Interplay of Job Demand-Resources, Work Engagement and Performance of Early Career and Experienced Nigerian Teachers in the Mixed-ability Classroom

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PAMAOW05: Learning in Interaction

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June 5, 2024

Abstract

Teachers experience various work pressures and job demands while teaching in the mixed ability classroom. This study explored the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model to understand how early career teachers (ECTs) and experienced teachers' (ETs) experience the interplay of job demands and resources in the mixed-ability classroom in a private nursery and primary school in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 (8 ECTs n=8, ETs n=2) teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings of the interplay of JD-R on ECTs and ETs show that teachers experience Job demands that deplete their personal resources, however, job resources, and online resources enhance their personal resources and they utilize the combination of these three kinds of resources to buffer the impact of job demands, such that they are able to remain engaged with their work and perform their role in the mixed ability classroom.

Furthermore, differences observed between the two career stages indicate that ECTs are more susceptible to risk of attrition due to high job demands while they are new to differentiation and complexities of mixed-ability education. Additionally, ECTs are more likely to engage in job crafting as they seek to adapt to their new role. Both ECTs and ETs use reflection to overcome challenges and pursue improvement in their inclusive practice.

Findings of this study indicate that in-service training should be prioritized to directly increase teachers' job resources and by extension strengthen their personal resources.

Introduction

The one-size-fits-all approach to education is steadily giving way to a growing consciousness that there are diverse kinds of learners in the typical classroom (Murray, et al., 2004; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). This diversity manifests in form of learners' interests, abilities, background knowledge, and so on (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023), which hereby, necessitates the utilization of inclusivity as a management mechanism for diversity (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015).

At the heart of all classroom activities, and specifically, the management of diversity of learner abilities within the mixed ability classroom, is the teacher as agent for facilitating the learning experience and meeting the individual and group needs of learners in the classroom (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). As such, there is a demand on teachers to create an inclusive learning environment through learner-centered instruction design, teaching strategies and classroom leadership approaches that accommodate the heterogeneity of students' learning abilities in their classroom (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017). Studies have, however, shown that, in their bid to cater to the needs of all learners in the classroom, teachers experience various kinds of pressures and demands that tend to hamper their effective classroom functioning, work engagement, performance, students' academic achievement, and might lead to the intention to quit the teaching profession (Ansari, 2013; Heng et al., 2023; Pillen et al., 2013; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017; Xiao, 2020).

In the light of the foregoing, it is apparent that teachers' continued work engagement is essential for their effective goal performance in the mixed-ability classroom. As much as teachers may aim to provide equal learning opportunities in the classroom, job demands experienced by early career teachers and their more experienced colleagues may impede their work engagement, lead to teachers' attrition intention and also affect the academic outcome of their learners. These demanding job characteristics hold true, particularly in Nigeria, the context of this study, where job dissatisfaction and work-related stress are prevalent among teachers, as a result of pressures related to workload and unfavourable work environment and conditions (Ajayi, 2013; Ajayi & Olatunji, 2019; Obineli, 2013).

As much as Nigeria has adopted education as a tool to promote national development and national unity, (Federal Republic of Nigeria -FRN, 2013; Cornelius-Ukpepi & Opuwari 2019) and is growing in commitment to providing inclusive and quality education for all children, Nigerian teachers still experience various demands and pressures in their work in the classrooms which contribute to stress, job dissatisfaction, and poor work engagement and academic outcomes for learners (Ajayi, 2013; Ajayi & Olatunji, 2019; Obineli, 2013; Sijuola & Davidova 2022).

Work pressure experienced by Nigerian teachers, similar to their colleagues across developing countries and indeed around the world, cause them to lose sense of efficacy, motivation and work engagement, develop job dissatisfaction and experience stress that could ultimately lead to them quitting the profession (Ajayi & Olatunji, 2019; Fernet et al. 2016; Harmsen et al. 2018; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022; Newberry & Allsop 2017; Sijuola & Davidova 2022). Furthermore, when the pressures posing challenges to their work engagement and positive role performance in the classroom are not effectively addressed, it has a negative impact on students' academic achievement (Gwambombo, 2013; Melnick & Miester, 2008, Shahzad & Naureen, 2017).

To gain a deep understanding of the intricacies of teachers' lived experience of job demands and resources in relation to their work in the Nigerian Mixed-ability classroom, a qualitative approach is adopted for this study. And to further gain detailed insight into how teachers at different career stages experience JD-R in this context, the perception of Early Career Teachers (ECTs) and Experienced Teachers (ETs) are compared.

An understanding of these job demands, and resources with which teachers buffer them, is crucial for improving teacher professional development design and institutional intentionality in creating work environments that increase teachers' job resources and promoting their work engagement and goal performance in the inclusive classroom.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework describes the JD-R model and its application with teachers' work engagement and performance, the mixed-ability classroom and teachers' career stages.

Job Demand-Resources Model of Work Engagement

The Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model of work engagement developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) is a conceptual framework that combines theories on job design and job stress to explain the dynamic effects of job demands, job resources and personal resources on employee work engagement and performance.

Figure 1.

The JD-R Model of Work Engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008)
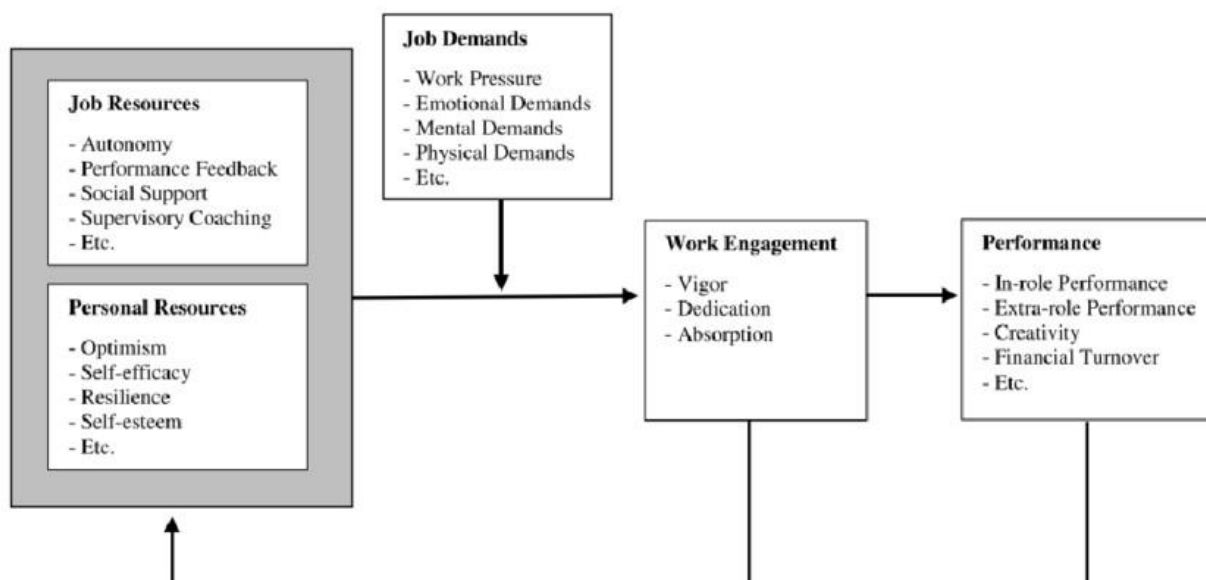
The theory was extended to capture job crafting as employee initiative to adjust work characteristics to align with their interests and strength, and also provides a flexible lens to understand outcomes of the interplay of JD-R on employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Teachers' JD-R work engagement and performance

According to the JD-R model, job demands are aspects of a job which involve mental or physical efforts which may lead to health impairments, exhaustion, and stress. Job resources are the physical, social, or organizational components of a job that promote work engagement, and employee performance; decrease job demands, and lessen their associated physiological and psychological pressures (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Personal resources are connected to individual resiliency, and refer to a person's self-evaluations that enable them to effectively influence and control their environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Hobfoll et al., 2003).

Work engagement refers to a positive, satisfying, work-related mindset that is exemplified by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor describes high energy and mental resilience, perseverance during challenges and readiness to devote effort to work. Dedication refers to a sense of inspiration, pride, enthusiasm, and challenge associated with work involvement; and absorption involves being so happily immersed in work that passage of time is unnoticed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Teachers' job demands

The teaching profession has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations (Carton & Fruchart, 2014). Studies have shown that due to various job demands, teachers are some of the professionals that are more prone to experience physical and psychological health impairments and job dissatisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005). Teaching has been shown to be a

profession that requires constant one-on-one interaction with pupils, and demanding high emotional effort from teachers, particularly regarding learners' attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Brown et al., 2002; Hakanen et al., 2006).

Job demands such as workload and student misbehavior have been linked to teachers' feelings of psychological well-being, burnout and emotional fatigue, health impairments, reduced self-efficacy, work commitment, job satisfaction and increased attrition intention (Collie et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017).

Teachers' job and personal resources

Teachers' job resources include work situations that provide a positive connection with their job satisfaction. Work environment that allow autonomy and offer cooperative and supportive relationships with colleagues, leaders and parents (Collie et al., 2012; Fernet et al., 2013; Hakanen et al., 2006; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Simbula et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Xia et al., 2022), and professional development opportunities (Hakanen et al., 2006; Simbula et al., 2011; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017).

Additionally, studies have shown that helpful relationships with colleagues and leadership in the school contribute positively, not only to teachers' work engagement and job satisfaction, but also supports their psychological and physical well-being. Teachers' self-confidence, sense of belonging, role performance, commitment to the school and the teaching profession seem to be positively related with supportive school culture (Collie et al., 2012; Meredith et al., 2022; Richter et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Teachers' personal resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and organizational based self-esteem contribute to reduced job burnout, health impairments, and improved work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Self-efficacy indicates teachers' belief in their ability to perform their duties, teaching and supporting learners' needs (Bottiani, et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers' personal resources are positively connected with effective classroom management and instruction, and improved student academic performance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001).

Teachers' engagement and performance

According to Wingerden et al., (2017), the combination of job and personal resources offer the most significant predictions of teacher work engagement. Findings indicate the double role of teachers' job demands, presenting the negative relationship between job demands and work engagement. High job demands may induce chronic stress, physical and emotional exhaustion, reduce job satisfaction and thus impair teachers' work engagement, studies indicate that teacher stress has a negative effect on their work performance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Intention to quit

Teachers' intention to quit is an outcome of the interplay of teachers' JD-R and work engagement that is of great concern to the teaching profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers are prone to considering leaving their jobs when they experience high job demands such as excessive workload, physical and emotional stress, and students' misbehavior . The pressures associated with meeting diverse students' needs in inclusive classrooms intensify these demands, reduced teachers' job satisfaction and lead to burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Furthermore, deficiency of professional development, and support of school leaders and colleagues, may also contribute to teachers' intention to quit (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers require resources and a supportive environment to cope with the demands of inclusive education, maintain their wellbeing and job satisfaction in order to function effectively in the mixed-ability classroom.

Job Crafting

Job crafting refers to individuals' initiatives to modify their work tasks, relationships, and perceptions, to align their jobs with their personal interests and strengths (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Such proactive behavior increases employees' sense of control, job satisfaction and reduces stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This is essential for teachers to effectively handle the wide range of demands they face in the classroom.

Through job crafting, teachers can reshape their work experiences to become more fulfilling and less overwhelming. This creative approach is beneficial for teachers to cope with the high demands of working in the inclusive classroom. They are able to increase resources and cope with the demands associated with supporting individual learning needs of all their learners (Murangi & Bailey, 2022). Job crafting is essential to promote work engagement, role performance and wellbeing (Tims et al., 2015). Thus, by engaging in job crafting, teachers are able to better manage their work demands, improve their work engagement, and sustain their commitment to providing equal learning opportunities for all students.

The JD-R model is suitable for this study because it offers a structured and comprehensive framework to interpret how various job characteristics and resources interact to influence the experiences of teachers in the mixed-ability classroom. The model is flexible and versatile, making it widely applicable to understand employees' work characteristics and performance in different job contexts, and is particularly relevant to educational settings.

The mixed ability classroom

Inclusivity in the classroom is a broad concept that encompasses cultural, language, learning ability, socio-economic, and other forms of diversity, and mixed-ability classroom speaks to the diversity among learners and how the classroom is positioned to provide equal

learning opportunities to all learners with their different learning needs (Asalu, 2017; Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Murray, et al., 2004; Zembylas, 2010). The mixed-ability classroom provides education for students with diverse levels of readiness, interest, motivation, personality type, and previous knowledge (Chapman & King, 2009; Haager & Klingner, 2005; Valiandes, 2015).

Learners in the mixed ability classrooms may have large differences in their learning skills; students will not make sense of things the same way because they come from diverse knowledge backgrounds. Significant differences in their pace and rate of learning makes a task challenging for some learners but boring to others, hence students in a classroom require different types and amounts of instruction, because they construct knowledge in different ways (Tomlinson, 2017). The mixed-ability classroom does not only recognize the differences among typically developing children but also recognizes and includes children with learning disabilities or special education needs SEN (Michael & Oboegbulem, 2013, Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Saloviita, 2020).

In Nigeria, the concept of inclusive education is still at the very nascent stages (Michael & Oboegbulem, 2013). From the literature, it appears there presently exists mainly, a broad recognition of the distinction between students with learning disabilities and those without disabilities and less insight into diversity among typically developing learners. As such, the inclusive classroom is generally seen as one that incorporates the education of both special education needs students and those without learning disabilities (Michael & Oboegbulem, 2013; Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020).

There is a general consensus that all classes comprise students with diversity of attributes; the average classroom comprises learners with a variety of abilities and skills and teachers have to simultaneously engage, lead and deliver instruction to the learners at group and individual levels (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Ansari, 2013; Tomlinson, 2003; Tomlinson, 2017). Teaching a mixed ability classroom demands the creation of a dynamic classroom environment that is adaptive to the diverse learning needs and ability levels of all students in the class (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012; Tomlinson, 2017). Leading, managing, planning and delivering instruction in the mixed ability classroom, often puts the teacher in demanding situations and exposes them to various work pressures (Hove, 2022). Studies have shown that teachers experience pressures and job demands in mixed ability classes when offering differentiating instruction to learners. Implementation of differentiated instruction is one of the most challenging tasks teachers have to incorporate into their classroom practice in recent times (Tomlinson, 2003).

Differentiated instruction is a pedagogical teaching and learning approach that strives to match learning tasks and activities with the needs of individual learners, in order to maximize students' learning opportunity (Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2017). Apart from the work pressures

associated with differentiated instruction, teachers experience the typical emotional demands and physical demands of the teaching profession. As commonly found in the literature, teachers often experience physically challenging work situations (Brouhier et al., 2023; Cassidy et al., 2017; Tsai et al., 2006). Especially in early years education and primary school settings, teachers' daily activities involve continual physically demanding movements such as squatting, bending, lifting and carrying children (Brouhier et al., 2023; Randall et al., 2023). The physical, emotional and cognitive demands of the profession may lead to lower self-efficacy of early career and more experienced teachers over time (Day & Gu, 2007; Paquette & Rieg, 2016).

The various work pressures and challenges that teachers experience in catering to the heterogeneous learning needs of students in their mixed ability classroom places demands on them and require various resources for them to sustain their engagement with their work and achieve their goals as effective teachers (Drakenberg, 2001; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022; Lindgren, 2005).

However, how teachers perceive and cope with everyday demands in their classrooms may differ from person to person based on their knowledge, worldview, priorities, perception of alternatives, and also depending on their level of experience in their career trajectory (Carton & Fruchart, 2014; Kelchtermans, 2009; Sumsion, 2000).

Teachers' career stages

Early career teachers (ECTs) and experienced teachers (ETs) are separated mainly by years of experience; studies range the experience trajectory for ECTs to be 0-5 years of service (Araujo, et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Makoa & Segalo, 2021; Semingson & Smith, 2016). Often also referred to as beginning teachers, new teachers, novice, or newly qualified teachers, ECTs are teachers in the early stages of their career who have newly joined the profession and are trying to form their own professional ideology as well as their personal teaching and class management style (Araujo, et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Makoa & Segalo, 2021; Semingson & Smith, 2016). They have been described as newcomers to the profession who are trying to adapt to the dynamics of teaching while being potential influencers of change in the status quo (Coppe et al., 2024; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Beginning teachers have similar experiences with their more experienced colleagues, such as the need for support and development (Coppe et al., 2024), however, there are some areas where beginning teachers differ from their more experienced colleagues. Beginning teachers have been found to benefit from supportive relationships and collaborative interactions within the school environment to cope with demands of classroom management and challenging experiences with student behavior (Burke, 2015).

Support of colleagues and mentors has also been found to reinforce their sense of efficacy

and professional identity, contributing to improved work performance and sense of commitment to the school (Chan et al., 2008). Thus when the required support is not provided, early career teachers may experience a decline in their self-efficacy and professional identity. Melnick (2008) found that early career teachers experience more overwhelm from workload and organization requirements of their jobs than experienced teachers, and they consider themselves to be unprepared to manage varying learner abilities. However he noted that this was due more to increasing multidimensional pressures on educators than level of teachers' preparation. A notable distinction that exists in the experiences of early care teachers and experienced teachers is that early-career teachers are sometimes initially fazed by the complexity of being new to the teaching profession and the need to quickly familiarize themselves with practical aspects of teaching (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Melnick, 2008)

More experienced teachers (ETs), are here defined as teachers with 6 years and above on their career trajectory often possessing higher level of expertise (Barkauskaitė, 2017; Graham et al., 2020; Kelchtermans, 2019; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022). More experienced teachers, like the ECTs, have been identified to need training on how to effectively lead an inclusive classroom in order to cope with the increasingly complex demands of supporting diverse learner needs (Drakenberg 2001; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022; Lindgren 2005). However, unlike early career teachers who derive valuable socio-environmental support from interactions within the school context, more experienced teachers more often prefer to operate individually, particularly when it comes to professional development activities or programs (Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022).

While more experienced teachers may not be found to experience as much decline with professional identity as beginning teachers, they do experience pressures and job demands that impact negatively on their work engagement. For instance, Torenbeek and Peters (2017) noted that the majority of experienced teachers experience demands relating to workload, unrealistic expectations and pressure from society and parents, lack of autonomy and influence on decisions and activities planning, and limited resources and knowledge to influence change within the classroom or school.

This Present Study

The purpose of this study is to uncover how the interplay of job demands, job and personal resources relate to how early career and experienced teachers experience their work in the mixed ability nursery and primary classroom in Nigeria.

There are many studies on various factors that affect teachers' work engagement as key agents for learning within the classroom setting from various parts of the world (Beijaard et al., 2004; Gwambombo, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lau et al., 2022), several studies have been done in Nigeria around challenges related to inclusive education in the Nigerian classroom, but

mostly focusing on classes consisting of learners with disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Cornelius-Ukpepi & Opuwari 2019; Obineli, 2013; Sijuola & Davidova 2022). However, there is a dearth of recent research, precisely on the lived experiences of Nigerian teachers regarding job demands and resources of early career and experienced teachers in the mixed ability classroom.

An understanding of these demands and teachers' coping resources is crucial for informing professional development design and educational policy formulation, to support teachers' improved classroom functioning, continued work engagement in the face of pressures and demands of differentiation and inclusivity in their classrooms.

The research questions guiding the study are:

RQ 1: How does the interplay of job demands and resources relate to teachers' experience of their work in the mixed-ability classroom in a private nursery and primary school in Nigeria?

RQ 2: How do these experiences differ for early-career and experienced teachers?

Methods

Design

A qualitative research approach was adopted to conduct this study, using opportunity sampling method to select the study participants from a suitable school in Nigeria with which the researcher has contact. The instrument for this study was semi-structured interview which was adopted to give enough room for each participant to present an authentic personal angle, voice and direction in the description of their lived experience while the researcher was able to center the conversation on the focus of the research questions (Brinkmann, 2020). Thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the data from the interviews.

The research was originally designed to uncover tensions experienced by early career and more experienced teachers in the mixed ability classroom and interpret the findings based on activity theory. However, emerging results indicated that findings could not be adequately explained with activity theory. The JD-R model was selected in consultation with the researcher's supervisor because it offers a structured and detailed lens through which to interpret how various job characteristics and resources interact to influence the experiences of teachers in the mixed-ability classroom. The research questions were also changed accordingly, to link the results and the JD-R model.

Participants

The target group for this study were beginning and experienced teachers with teaching experience ranging from less than 2 years to 5 years for early career teachers (n = 8) and 6 years and above for more experienced teachers (n = 2). Number of participants was 10 teachers of the nursery and primary sections of a private school from an upper-middle income area of Ibadan,

Nigeria. The nursery section comprises playgroup and nursery classes with children aged 2-3 and 4-5 years respectively while the primary section has children aged 6-10 years.

The participating teachers were all females, ages ranging from 23-42 years. The school offers a combination of Nigerian and British curriculum with Montessori child centered principles (Bavli & Kocabaş, 2022). The school engages in in-service training and mentoring and all teachers had knowledge of the mixed ability classroom, classroom management and leadership, and differentiated instruction. The school operates inclusive education, trains teachers to support children with special education needs (SEN) and also accommodates shadow teachers provided by parents for their SEN children.

The researcher had no prior relation with any of the participants. She only has a relationship with the proprietress of the school who is a mentor to her.

Concepts and tools

In order to have a rich exploration of the tensions experienced by Early-Career Teachers (ECT) and Experienced Teachers (ET) in their processes of supporting the learning needs of diverse range of learning abilities in a mixed ability classroom, an individual semi-structured interview was conducted with the participating teachers. The semi-structured interview guide comprised 10 open-ended questions based on which the researcher could ask further follow-up questions to gain richer insight towards answering the research questions.

Before proceeding with questions, the researcher welcomed the participant, reviewed the information about purpose and process of the interview and confirmed their consent to participate. The interviews started with an introductory question to open up a smooth conversation and build rapport with the interviewee, followed by transition questions leading to the core interview questions (IQ) that provided insight into the participant's experience and supplied answers to the research questions; and thereafter concluding questions were used to close the conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interview guide and the relation between the interview questions and research questions is reported in Appendix 1.

Interview questions were tested in a pilot run with two teachers within the researcher's network who are not part of the intended participants. The test run interview was conducted in order to determine the level of clarity of the IQs and to ensure that they invoke responses that answer the research questions. Based on the observations from the pilot testing, the questions were refined appropriately to suit each of the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Procedure

The researcher contacted the proprietress of the selected school via Whatsapp and explained the purpose of the study to her. She in turn connected the researcher with the Head of School (HOS) via Whatsapp. Thereafter, all correspondence with the school was through the

HOS, via email, for letter of introduction, consent forms and virtual interview links, and via Whatsapp for scheduling, availability notifications and other virtual meeting logistics.

The purpose of the study and modality details of interview recordings were discussed with the HOS. All information and forms were disseminated to the participant through the HOS. There was no direct communication with any of the teachers before and after the interviews. The letter of introduction explaining the purpose, nature and process of the interview for the study, how personal data would be pseudonymized and used only for the purpose of the research were sent by the HOS to each participant.

Consent forms were also sent by the HOS to each teacher and all returned to her. Filled and signed consent forms from all participants were sent to the researcher by the HOS. The researcher and the HOS resorted to Whatsapp for collection of filled and signed consent forms because the HOS experienced recurrent technical issues and all attempts to return the forms by email failed to deliver.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 29 to 48 minutes, and were conducted and recorded digitally via Kultura Classroom on Brightspace. Virtual interview was well suited for accessing the participants who were all located in Nigeria. This bridged the accessibility gap for the research and the technology provided an opportunity that is very similar to a face-to-face interview (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Additionally, the Kultura classroom tool was preferred because it stores data within the university's secure cloud storage environment, ensuring that respondents' personal data were not accessible to third parties.

Data Management and Analyses

Interview responses were first transcribed via video transcription function in the Kaltura classroom. This transcript lacked accuracy due to omissions and wrongly transcribed words and phrases. This necessitated a follow-up transcription using intelligent verbatim to produce an edited transcript by listening and filling-in omitted portions of the recordings, correcting wrongly transcribed words, and using punctuations helped to produce a more readable version of the interview content. Thereafter, all participants' names and names mentioned during the interviews were pseudonymized.

The transcript was thereafter analyzed by organizing the data using thematic analysis with deductive and inductive iterative approach (Chandra & Shang 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Swain, 2018). For the original analysis of teacher tensions, codes were identified manually from transcript quotes, and categorized under themes such as tensions, pedagogical knowledge, self-efficacy, training, support, autonomy, and experience.

The second round of analysis based on the JD-R model was however conducted using Atlas.ti Microsoft Windows version 24, in order to save time on coding. All interview transcripts

were uploaded to the software and categorized into two groups- early career and more experienced teachers. The deductive analysis was processed through the themes generated from the JD-R model. Codes were categorized under job demands, job resources, personal resources, work engagement and job performance, using the sub themes under each component of the model to identify and assign codes from the dataset. Inductive analysis occurred concurrently, in an iterative process, using open coding. New codes and patterns such as reflection, online resources, and negotiating autonomy, emerging from the data, were categorized and linked to the JD-R model with extensions of the model such as job crafting and intention to quit.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure ethical compliance, information and consent forms were given to enlighten and secure the consent of each participant (Pietilä et al., 2020). The use of intelligent verbatim editing correcting the machine generated transcript from Kaltura classroom helped to promote reliability and validity of the data collection (MacLean et al., 2004; Halcomb & Davidson 2006). Additionally, the researcher used comments to meticulously document definitions of codes in the Atlas.ti environment to promote consistency and reliability of codes (Terry et al., 2017).

Positionality statement

I am a middle-aged Nigerian woman with over 20 years teaching experience across early years, primary and secondary classes. My educational background cuts across communication and language arts, social work and education.

My research interests revolve around differentiated learning, curriculum design and development, and interpersonal classroom interactions. This explains why I aimed to uncover the experience of Nigerian teachers regarding their delivery of differentiated instruction in this research. I acknowledge that my background in social work and social welfare constitutes an affective lens through which I view education, learners, teachers and their classroom interactions and functioning. This lens combines with my background and experience as student and teacher in the Nigerian educational system to shape how I viewed and operationalized tensions more as affective internal conflicts than ethical dilemmas teachers experience in the mixed-ability classroom.

My relationship with the proprietress of the selected school afforded me access to the participants but did not influence their interview responses or the knowledge produced from the data they supplied.

Results

The results are presented showing the interplay among demands experienced by ECTs, followed by the interplay among resources, demands, work engagements and performance, job

crafting and highlights intention to quit as an outcome of this interplay. Thus giving an overall view of findings for the two research questions.

Figure 2.

Interplay of Teachers' JD-R Model of Work Engagement.
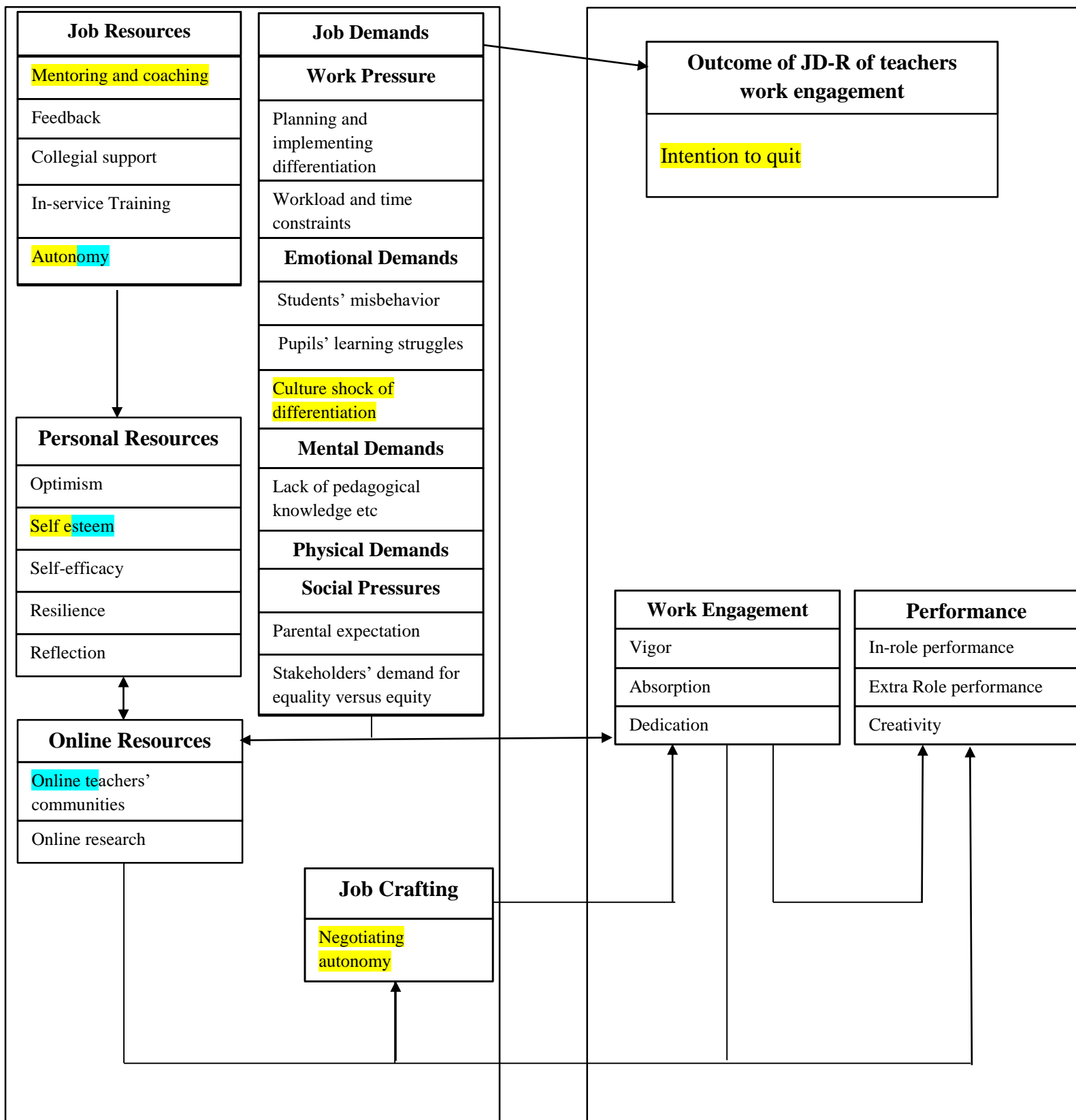
Key: Comparison of ECTs and ETs experience of JD-R of work engagement.

Same ☐   Different for ECTs �yellow▏   Different for ETs ▏cyan▏

Job Demands

Work pressures

Work pressures experienced by teachers were reported in the form of demands and

pressures associated with planning and implementing differentiation, and workload and time constraint.

Planning and implementing differentiation

Attending to the individual needs of all learners in the classroom is perhaps the most demanding of work pressures for teachers. Both ECTs and ETs reported experiencing work pressure when planning lessons or considering how to deliver instruction to all the learners and particularly how to ensure they do not exclude the low achieving or SEN pupils. "How do I plan it in such a way that she also is going to, ... benefit and then she won't be left out." (Ms Lola). ... "Also, you just have to go the extra mile at doing things so that none of them will be left. It takes a turn on you as a teacher."(Ms Ope).

Workload and time constraint

Workload and time constraint were identified as a combined source of work pressure for both ECTs and ETs: "there was definitely pressure for time because you look at the curriculum, there is an amount of topics you have to cover" (Ms. Ire).

It was found that teachers were able to buffer the demands of workload and time constraints, and planning and implementing differentiation with job resources such as training, collegial support and mentoring: "at the training ... this issue came up with the difficulties that we're having in classes. So...we brainstormed together and were able to find- so let's try this..." (Ms Ara).

Emotional demands

Teachers experienced emotional demands regarding pupils' misbehavior and academic struggles, and the culture shock of differentiation practice. These emotional demands could be linked to lack of pedagogical knowledge.

Class management

Early career teachers reported experiencing emotional demands from students' misbehavior due to class management challenges as a result of lack of knowledge of task differentiation for each ability level, resulting in children's misbehavior when unengaged and bored. While such a teacher worked with middle and low ability learners, high ability learners distract the class once they finish their own task: "I give them the same worksheet, ... the high ability will finish up and then start disturbing others... and the child was ...just distracting ... It was just frustrating for me."(Ms. Ayo).

Pupils' learning struggles

Pupils' learning struggles pose emotional demands on both early career and more experienced teachers: "as a teacher, I feel very unfulfilled when my learners are not ... achieving what's the set goal" (Ms. Iyin). Emotional demand may lower teachers' self-efficacy as they tend to

question their teaching methods and become confused about which approach to deploy to aid different learners: **"I feel so confused…when you've explained, explained, explained… and the child is still not getting it, oh my God, what else on this earth would I use to introduce this to the child?" (Ms Iyin).**

Culture shock of differentiation

Despite their teacher training background, ECTs expressed remarkable emotional pressure concerning initial culture shock of the practicalities of differentiation and transitioning from theory to practice.

> I felt as if I didn't know anything. Like it was as if I just had NCE (National Certificate of Education) and then I had I had degree and then I was looking like somebody that did not even go to school at all. Because I'm saying that I studied education and then I'm in a class,… I do not have knowledge of what I'm supposed to do. Because when I just started, I think for the first two weeks or three weeks, I kept running to the HOS' (Head of School) office like, please, I do not know this, please come to my class, … It was looking like I was empty, I felt bad" (Ms Lara).

Mental Demands

Two significant mental demands that emerged from the findings are lack of pedagogical knowledge and inadequate knowledge of differentiation.

Lack of pedagogical knowledge

Both ECTs and ETs' experience of mental demands was shown to come mainly from lack of pedagogical knowledge of differentiation strategies. "it was really challenging because I didn't even know… there's something like different abilities in the class in the first place." (Ms Ayo), "I prepare my lesson plan about three, four weeks (ahead).

Inadequate knowledge of differentiation

Differentiating assessment was also reported as a mental demand for ECTs: "I'm like, should I just do the same thing for everyone or should I differentiate them truly as they are?" (Ms Jola). Teachers seem to find it difficult to assess different ability groups in the class. They indicated conflicts regarding how to assess low-ability pupils. Specifically, if they should test low ability pupils based on their approximate competence level, or based on the expected level of competence for the whole class; also considering that parents would expect excellent performance.

Physical demands

Results show that both early career and experienced teachers experience demands as a result of physical exertion required to give individualized attention to all pupils when facilitating or monitoring their learning progress in the classroom, for example during a learning task. "I'll

keep going back and forth to start checking up on what they've been able to get … It is stressful and demanding." (Ms Lara). These results indicate that physical demands that teachers experience are a source of stress which may contribute to intention to quit: "If we're not jumping outside today, we are watching a video… it taxes … I actually wanted to quit because it was stressful" (Ms Lara).

Social pressures

Social pressures reported by teachers are parental expectations, stakeholders" demand for equality versus equity.

Parental expectations

Teachers experienced social pressure from parents' expectations of what their children ought to have covered at a certain time of the school term: "There's always high expectation from parents, why is my child not doing this when his friend is already doing this? "(Ms Dara) "Especially when it's a class with different arms and you're not the only teacher, and parents compare their children's work… that comparison makes you feel a bit tense"(Ms Dara).

The pressure from parents may also combine with the emotional pressure the teachers may already experience due to their pupils' learning struggles and lagging behind with covering the curriculum.

Stakeholders demand for equality versus equity

Findings show that teachers also experience social pressures regarding stakeholders' demand for equality versus equity. Parents and pupils alike express dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of attention, resources and opportunities given SEN pupils or low ability learners compared to typically developing or high performing members of the class. The following quote shows a typically developing pupil's reaction to a special education needs classmate being exempted from some rules at the class' spelling bee: "the mom of one of them came to speak with me that he (George's classmate) does not understand why we had to exempt George from the rule that was given to all of them." (Ms Ara).

Job Resources

Resources that teachers identified within the school context include training, feedback, collegial support, mentoring and coaching, and autonomy.

In-service training

One of the notable job resources reported by both ECTs and ETs is in-service training provided by the school. Teachers found training a useful resource for reducing the impact of work pressures, emotional and mental job demands: "I have knowledge of what to do now… my first two years' experience, it was more of struggling and then I've learnt so much and with the trainings, that's really helped me on how to manage my class." (Ms Ayo). Training is shown to

help teachers resolve the challenges that arise from lack of pedagogical knowledge about the strategies to deploy for differentiation: "I was able to use different methods for the kids… which I learned on the job. So I think it's a progressive … training." (Ms Lola). Training is found beneficial for improving teachers' self-efficacy.

Feedback

Only early career teachers reported experience of feedback provided by mentors or colleagues. Feedback was indicated as useful for improving personal teaching style and getting integrated into the school culture " right now, there's a little bit of … better structure than when I began" (Ms Jola), "everybody was like, no, this is not how they do it here" (Ms Jola). More experienced teachers tend to rely on other interpersonal job resources such as collegial support and online teachers' communities.

Collegial support

Findings indicate that both ECts and Ets use collegial support to buffer job demands. Teachers reported using support of colleagues to cope with demands of lack of pedagogical knowledge. "We have this review that we do… whatever we're finding difficult, we discuss them" (Ms Ara). Additionally, intention to quit among ECTs, as a result of emotional demands, workload, and health impairment associated with teaching a mixed-ability classroom, was resolved through collegial support:

> It was too much, it was a lot of work to me. I was at the verge of quitting then, it was… my colleagues,.. that kept on advising and saying that I should not worry. I should just be reading about autism…" (Ms Lara).

Mentoring and Coaching

Results show that ECTs tend to reduce the cost of mental and emotional pressures related to unfamiliarity and culture shock associated with being new to the operations of the mixed-ability classroom through coaching and mentoring within the school: "I speak with the head teacher… because of her … wealth of experience, teaching,… she's able to give…timely advice as to how to handle a child appropriately" (Ms Lola). More experienced teachers did not report any experience of coaching or mentoring. This may be because they perceive themselves to be well established in their teaching strategies over the years.

Autonomy

The degree of liberty teachers perceive themselves to have for independent decision-making within their classrooms as agents within the school context is a resource that ECTs leverage more than ETs. ECTs differ from more experienced teachers in how they perceive autonomy. ECTs seemed more inclined to challenge the status quo and negotiate for greater autonomy. They reported seeking to get the school leadership to buy into their ideas, methods

and strategies that are novel to the school's established system: "…whoever you want to bring it forward to, to explain what you think, even if we're not doing it yet, at least I think we should do it this way." (Ms Jola). Experienced teachers tend to seek to be aligned and compliant with the existing school system: "Whatever ideas you have, you have to run it by the school authority and see that it aligns with the school policy" (Ms Ara).

Personal Resources

ECTs and ETs both use personal resources such as optimism, self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, and reflection to reduce the costs of various job demands.

Optimism

Both ECTs and ETs reported a sense of optimism which helped them to stay engaged with their work in spite of challenges, and continue to pursue improvement for themselves and for their pupils: "there is always room to help every child to get better. It's just very good to be optimistic about every child irrespective of their ability" (Ms. Lola).

Self esteem

Early career teachers were found to be more positive in their self-esteem than more experienced teachers. This may be because ECTs perceive themselves as improving in their understanding of appropriate differentiation approaches for their individual learners, which also reflects in their pupils' learning achievement: "I'm really proud of myself… I would even commend myself, …I understand, and I'm working on,… better approaches" (Ms Jola), "the joy is at the end of the term when they are being assessed they perform very well, perform very well, … that, over time, builds my confidence" (Ms Dara).

More experienced teachers, on the other hand, displayed somewhat negative self-esteem, particularly regarding autonomy and decision making in the classroom: "sometimes I don't trust myself when it comes to making decisions. I try as much as possible to also speak to fellow educators, … as much as possible to even join groups" (Ms. Iyin). ETs benefited from collegial support within the school and from online communities to address their decision making inadequacies and improve confidence in their own professional judgment. Self esteem is shown to benefit teachers in coping with emotional and social pressures.

Self-efficacy

Both Early career teachers and more experienced teachers indicated having a sense of self-efficacy. This personal resource is also shown to be useful for teachers to cope with emotional and social pressures, for example, when parents complain about their classroom inclusivity efforts. Particularly when parents do not understand why resources or teaching approaches are differentiated among children in the same classroom. For instance, an ECT boldly defended her choice to separate an autistic child from the rest of the classmates, to train

the child in self-regulation and curb her aggressive tendencies towards other pupils: "So I explained to the mom, I've done this because- look at this person..., I showed her the marks on their body and I told her this was done by the same child" (Ms. Iyin). Self-efficacy is shown to benefit from training and research and also useful to buffer emotional and work demands:"I know that my knowledge has increased, things that normally would have made me tensed and worried now make me to know that what I need to do is to learn more about the particular thing" (Ms Dara), "because of the diverse training we've received and the personal experiences that I've had, books I've read... they also help me to make the right decision...." (Ms Tope).

Resilience

Results indicate that both ECTs and ETs used resilience as a personal resource to buffer the emotional demands of pupils' learning struggles: "never say never. No matter how tough or discouraging the performance of a child is" (Ms. Lola). Through resilience teachers are able to continue working with the pupils over time until their academic performance improves.

Reflection

Both ECTs and ETs use reflection to draw learning points from emotionally demanding work situations such as pupils' learning struggles: "if I don't get... that joy of seeing them acquire that knowledge,...I go home still trying to reflect- what did I do wrong?" (Ms Iyin). Teachers use reflection to identify points for improvement in their classroom experience: "when you go through a particular thing, you learn from it, you see what you did not do right, and what can be done better in future occurrence" (Ms. Tope). Teachers' use of reflection can boost their optimism, help them to come to terms with their mistakes, refocus after experiencing work pressures, and continue performing their roles in the classroom.

Online Resources

Both ECTs and ETs indicated using online resources such as personal research on the internet and joining online teachers' communities for knowledge building and personal professional development: "what other method can be applied, ... then going online sometimes, I just ask questions concerning the activities" (Ms Ire). Teachers' reliance on online communities for teaching resources, strategies and support with their difficulties with differentiation is useful for coping with knowledge related job demands: "engage myself trying as much as possible to join groups... to learn more about the children I'm handling" (Ms Iyin).

Work Engagement

Teachers demonstrated continued engagement with their role in the mixed ability classroom with vigor, absorption, and dedication even when faced with challenging situations and job demands.

Vigor

Both ECTs and ETs were found to demonstrate vigor through resilience and sustained efforts to get results: "sometimes it won't work immediately. I try one, I try another, before I know it…" (Ms. Iyin); when they experience emotional pressures of pupils' struggle with learning, teachers tend to display persistence and continued willingness to devote effort to their work, "Let's try a different approach, let's try this, … not outrightly just writing off the child" (Ms Tope).

Absorption

ECTs and ETs were found to be absorbed in their role, they reported not only engaging in their work when physically present in the school but also still thinking about and seeking solutions to classroom challenges. They seem not to easily detach themselves from their work, even when away from the classroom: "I go home still trying to reflect what did I do wrong?" (Ms. Iyin). Teachers invest time and effort to gain the knowledge and skills required to meet the learning needs of all their pupils: "that makes me do a lot of research… it comes from the place of me wanting every one of them to understand as much as possible."

Dedication

Results show that both ECTs and ETs display a sense of inspiration, enthusiasm, commitment and pride in their work: "I take my pupils like my own kids… they'll be in my class for like nine months…that's like me being pregnant with them for nine months… I have to deliver them to the next class" (Ms. Tope). They demonstrate willingness to continue to perform their role in the classroom in spite of the demands of work pressure from pupils' misbehavior as a result of childishness: "And sometimes it just doesn't work because children will always be children." (Ms Lola).

Performance

Teachers' work engagement reflected in their in-role and extra-role performance of providing an inclusive education for all learners in their mixed- ability classroom.

In-role performance

Pedagogical knowledge gained from training, coaching and collegial support were reported as job resources that teachers use to cope with the demands of the mixed-ability classroom: "I'm prepared to be able to handle anything that comes up in my class because I have different abilities that I've been informed, like I have knowledge of what to do now" (Ms Ayo). Findings indicate that early career teachers demonstrated improved differentiation practices in their class after gaining knowledge through inservice-training and mentoring:

> I…have to now give everybody different things to do then. And high flyers, if they're
>
> done, I will have to extend, the middle learners I will have to keep on watching them and

the low learners. I'll keep going back and forth to start checking up on what they've been able to get and what they're not able to get (Ms Lara).

Extra-role performance

Both early career and more experienced teachers reported achieving extra role performance through creative use of strategies to overcome low pupil's academic achievement: "it took me going extra mile into … some other periods like their recreational time chipping in some activities that are educational, just to give them the extra spice needed to meet up" (Ms. Ire), "I was able to overcome that, and I moved on, and the child got virtually everything. He was even able to supersede those that even got it the previous day" (Ms. Iyin).

Job Crafting

The inductive analysis revealed that ECTs engage in job crafting by negotiating for greater autonomy in their differentiation practice. Particularly when they discover differentiation strategies and inclusive methods that are different from the school's established strategies:

> when you're working in an organization, it's structurally established, you have to follow if you want to be there. But at the same time, I don't believe in being dogmatic or just following routine just for the sake of it, …whoever you want to bring it forward to, to explain what you think, even if we're not doing it yet, at least I think we should do it this way. (Ms Jola).

Intention to Quit

An interesting outcome of the interplay of the JD-R on teachers that emerged from the data is intention to quit. For early career teachers, findings show that initial physical and emotional and physical demands experienced due to complexities of mixed-ability classroom may lead to health impairment and intention to quit teaching: "it was, it was telling on me I was always even falling sick. Every day I had drug I take for headache because I shout… was tough for me because I actually wanted to quit because it was stressful" (Ms Lara).

Discussion

This study aimed to understand how the interplay of job demands and resources relate to teachers' experience of their work in the mixed-ability classroom in a private nursery and primary school in Nigeria (RQ1) and to explore how these experiences differ for early-career and experienced teachers (RQ2). The most significant interplay of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) work engagement of ECTs and ETs found in the foregoing results section are discussed to answer RQ1 and a comparison of this interplay for ECTs and ETs are discussed to answer RQ2. Furthermore, the discussion presents implications of the study, its limitations and offers recommendations for further study.

The interplay of job demands and resources remarkably influences teachers' experience, engagement and performance in the mixed-ability classroom. While both early career and more experienced teachers face similar job demands, ECTs benefit more from job resources such as in-service training and support systems within the school context, and personal resources such as self-efficacy and resilience to maintain their work engagement and performance in the face of various job demands. Online resources in the form of online research and online teachers' communities were noted to be valuable as part of teachers' repertoire of resources.

Both ECTs and ETs demonstrate high levels of work engagement characterized by vigor, absorption, and dedication. ECTs, however, exhibited job crafting behavior by seeking greater autonomy and implementing innovative teaching strategies, to enhance their performance in the mixed-ability classroom. High initial job demands were found to contribute to health impairments and intention to quit among ECTs. This highlights the essentiality of structured support systems within the school community, especially during the early stages in the profession, to prevent burnout and attrition among ECTs.

These findings contribute to the broader understanding of teachers' experience of job demands in the mixed-ability classroom and emphasize the importance of job resources and personal resources in promoting teachers' engagement and performance in inclusive education practices.

Job Demands

Findings indicate that job demands hamper teachers' effective functioning and strain their work engagement and hinder their optimum performance in delivering inclusive education for all learners in the mixed-ability classroom.

Work pressures

Both ECTs and ETs reported pressures related to planning and implementing differentiation strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners, workload and time constraints to cover the curriculum while tailoring instruction to diverse learner needs. This aligns with existing literature that identify differentiation as a crucial but demanding aspect of inclusive education (Santagata & Guarino, 2021; Friedman, 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Emotional demands

Teachers reported emotional demands, particularly with classroom management challenges due to ignorance of differentiation strategies, learners' misbehavior and addressing pupils' learning struggles. Both ECTs and ETs expressed frustration due to pupils' misbehavior and learning struggles, impacting their sense of efficacy and job satisfaction. This is consistent with studies highlighting the emotional demands of classroom management and the stress associated with meeting diverse learners' needs (Day & Gu, 2007; Klassen et al., 2013). ECTs

particularly, experienced emotional pressures due to the culture shock of transitioning to differentiation practices, connecting with findings by Richards (2012) on the emotional demands of adapting to new instructional methods.

Mental demands

Mental demands stemmed significantly from inadequate pedagogical knowledge and challenges in differentiating assessments. Both ECTs and ETs reported these mental demands, buttressing the need for continuous professional development to equip teachers with effective differentiation strategies (Day & Gu, 2007).

Physical demands

The physical exertion required to give individualized attention to all pupils was highlighted as a source of stress, potentially contributing to burnout and intention to quit among teachers. Both career stages experience physical demands, however, ECTs found the physical exertion of managing a classroom and providing individualized attention particularly taxing. ETs, with their accumulated experience, often have more established classroom management strategies that help mitigate some of the physical demands. Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2018) and Bianchi (2017) also highlight how physical demands can lead to burnout, especially among beginning teachers.

Social pressures

Teachers experienced social pressures from parental expectations and stakeholders' demands for equality versus equity in the classroom. These pressures often conflicted with teachers' efforts to implement inclusive practices, reflecting broader societal pressures encountered by teachers in inclusive education as Torenbeek and Peters (2017) similarly identified.

Job Resources

Job resources were found to bolster teachers' performance by reducing the impact of certain job demands directly or indirectly by strengthening certain personal resources that benefit teachers in reducing the effect of demands.

In-service training and feedback-

Both ECTs and ETs identified in-service training as crucial for coping with job demands, enhancing their pedagogical knowledge, and improving classroom management skills. Feedback, particularly for ECTs, was vital for improving teaching practices and integrating into the school culture (Kardos & Johnson, 2007).

Collegial support and mentoring

Collegial support emerged as a key resource for both career stages, helping teachers strengthen their resilience in challenging situations faced in the mixed-ability classrooms

(Vangrieken et al., 2017). Mentoring was particularly beneficial for ECTs, providing guidance and reducing the culture shock associated with differentiation. This aligns with findings that mentoring significantly impacts new teachers' professional growth and retention (Hobson et al., 2009).

Autonomy

Degree of autonomy and decision-making latitude afforded teachers within the school helped them buffer social pressures and enhance their sense of efficacy. ECTs, more than ETs, sought to challenge the status quo and advocate for innovative practices, reflecting proactive job crafting behavior (Wingerden et al., 2017). Identifying ECTs as newcomers who are potential influencers of change in the school culture (Coppe et al., 2024; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Personal Resources

Personal resources are improved by certain job demands and crucial for promoting work engagement by managing the effects of job demands and sustaining role performance.

Optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy

Personal resources such as optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy were crucial for maintaining work engagement (Corso-de-Zúñiga et al., 2020). ECTs exhibited higher self-esteem due to perceived improvements in their teaching, while ETs displayed lower self confidence. Both groups used self-efficacy to cope with social pressures, confirming the importance of self-efficacy in managing classroom challenges and promoting teachers' performance (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Resilience and reflection

Resilience helped teachers persist despite emotional and physical demands, while reflective practices enabled them to learn from challenging experiences and improve their teaching strategies. This underscores the role of resilience and reflection in sustaining teacher engagement and improved effectiveness (Corso-de-Zúñiga et al., 2020; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Online Resources

Online teachers' communities were beneficial for both ECTs and ETs. Teachers used online research of various topics of interest or challenge and interaction with other teachers in online groups to resolve challenges they face in the classroom, benefiting from the wealth of experience and resources available in teachers' online communities of practice (Clarke, L. (2009).

Work Engagement and Performance

Teachers' work engagement is preserved and maintained by job and personal resources and online resources leading to role performance. Effective work engagement could be

threatened by high job demands and absence of specific resources (Wingerden et al., 2017). Performance is achieved through work engagement and could be hindered or aborted by hampered work engagement as a result of high job demands. Teachers demonstrated high levels of work engagement through vigor, absorption, and dedication. Both ECTs and ETs were committed to providing inclusive education despite significant challenges, indicating that job and personal resources effectively mitigated job demands. Their engagement translated into both in-role and extra-role performance in their inclusive education tasks (Bakker & Bal, 2010).

Job Crafting

Interestingly, ECTs indicated engaging in job crafting, a behavior not reported by ETs. By negotiating for greater autonomy regarding teaching methodologies. Job crafting aids increased job resources; such as autonomy (Nie et al., 2015), and personal resources; such as self-efficacy and self- confidence, and improved work engagement, performance and satisfaction (Wingerden et al., 2017).

Intention to Quit

Initial high job demands led to health impairments and intention to quit among ECTs, reflecting the critical need for adequate support systems during the early stages of teaching (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Differences of JD-R Interplay Perception of Both Career Stages

Job Demands

Both ECTs and ETs experience job demands. ECTs however struggle more with culture shock of transitioning from theoretical knowledge to practical operation of differentiation, lack of pedagogical knowledge of differentiated instruction and assessment, and the physical strain of teaching in the mixed-ability classroom. Thus placing them at higher risk of health impairments and attrition than ETs (Pillen et al., 2013).

Job resources

ECTs and ETs equally value in-service training and collegial support as critical school based to reduce the impact of job demands Chan et al., 2008). From the results, autonomy can be considered beneficial to teachers' self-esteem. Interesting to note, however, is the difference in ECTs and ETs' perception of autonomy. While ECTs seek greater autonomy by challenging the status quo and recommending innovative differentiation strategies, ETs expressed low perception of autonomy in decision making and leaned towards compliance and adherence to the norm, their perception of autonomy aligns with Çolak et al., (2017) whose study indicated that teachers' perceptions of autonomy reduced with increase in their career trajectory.

Personal resources

Self-efficacy, resilience and reflection emerged as some of the most crucial personal

resources among teachers across both career stages. While ECTs expressed positive self-esteem as a result of perceived improvement in their differentiation practices, ETs' indicated low self-esteem regarding autonomy and decision making which aligns with findings that job demands and inadequacy of job resources may contribute to low self-esteem in teachers (Collie et al., 2012; Torenbeek and Peters (2017).

Job crafting

Job crafting was demonstrated by only ECTs in their efforts to adjust elements of their job. ECts are more likely to engage in job crafting than their more experienced colleagues, as they seek to adapt to their new role in the mixed-ability classroom (Tims et al., 2015).

Intention to quit

Intention to quit is a significant outcome of the interplay of JD-R on teachers' work engagement and performance. It is highlighted in this study as a potential consequence of high job demands in the absence of the buffering effect from job and personal resources. ECTs are more susceptible to intention to quit, mainly due to initial unexpected experience of high job demands in the mixed-ability classroom.

Conclusions

In summary, the interplay of JD-R and early career and more experienced teachers observed in this study reveals that teachers experience Job demands that deplete their personal resources, however, they utilize the combination of job resources, and online resources to enhance their personal resources thereby buffering the impact of job demands, such that they are able to remain engaged with their work and perform their role in the mixed ability classroom.

Differences observed between the two career stages considered reveal that ECTs are more susceptible to risk of attrition due to high job demands while they are new to differentiation and complexities of mixed ability education. Additionally, ECTs are more likely to engage in job crafting as they seek to adapt to their new role. Both ECTs and ETs use reflection to overcome challenges and pursue improvement in their inclusive practice. Online communities and personal research are resources that are also valued and helpful to both career stages in coping with job demands.

Implications

This study suggests that incorporating extensive teaching practice in the inclusive classroom into pre-service teacher training design would increase early career teachers' job resources reducing the culture shock of the practicalities and demands of differentiation. Additionally, attention should be paid to designing the school structure to provide teacher-centered resources. Job resources such as coaching and mentoring, along with a system of

strong collegial support environment to aid beginning teachers' transition from training to practice. Additionally, the place of in-service training cannot be overlooked if teacher engagement and effective classroom role performance is to be achieved by teachers across career stages.

Furthermore, findings from this study suggest that autonomy is an important resource for teachers' active work engagement and creative role performance. Therefore, it is pertinent that schools design ongoing professional development programs to familiarize teachers with the characteristics and needs of learners; and the requirements and responsibilities of the teacher in the mixed-ability classroom. Equipping teachers with pedagogical knowledge in inclusive approach and differentiation strategies would empower them for competent professional judgment in their classrooms. Thus making it safe to explore their decision making latitude in the classroom, such that their decisions are enlightened and beneficial to the learners and school as a whole.

Limitations

This study was initially conducted as research into the tensions experienced by early career and more experienced Nigerian teachers in the mixed-ability classroom, based on the theoretical lenses of activity theory. However, the theoretical framework was changed because results from the findings were found to be better explained and more rooted in the work engagement performance model of employee JD-R theory. To ensure consistency in the findings, the dataset was reanalyzed using the JD-R theoretical framework. However, the shift from seeking to understand teachers' experience of tensions to exploring their job demands and resources for work engagement and role performance could be responsible for some elements of the JD-R work engagement model not being captured in the results. For example, absorption as a feature of work engagement was not identified in the research findings.

Another significant limitation of this study is that there was an unequal proportion of representation for the target career stages. Based on the convenience sampling method utilized for the study and the researcher being located in the Netherlands while conducting research with respondents in Nigeria. There was limited access to a variety of options of suitable schools, therefore the volume of data gathered from early career teachers was more than that of their more experienced colleagues due to availability of respondents from the two career stages within the selected school. Thus it is uncertain if and how an increase in the population of more experienced teachers would have yielded new insights for the study.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in a private school where parent and students' population and teachers' work conditions are typically different from government owned schools (Tooley & Dixon, 2006). The job demands and resources associated with the classroom

and overall work situation in government schools might alter how teachers engage and perform based on job demands-resources in their setting. Thus further research in the Nigerian public school context is necessary for a fuller perspective on teachers' job demands-resources.

Finally, in order to inform policy and action towards improved resources for teachers to cope with job demands (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018), it would be valuable to establish generalizability of results. Additional insight could be gathered from further studies using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative research. A complementary exploratory sequential design with a quantitative follow-up on this research. Testing relevant hypotheses on a larger scale would aid generalizability of the findings, to establish if they hold true across a broader population. Thus adding understanding of statistical relationships among all JD-R elements and their interrelation to teachers' work engagement and role performance; to the depth, context, and detailed understanding of teacher's experience of JD-R in the mixed-ability classroom provided by this qualitative study.

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APPENDIX A

RQ-IQ Table to Link Interview Questions to RQs

	IQ	RQ 1	RQ 2
1.	Tell me about your teacher training and educational background		X
2.	How long have you been teaching?		X
3.	Could you describe the ability levels of your pupils?	X	
4.	As a teacher attending to these different levels of learner abilities, what parts of your duties stir feelings of pressure?	X	X
5a.	How would you describe the nature of demands/pressure you have experienced?	X	X
5b.	Could you recall a specific incident of such demand or work pressure? Possible follow-up questions: - What exactly happened? - Who was involved? - What was said? - What did you think was the main issue causing the pressure/demand? - What actions did you take? - How did you handle it?	X	
6.	How do you think these demands impact you as a teacher?	X	
7.	How well do you think you make the right decisions concerning the different needs of your learners?		X
8.	How well do you think your teacher training prepared you to handle these demands?		X
9.	How much liberty do you have to make decisions concerning supporting the different learners in your class?	X	X
10.	How do you think your level of teaching experience impacts how you handle demands and pressures?		X