

DEATH FEAR IN TEACHING PROFESSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NSUKKA URBAN

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Abstract

Death fear is a threat to teaching profession and academic performances particularly in secondary schools. This study determined death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban. Three research questions and one null hypothesis of no significant difference guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive research design. A sample size of 260 respondents was randomly selected from thirteen public secondary schools in Nsukka urban of Enugu state. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were the statistical tools used for data analysis. The finding indicated that death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban is high. Female teachers showed higher death fear in teaching profession than their male counterpart. Year of experience determined death fear in teaching profession. It was recommended among others that Nigerian universities and Colleges of Education should provide more effective death education programmes and courses that can modify the attitudes of students and teachers towards death and death related concepts.

Keywords: Death fear, teaching profession, teacher, gender, fear

Introduction

The pronouncement of death occurrence often stirs up strong emotions in individuals such as sorrow, helplessness, anxiety, feelings of frustration, loss, depression, anger and guilt (Weigel, Parker, Fanning, Reyna & Gasbarra, 2007). Such emotional disposition is known as death fear. Death fear has remained a threat to teaching profession and academic performances particularly in secondary schools. Fry (2003) conceived death fear as multidimensional concept that covers fears related to one's own death, the death of others, fear of the unknown, fear of obliteration and fear of the dying process. Similarly, Tance (2008) highlighted other dimensions of death fear to include: fear of dying, fear of the dead, fear of being destroyed, fear of significant others, fear of the unknown, fear of conscious death, fear of the body after death, and fear of premature death.

In different perspective, Jamil (2012) submitted that the greatest fear in human is the fear of survival, though depending on how fear is defined. The author therefore, conceived fear as an emotion induced by a threat perceived by living entities, which causes a change in brain and organ function and ultimately a change in behaviour, such as running away, hiding or freezing from traumatic events. These dimensions of fear hold strong effect on human emotion and therefore, determine to an acceptable extent, the chances of success in any career or profession. It has been noted that fear may occur in response to a specific stimulus happening in the presence, or to a future situation, which is perceived as risk to health or life (Ohman, 2000). However, these responses may arise from perception of danger leading to confrontation with or escape from or avoiding the threat (also known as the fight-or-flight response), which in extreme cases of fear (horror and terror) can be a freeze response or paralysis. Fear could predispose death (Kahoe and Dunn (2007).

The concept of death has been perceived differently by various researchers. For instance, Okafor (1993) defined death as an unpredictable and unexpected event that cuts off life. Baker (2000) perceived death as the irreversible cessation of the capacity for consciousness. Consciousness in this definition is meant broadly to include subjective experiences so that both wakeful and dreaming states count as instance. One dies on this view upon entering a state in which the brain is incapable of returning to consciousness. Ugwu (2012) conceived death as the permanent cessation of life. As used in this study, death is the termination of human existence. It has been hypothesized and tested that fear of death motivates religious commitment and assurance about afterlife (Wink, 2006). The author argued that religiosity can be related to fear of death when the afterlife is portrayed as time of punishment or reward. In a 2006 study of the white (Christian men and women), it was tested that traditional, church-centred

religiousness and de-institutionalized spiritual seeking are ways of approaching fear of death in old age. It was found that both religiousness and spirituality were related to positive psychosocial functioning, but only church-centered religiousness protected subjects against the fear of death (Wink, 2006). These findings may not be significantly different when teachers are the focus of the study.

Teaching profession is a demanding job that requires high level of confidence on teachers, in order to accomplish the goal of education (College Foundation of North Carolina – CFNC, 2014). Teachers, therefore, require routine opportunities for seminar, workshop and conferences on death education, death concepts and death related topics, to enable them update the necessary competences and courage needed in teaching profession. Such social setting according to Bandura (1997) serves as a tool in building one's self-efficacy, motivation and confidence level. This study anchored on social cognitive theory (SCT) propounded by Bandura in 1977. The theory explained human behaviour using a three-way reciprocal approach involving person, environment and behaviour. The influence of these factors according to Schwarzer (1992) continually interacts in a reciprocal process, implying that one factor affects the other, the person can shape the environment and the environment can as well shape the person or his behaviour. This is applied in the present study in that, death occurrences in school environment can influence teachers' disposition and behaviour in their profession.

A lot of studies have focused on death fear, death attitude and anxiety. For instance, Okafor (1993) found that women exhibit higher death fear than their male counterparts. It has also been revealed that individuals in general hold high death fear (Durosaro, 1996). Fear according to Durosaro (1996) is a vital response to physical and emotional danger. Abdel-Khalek and Al-Kandari (2006) noted that gender-related differences in death fear are real. In addition, Olsson and Phelps (2007) found that death fear decreases with experience. Furthermore, Ugwu (2012) found that teachers above 10 years in teaching profession hold positive attitude towards death. However, none of these studies, to the best of the researcher's knowledge focused on determining death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban. This was the gap the present study filled.

Ideally, school environment is basically structured to promote effective teaching and learning process. Teachers are trained in Universities, National Teachers' Institute, Teachers' Training College, Colleges of Education, among others, to gain the right knowledge, skills and competences needed in teaching profession to enable them prepare students to become better individuals in future.

Recently, Nigerian schools have remained a target for killing and suicide bombing. These events no doubt trigger a lot of emotional challenges to both students and teachers in different schools thereby affecting the ideal goal of educational system. This study, therefore, determined death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban with consideration on gender and year of experience differences. From the literature reviewed, no study of this kind has been conducted on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in this location. This was the gap the researcher filled. The findings of the study may be of immense benefit to school administrators, curriculum planners, public health educators and educational institutions. The purpose of the study was to determine death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban. Specifically, the study determined:

1. death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban.
2. death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on years of experience.
3. death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender.

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban?
2. What is the death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on year of experience?
3. What is the death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender at .05 level of significance.

Methods

The study adopted descriptive research design. This design according to Shuttleworth (2008) is a scientific method that involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way, and helps to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe what exist with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. A sample size of 260 respondents was studied. Two-stage sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, purposive sampling procedure was used to select thirteen government-owned community secondary schools (Obimo, Okutu, Ibagwa-Ani, Umabor, Ehandiagu, Alor-Uno, Nru, Lejja, Ede-Oballa, Isieniu, Edem, Okpuje and Obukpa) in Nsukka urban. The choice of purposive sampling was to ensure that only government-owned community (boys and girls) secondary schools were selected. In the second stage, random sampling procedure was used to select 20 teachers (10 males and 10 females) from each sampled school. Random sampling is of extreme important in that it assures the researcher that the samples represent, to an acceptable extent, the population from which they were drawn (Owie, 2006).

A researcher designed instrument known as death fear in teaching profession questionnaire (DFTPQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was designed to reflect some dimensions of death fear as shown in reviewed literature to include: fear of dying, fear of the dead, fear of being destroyed, fear of significant others, fear of the unknown, fear of conscious death, fear of the body after death, and fear of premature death. The face-validity of the questionnaire was established by three experts, two from Department of Health and Physical Education and one from Education Foundation, all in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument was considered reliable at .76

The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents and collected on the spot. The responses in the instrument were rated as follows: strongly agree (SA) - 4, agree (A) - 3, disagree (D) - 2 and strongly disagree (SD) – 1 point. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. A criterion mean of 2.50 was established for decision. Any item that had a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered high death fear, while below 2.50 was considered low. The null hypothesis was tested using t-test statistical analysis at .05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Death Fear in Teaching Profession in Secondary Schools in Nsukka Urban. (N = 260)

S/N.	Death Fear in Teaching Profession	\bar{x}	SD	Dec
1.	I dread visiting a funeral home to seeing a dead student or colleague	2.55	1.137	High
2.	Touching or seeing a corpse would disrupt my composure and affect my teaching ability	2.12	1.052	Low
3.	Discovering a dead body would be a horrifying experience in my teaching profession	2.57	1.082	High
4.	I am afraid to teach death concept or death-related topics to students	2.78	1.045	High
5.	It would bother me to remove a dead body from the road or school premises	2.44	1.077	Low
6.	I dread discussing death issues with colleagues or friends in school or at home	2.63	1.131	High
7.	If I try hard enough, I would not be afraid of the unknown	2.19	1.086	Low
8.	It does not scare me to think I may be conscious while lying in a morgue	2.57	1.044	High
9.	I have a fear of not accomplishing my goals in life before dying	2.82	1.034	High
10.	I am always afraid of being destroyed with gun, knife, or bomb during school hours in school premises	2.54	1.104	High
Grand Mean		2.52	1.079	High

Data in Table 1 shows the mean responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka Urban. The Table indicates that items “1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10” had mean scores above the criterion mean point of 2.50 implying that death fear in teaching profession in secondary school is high. It was also indicated in the Table that items “2, 5, and 7” had mean scores below the criterion mean point of 2.50 implying low death fear in teaching profession. The Table further shows that the grand mean (\bar{x}) of 2.52 which is above the criterion mean point of 2.50 implies that death fear in teaching profession in secondary school in Nsukka urban is high.

Table 2: Death Fear in Teaching Profession in Secondary Schools in Nsukka urban based on year of experience. (N = 260)

S/N	Teacher Self-Efficacy in Teaching Profession	1-5yrs		6-10yrs		Above 10yrs	
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
1.	I dread visiting a funeral home to seeing a dead student or colleague	2.46	1.006	2.17	1.113	2.57	.934
2.	Touching or seeing a corpse would disrupt my composure and affect my teaching ability	2.45	.935	2.21	1.054	2.52	.115
3.	Discovering a dead body would be a horrifying experience in my teaching profession	2.35	.962	2.55	.998	2.51	.995
4.	I am afraid to teach death concept or death-related topics to students	2.52	.896	2.48	1.014	2.56	.059
5.	It would bother me to remove a dead body from the road Or school premises	2.55	.918	2.41	1.015	2.43	.893
6.	I dread discussing death issues with colleagues or friends In school or at home	2.54	.989	2.44	1.043	2.56	.037
7.	If I try hard enough, I would not be afraid of the unknown It does not scare me to think I may be conscious while Lying in a morgue	2.31	.701	2.51	.031	2.47	.087
8.	I have a fear of not accomplishing my goals in life before dying	2.58	.941	2.46	1.039	2.57	.903
9.	I am always afraid of being destroyed with gun, knife, or bomb during school hours in school premises	2.61	.880	2.50	.994	2.53	.958
	Grand Mean	2.49	.912	2.45	.923	2.52	.589

Data in Table 2 shows the mean responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on year of experience. As shown in the table, teachers whose year of experience is between 1-5 years ($\bar{x} = 2.49$, $SD = .912$) and 6-10 years ($\bar{x} = 2.45$, $SD = .923$) had mean score below the criterion mean of 2.50, implying low death fear in teaching profession while those whose years of experience is above 10 years ($\bar{x} = 2.52$, $SD = .589$) has mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50, implying high death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban.

Table 3: Death Fear in Teaching Profession in Secondary Schools in Nsukka Urban based on Gender. (N = 260)

S/N.	Death Fear in Teaching Profession	Male		Female	
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
1.	I dread visiting a funeral home to seeing a dead student or colleague	2.55	1.137	2.77	1.00
2.	Touching or seeing a corpse would disrupt my composure and affect my teaching ability	2.63	1.131	2.56	1.181
3.	Discovering a dead body would be a horrifying experience in my teaching profession	2.78	1.045	2.42	1.180
4.	I am afraid to teach death concept or death-related topics to students	2.20	1.077	2.16	1.090
5.	It would bother me to remove a dead body from the road or school premises	2.57	1.082	2.93	1.055
6.	I dread discussing death issues with colleagues or friends in school or at home	2.12	1.052	2.72	.984
7.	If I try hard enough, I would not be afraid of the unknown	2.75	1.055	2.79	.965
8.	It does not scare me to think I may be conscious while lying in a morgue	2.57	1.044	2.47	1.032
9.	I have a fear of not accomplishing my goals in life before dying	2.55	1.006	2.95	.872
10.	I am always afraid of being destroyed with gun, knife, or bomb during school hours in school premises	1.98	1.086	1.88	1.096
	Grand Mean	2.47	1.071	2.56	1.045

Data in Table 3 shows the mean responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender. The table revealed that male teachers have grand mean ($\bar{x} = 2.47$, $SD = 1.071$) which is below the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating low death fear in teaching profession while the female teachers have grand mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, $SD = 1.045$) which is above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban is high.

Table 4: t-test on Death Fear in Teaching Profession in Secondary Schools in Nsukka Urban based on Gender (N = 260)

Gender	$\bar{x} \pm$	SD	$\bar{x} \pm$	SD(d)	t-cal	df	P-value
Male	12.67	3.116					
Gender	13.40	2.342	.73	-.774	1.262	260	.210

Data in Table 4 shows that differences exist on the mean responses of male and female teachers on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools. The female teachers had higher mean score ($\bar{x} = 13.40$, $SD = 2.342$) than their male counterparts ($\bar{x} = 12.67$, $SD = 3.116$) with a t-calculated value of 1.262. The null hypothesis of no significance differences on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender was therefore accepted since the p-value of .210 is greater than 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion

Data in Table I show the mean responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools. From the table, it was revealed that death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban is high. The finding was not surprising since there had been increased report of deaths both in schools and churches particularly in the Northern part of the country. This finding agrees with Durosaro (1996) who found that individuals in general hold high death fear. Fear is a vital response to physical and emotional danger and can also serve as a threat to success. The implication of the above finding is that the expected goal of education in teaching profession may not be accomplished since the teachers are exhibiting high death fear in their profession. Secondly, the students may not be performing well academically since the teachers are not giving their best. Thus, teaching profession requires that teachers should teach without fear. Therefore, there is need for workshops and seminars for teachers focusing on the implication of death fear in accomplishing the goal of education in teaching profession.

Data in Table 2 shows the mean responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on year of experience. The study showed that teachers whose year of experience is between 1-5 years and 6-10 years indicated low death fear in teaching profession while those whose years of experience is above 10 years indicated high death fear. The finding was surprising and disagrees with Olsson & Phelps (2007) who had earlier submitted that death fear decreases with experience. The finding also disagrees with Ugwu (2012) who found that teachers above 10 years in teaching profession hold positive attitude towards death. It is expected that the highly experienced teachers should exhibit low death fear due to their longer years of experiences in the profession but the reverse has been the case. Therefore, there is need for Nigerian universities and colleges of education to provide a more effective death education programmes and courses that would modify the attitudes of students and teachers towards death and death related concepts.

Data in Table 3 showed the responses on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender. The result indicated that female teachers showed high death fear in teaching profession while the male teachers indicated low. The expected finding could be attributed to cultural norms of the respondents which confer the responsibility of handling and preparing dead bodies for burial by males. Secondly, the males are known to be the shepherds both at homes and in work places while the females are meant to be protected. The finding is in line with the findings of Okafor (1993) who reported that females had more negative attitude towards death and dying than the males. The implication of the finding is that female teachers may not function optimally in their profession

with such fear dispositions. Therefore, there is need for increased effort in eliminating death fear in teaching profession.

Data in Table 4 showed that differences exist on the mean responses of male and female teachers on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools, though the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significance differences on death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban based on gender was therefore accepted since the p-value of .210 is greater than .05 level of significance.

Conclusions

Based on the literature reviewed and the major findings of the study, it was concluded that death fear in teaching profession in secondary schools in Nsukka urban is high. Secondly, highly experienced teachers showed high death fear in teaching profession than their younger counterparts. Finally, female teachers indicated high death fear in teaching profession while male teachers indicated low.

Recommendation

On the basis of the findings of the present study, the discussion and conclusions thereof, it was recommended as follows:

1. Nigerian universities and Colleges of Education should provide more effective death education programmes and courses that can change or modify the attitudes of the students and teachers towards death and death related concepts. This could be achieved by setting up a Curriculum Innovation Committee to plan a more detailed programme or improve on the already established ones.
2. The Ministries of Education should borrow a leaf from the NUC by also introducing death education at the lower levels of education since the negative death attitudes of individuals were most probably established from their earlier levels of education into the Universities levels.
3. The National University Commission may be advised to organize workshops, seminars and symposia for teachers and lecturers in order to help prepare them better for the task of teaching death education to students in schools, colleges and universities.

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