjects, and highlight the necessity for policies that guide recruitment according to subject-specific needs (Ugolo, 2025; IISTE, 2025).

Despite recent reforms, such as the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) licensing and qualifying examinations, many secondary schools remain staffed by unqualified or under-qualified personnel (RSIS International, 2025). Gender disparities also persist; public junior secondary schools are more likely to recruit male teachers, contrary to trends in primary education, which can impact inclusivity and student outcomes.

Educational Quality

Educational quality in Nigeria's secondary schools is undermined by inadequate infrastructure, lack of learning materials, and the employment of poorly trained teachers (Kaduna State ESP, 2015). The steady decline in student achievement, particularly in science and technical subjects in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE), underscores the problem. The human resources management literature strongly advocates for hiring well-qualified teachers and providing targeted professional development and compensation to improve teaching quality (International Policy Brief, 2020).

Learning Poverty

Learning poverty is driven by socio-economic constraints, poor motivation, inadequate support, and limited access to basic learning resources. Students from low-income families face barriers such as hunger, inability to pay school fees, and unfavourable learning environments. Empirical investigations reveal that poverty significantly impairs access to education and correlates with low academic performance and weak skill acquisition (RSIS International, 2025).

Interconnections

Flawed teacher recruitment practices directly affect the distribution and quality of teachers, which, in turn, impacts educational quality and deepens learning poverty. Regions with persistent teacher shortages experience higher rates of learning poverty, perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage (Ugolo, 2025). Targeted interventions aimed at merit-based recruitment and equitable teacher deployment are essential to disrupt this cycle. A large and growing literature links education quality to poverty reduction: high-quality schooling builds human capital and improves lifetime earnings, while poor schooling contributes to persistent, intergenerational poverty (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). In the Nigerian context, "learning poverty" is the inability of a child to read and understand age-appropriate text by age ten, which is alarmingly high and is symptomatic of systemic failures, including teacher shortages, poor teacher preparation, and weak governance of teacher deployment and recruitment. These failures reduce the returns on public education spending and limit the capacity of education to serve as an antidote to poverty.

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Methodology

A mixed-method research design was adopted. The population comprised teachers and administrators in public secondary schools across Lagos State. A total of 450 teachers and 30 administrators were selected using stratified random sampling. Instruments for data collection included a structured questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.87$) and an interview guide. Pearson correlation and regression analyses were used for quantitative data, while thematic analysis explored qualitative responses.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

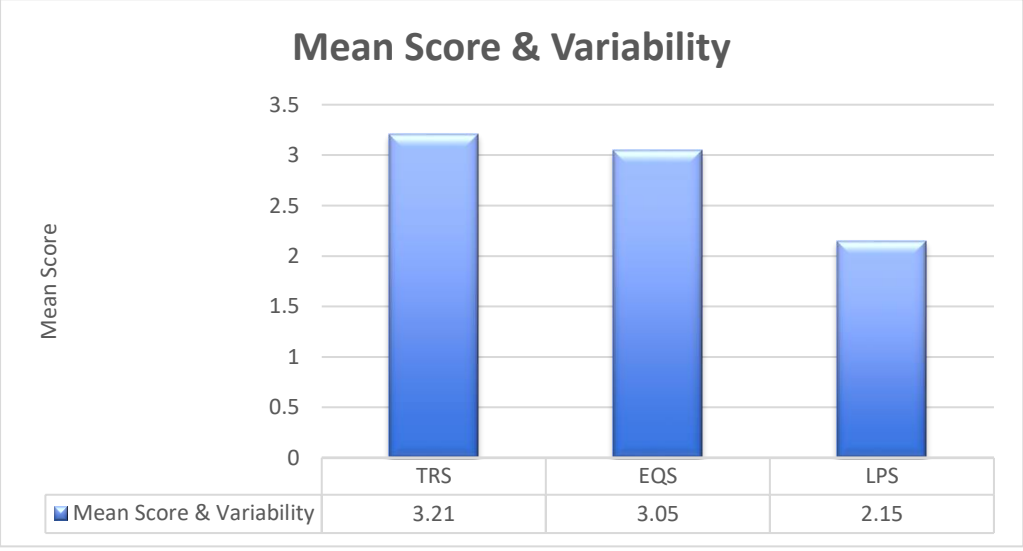
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Teacher Recruitment Score (TRS)	450	3.21	0.74	1	5
Educational Quality Score (EQS)	450	3.05	0.69	1	5
Learning Poverty Score (LPS)	450	2.15	0.81	1	5

Source: Researchers Computation, 2025

The descriptive analysis reveals that teacher recruitment practices and educational quality are perceived as moderate but not optimal. Learning poverty is present but varies significantly, indicating that while some schools fare relatively well, others struggle with severe foundational learning deficits. This underscores the importance of ongoing reform and targeted interventions to improve recruitment, elevate quality, and address learning poverty in Nigeria's public secondary schools.

Figure 1: Mean Score and Variability



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A bar chart showing the mean scores with standard deviation error bars for Teacher Recruitment Score (TRS), Educational Quality Score (EQS), and Learning Poverty Score (LPS). This visual helps to compare the average ratings and the variability for each key variable.

Pearson Correlation Matrix
(Correlation Coefficients between key variables)
Teacher recruitment practices have no significant influence on educational quality.

	Teacher Recruitment Score (TRS)	Educational Quality Score (EQS)	Learning Poverty Score (LPS)
Teacher Recruitment Score (TRS)	1	.63	-.49
Educational Quality Score (EQS)	.63	1	-.58
Learning Poverty Score (LPS)	-.49	-.58	1

Note: All correlations are significant at p<.01p<.01.
Source: Researchers Computation, 202

There is a strong positive correlation between teacher recruitment psractices and educational quality (r=.63,p<.01r=.63,p<.01), indicating that improved recruitment is associated with higher educational quality. Learning poverty shows a moderate and negative relationship with both recruitment practices (r=−.49,p<.01r=−.49,p<.01) and educational quality (r=−.58,p<.01r=−.58,p<.01). Better recruitment practices and improved educational quality are associated with lower learning poverty.

Regression Analysis
Regression: Predicting Learning Poverty from Recruitment and Quality

Variable	B	SE	B	T	P
Recruitment Practices	-0.29	0.05	-.31	-5.8	<.001
Educational Quality	-0.41	0.08	-.37	-7.2	<.001
	3.62	0.44		8.2	<.001

R^2 = .46, F(2,447)=188.2, p<.001
Source Researchers Computation, 2025

Both teacher recruitment practices and educational quality are significant predictors of learning poverty, explaining 46% of the variance. Higher recruitment quality and educational quality correspond to significantly lower levels of learning poverty among students.

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Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Analysis Results (Sample Themes & Quotes)

Theme 1: Recruitment Transparency

"Recruitment is often influenced by favouritism, which affects who is hired and their motivation to teach." (Administrator)

Theme 2: Teacher Preparedness

"Many teachers lack necessary training, impacting students' foundational skills." (Teacher)

Theme 3: Resource Deficits

"Inadequate textbooks and overcrowded classrooms are common challenges." (Teacher)

Theme 4: Impact on Student Outcomes

"Poor recruitment leads to poor teaching, which contributes to students not meeting basic learning standards." (Administrator)

Discussion

The quantitative findings demonstrate that effective teacher recruitment practices strongly predict both improved educational quality and reduced learning poverty among students. These results align with existing research, which links transparent recruitment processes and merit-based hiring to enhanced student outcomes (Ugolo, 2025; Umar et al., 2024). The negative association between teacher recruitment/quality and learning poverty suggests that investments in the recruitment pipeline are pivotal for addressing foundational learning deficits (RSIS International, 2025).

Qualitative data reinforce these findings, highlighting persistent challenges such as a lack of transparency, inadequate professional development, and resource shortfalls (Kaduna State ESP, 2015). Teachers and administrators consistently noted that systemic reform in recruitment and support is essential for breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage. These findings underscore the urgent need for policies that prioritise transparent, data-driven teacher recruitment and ongoing professional support, as recommended in recent educational planning documents (International Policy Brief, n.d.).

Conclusion

Teacher recruitment practices significantly shape educational quality and learning outcomes in Nigeria's public secondary schools. Transparent recruitment improves educational quality and reduces learning poverty. Strengthening recruitment systems is essential for improving human capital and achieving SDG 4.

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Recommendations

i. Digitalise teacher recruitment to improve transparency.
ii. Enforce TRCN certification as mandatory for employment.
iii. Provide structured induction and mentoring for new teachers.
iv. Expand continuous professional development (CPD).
v. Ensure equitable deployment of qualified teachers.
vi. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems.

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