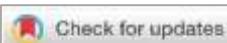


Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Gender and the Teaching Profession: A Study of Kwara State College of Education, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background of study: Teaching is traditionally seen as a gendered profession, with women predominantly occupying classroom roles while men hold leadership positions. In Nigeria, this gender imbalance is deeply rooted in cultural perceptions linking nurturing with femininity and authority with masculinity. This study explores how such gender stereotypes influence career choices, professional identities, and leadership aspirations among pre-service teachers in Kwara State Colleges of Education.

Aims and scope of paper: The study aims to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of gender and the teaching profession, focusing on the impact of gender stereotypes on their career choices, professional identity, and leadership aspirations within Nigerian teacher education institutions.

Methods: A descriptive survey design was used, with 400 pre-service teachers selected through stratified random sampling from the Ilorin and Oro campuses of Kwara State Colleges of Education. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Result: The study found that while most pre-service teachers did not believe gender determined teaching competence, they still viewed teaching as more suited to women. Gender stereotypes influenced career decisions, with female students often encouraged to pursue teaching for its stability, while male students perceived it as less prestigious. While respondents acknowledged global trends of feminisation, they noted that gender equality campaigns had limited local impact. Additionally, gendered perceptions were shown to affect recruitment dynamics, professional identity development, and leadership representation.

Conclusion: The study concludes that teaching in Nigeria remains both numerically feminised and structurally masculinised. It highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies, inclusive curricula, and institutional reforms to promote balanced representation and foster sustainable educational leadership in Nigerian teacher education.

A. Introduction

Around the world, teaching has long been viewed through the lens of gender. In many contexts, it is popularly described as a "feminised profession," particularly at the lower levels of schooling where women dominate the workforce (Moreau, 2019). Research shows that teaching in early and primary education has historically attracted more women, largely because of deeply entrenched gender norms that link caregiving and nurturing with femininity (Adekoya et al., 2024; Brooks, 2023; Quon et al., 2025).

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This feminisation of teaching is not only a matter of numbers but also shapes how the profession is valued, how career progression is structured, and how male teachers are perceived when they enter the field (Kundu & Basu, 2022). At the same time, paradoxes exist globally. While teaching is dominated by women in many countries, the leadership positions in education—such as principals, administrators, and policymakers—are still disproportionately occupied by men (Brinia, 2012). This has created what scholars often call the "glass ceiling effect," where women are numerically dominant in teaching but underrepresented in leadership. In other contexts, cultural perceptions may discourage men from becoming teachers because the profession is seen as low-paying or misaligned with traditional notions of masculinity (Estrada et al., 2024; Mekonmin, 2014). Thus, teaching as a gendered profession is both a global and a local reality, but the patterns vary significantly depending on cultural, economic, and historical contexts.

In Nigeria, these global dynamics find unique expression. Historical records show that missionary education in the 19th century often recruited women into teaching because their roles as caregivers were thought to naturally suit the training of children (Fafunwa, 2018; Odidi, 2019). Over time, this created a social perception of teaching as a "women's profession," particularly in primary and secondary schools. Yet, the paradox persists: while female teachers dominate the classrooms, men are often more visible in administrative and leadership roles, creating a gender imbalance in how authority and responsibility are distributed (Kark et al., 2016). Contemporary Nigerian studies confirm that gender perceptions continue to influence career choices among young people entering the teaching profession. For example, [Adisa et al. \(2021\)](#) argue that the teaching profession in Nigeria struggles with low status, and this poor societal image particularly deters male entrants. Similarly, [Allu \(2021\)](#) note that many pre-service teachers hold stereotypical views about teaching as a fallback career more suited for women, while men aspire to professions considered more prestigious or financially rewarding. These perceptions create challenges not only for recruitment into Colleges of Education but also for sustaining a balanced and motivated workforce in the teaching sector.

The situation is especially significant for Colleges of Education in Nigeria, which are responsible for preparing the majority of teachers for basic education. These colleges enrol thousands of pre-service teachers annually, who represent the future of the profession. Understanding their perceptions of teaching as a gendered profession is crucial because such perceptions may influence whether they fully embrace teaching, how they envision their career paths, and whether they challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes in Nigerian society. Globally, institutions such as UNESCO and the OECD have emphasised that gender equality in education is not only about ensuring equal access to learning but also about fostering balanced representation in the teaching workforce (Walker et al., 2019). Nigeria's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) and Goal 5 (gender equality) makes it imperative to critically examine how gender dynamics continue to shape who enters teaching, how they perceive the profession, and what implications this has for the broader education system. The current study investigates the perceptions of pre-service teachers at the Kwara State Colleges of Education in Ilorin and Oro, Nigeria. These two institutions were chosen because of their size, history, and diverse student populations, which make them an ideal setting to explore how gendered understandings of teaching are constructed and reproduced. By situating the Nigerian case within global patterns, this study seeks to provide fresh insights into how gender perceptions influence the teaching profession and what this means for policy, recruitment, and professional identity in Nigeria.

Teaching has long been recognised as a gendered profession, with women dominating classroom roles while men disproportionately occupy leadership and policymaking positions. This pattern, often termed the feminisation of teaching, reflects enduring cultural stereotypes that associate nurturing with femininity and authority with masculinity (Allu et al., 2022). The persistence of these stereotypes not only shapes who enters teaching but also influences professional identity and career progression. In Nigeria, and particularly within Kwara State Colleges of Education, this imbalance remains visible. Female pre-service teachers outnumber their male counterparts, while men continue to dominate administrative and leadership roles (Ossai & Ramsaroop, 2022; Mohammed et al., 2025). Local observations and institutional records suggest that many male students perceive teaching as a low-status or "female" occupation, whereas many female students are drawn to it because it is seen as stable and socially acceptable (Osiesi et al., 2022). These entrenched perceptions influence course enrolment, career commitment, and willingness to assume leadership roles after graduation.

Despite numerous studies on teacher motivation, status, and gender imbalance, little empirical evidence exists on how pre-service teachers—those preparing to join the profession—perceive teaching through a gendered lens. Such perceptions are critical because they influence career commitment, leadership aspiration, and the long-term gender composition of the workforce. Grounded in Social Role

Theory, which explains how gendered expectations guide occupational choices, this study investigates pre-service teachers' perceptions of gender and teaching in Kwara State Colleges of Education, Nigeria. The central problem is the limited empirical understanding of how gender stereotypes and social norms shape pre-service teachers' professional identities and career intentions, thereby sustaining gender imbalance in the teaching profession and undermining progress toward Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 on quality education and gender equality.

This study is significant for several reasons, spanning academic scholarship, educational policy, and practical implications for teacher education in Nigeria and beyond. By situating Nigerian pre-service teachers' perceptions within global debates, the study contributes new empirical evidence that enriches comparative scholarship on gender and professional identity in teaching. At the policy level, the study offers insights that are vital for addressing Nigeria's teacher recruitment and retention challenges. In line with Nigeria's commitments to Sustainable Development Goals 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality), this research provides evidence to support gender-sensitive teacher workforce planning. For Colleges of Education in Kwara State and Nigeria as a whole, the study has practical importance. Since these institutions are the training grounds for future teachers, understanding the gendered perceptions of their students is essential for curriculum development, guidance, counselling, and leadership preparation. Finally, this research resonates beyond Nigeria. The issue of gender and teaching is not confined to one country but is a global challenge shaped by diverse cultural and economic realities. By presenting data from Nigerian pre-service teachers, this study adds an African perspective that is often underrepresented in global debates. It also provides opportunities for cross-national dialogue on how gendered perceptions of teaching influence the future of education, making the findings relevant for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide.

This study is anchored in Social Role Theory, which explains that gender differences in occupation arise from societal expectations about appropriate roles for men and women (Eagly et al., 2012). The theory posits that individuals internalise these expectations, leading to occupational segregation. In teaching, caregiving and nurturing are culturally coded as feminine traits, while leadership and authority are associated with masculinity (Brody, 2015). Applying this framework helps to explain why teaching is often perceived as "women's work" in Nigeria, while men gravitate toward administrative positions. The theory thus provides a basis for analysing how gender stereotypes shape pre-service teachers' career intentions, professional identities, and perceptions of status within the teaching profession. Feminised professions, particularly in basic education, are dominated by men, according to UNESCO and OECD reports. Women make up over 70% of primary school teachers globally, yet policy roles are predominantly held by men. Warin and Gannerud (2014) note that this feminisation is not merely numerical but ideological—it reflects persistent social narratives linking teaching to women's natural caregiving roles. However, Moreau (2019) argues that feminisation has also contributed to the devaluation of teaching, as "women's work" is often perceived as less prestigious and less financially rewarding. This global paradox—female numerical dominance but male structural authority—remains a defining feature of the profession.

Recent cross-national studies (Davis, 2020; Hsiao, 2023) further reveal that men often avoid teaching due to stigma around masculinity and low pay, while women's participation is driven by social acceptance and work-family compatibility. These international patterns mirror, though not identically, those in sub-Saharan Africa, where similar stereotypes persist but are reinforced by socio-economic pressures and cultural expectations. The feminisation of teaching describes the historical and social process through which teaching became associated primarily with women (Moreau, 2019). Feminisation increased women's access to paid employment but also led to the symbolic downgrading of teaching as a "low-status" profession (Brooks, 2023). Recent studies in Asia and Africa show that feminisation continues to influence teachers' career trajectories (Sarangapani et al., 2024; Adekoya et al., 2024). While it has promoted inclusivity at entry levels, it has simultaneously reinforced vertical segregation—men remain overrepresented in senior positions (Wilfred et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, feminisation is often linked to colonial-era missionary education that recruited women as natural caregivers (Fafunwa, 2018). However, the implications extend beyond numbers. The perception of teaching as "women's work" discourages men from entering teacher education programmes, leading to gender imbalance at pre-service levels and affecting the diversity of perspectives within the teaching force (Adisa et al., 2021). These patterns show that feminisation is both a historical legacy and a continuing structural issue within teacher preparation institutions. Gender stereotypes strongly influence individuals' career decisions and identity formation. Social expectations depict men as assertive and career-driven, and women as nurturing and domestically oriented (Eagly et al., 2012). In the teaching context, these stereotypes shape the motivation and social perception of who should teach.

[Reich-Shapiro et al. \(2021\)](#) found that male teachers often face stigma or suspicion, particularly in early childhood education, where teaching young children is seen as incompatible with masculinity. Conversely, female teachers are often encouraged to teach because it aligns with maternal roles and offers flexible schedules ([Dean, 2022](#)).

In sub-Saharan Africa, studies by [Mekonnin \(2014\)](#) and [Estrada et al. \(2024\)](#) report that societal expectations continue to define teaching as a female domain. Men who enter teaching frequently view it as temporary employment before transitioning to “higher-status” professions. These stereotypes not only influence recruitment but also reinforce gendered hierarchies that limit diversity and innovation in educational leadership.

The Nigerian teaching workforce exhibits clear gender disparities. National data from the Teachers’ Registration Council of Nigeria indicate that women account for approximately 68% of basic education teachers, while men occupy over 70% of headship positions in public schools ([Adelokun, 2025](#)). Studies by [Okoli \(2025\)](#) and [Ukpong \(2025\)](#) highlight persistent societal perceptions that teaching is less prestigious and financially unrewarding, a view that discourages male participation. [Raji \(2024\)](#) emphasises that, although women dominate numerically, they face institutional barriers to leadership due to cultural norms that privilege male authority. In Kwara State, reports show similar patterns: female enrolment in Colleges of Education (particularly in Ilorin and Oro) remains consistently higher than male enrolment. Women often cite social respectability and job stability as reasons for choosing it. These dynamics suggest that gender stereotypes not only influence entry into the profession but also shape future leadership representation within the state’s education system.

Pre-service teachers—the next generation of educators—play a central role in reproducing or challenging gender stereotypes within the profession. Research indicates that their perceptions are often shaped by family influence, peer norms, and cultural expectations ([Allu, 2021](#); [Awokoya, 2012](#)). In Nigeria, studies have found that many male pre-service teachers see teaching as transitional, while female students perceive it as a stable and socially acceptable career ([Amosun et al., 2021](#); [Osiesi et al., 2025](#)). However, few studies have explored how these perceptions are formed or the extent to which they influence professional identity development. Existing literature focuses largely on teacher motivation and professional challenges, but rarely captures pre-service teachers’ voices directly. Consequently, little is known about whether teacher education programmes in Nigeria reinforce or counteract gender stereotypes. Given that Colleges of Education are the main training grounds for basic-level teachers, understanding how gender perceptions are internalised during training is essential for designing interventions that promote equity and balance in the profession. The reviewed literature reveals three major patterns. First, teaching is globally and nationally feminised, but men continue to dominate decision-making and leadership roles. Second, gender stereotypes play a defining role in occupational choice, discouraging men from joining and limiting women’s advancement. Third, most Nigerian research has concentrated on teacher motivation and job status, with limited empirical attention to pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching as a gendered profession—particularly within specific state contexts such as Kwara. This gap is significant because pre-service teachers’ perceptions influence the future gender composition of the workforce, recruitment dynamics, and professional identity development. Therefore, this study fills that gap by examining how gender stereotypes, social expectations, and professional aspirations interact to shape pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching in Kwara State Colleges of Education, Ilorin and Oro. Through this lens, it contributes new empirical evidence to both Nigerian and international discussions on gender equity in teacher education.

The aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers at Kwara State College of Education, Nigeria, regarding teaching as a gendered profession. The study seeks to examine how gender stereotypes influence their choice to pursue teaching as a career and how these perceptions align with or differ from global trends. Additionally, it aims to investigate the implications of gendered perceptions for recruitment, professional identity, and educational leadership within the Nigerian context. By addressing these aspects, the research intends to contribute to the understanding of how gender norms shape teacher education and the broader dynamics of the teaching profession in Nigeria.

B. Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered suitable because the aim was to systematically gather quantitative data from pre-service teachers about their perceptions of gender and the teaching profession. A survey made it possible to capture a wide range of views from students across different programmes and campuses of the Kwara State College of Education system. The population of this study comprised all pre-service teachers enrolled in the Kwara State

College of Education, Nigeria, during the 2024/2025 academic session. The institution has three campuses: Ilorin, Oro, and Lafiagi. For this study, the Ilorin and Oro campuses were purposively selected because they are the oldest and largest in terms of student enrolment, and they also offer the widest range of academic programmes compared to the relatively new Lafiagi campus. College of Education, Ilorin – 1,820 students and College of Education, Oro – 1,428 students. Thus, the total accessible population for this study was 3,248 pre-service teachers across the two campuses. The inclusion of Ilorin and Oro campuses was deliberate. These two colleges account for the majority of pre-service teachers in Kwara State and provide a more diverse representation of gender, academic programmes, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Their long-standing history in teacher education also makes them more relevant for examining entrenched perceptions about gender in the teaching profession. By contrast, the Lafiagi campus is relatively new, with lower enrolment figures and fewer programme offerings, making it less representative for this study. To select a representative sample, the stratified random sampling technique was employed.

The population was stratified first by campus (Ilorin and Oro), then by academic school (Arts & Social Sciences, Languages, Sciences, Vocational & Technical, Education), and finally by level of study (Year 1–3). Within each stratum, respondents were randomly chosen to ensure balanced representation of gender, programme, and level. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The calculated sample size was 356. To compensate for possible non-response or incomplete questionnaires, the sample size was increased to 400 participants. This was proportionately distributed as follows: Ilorin campus (1,820 students, \approx 56% of population): 224 respondents and Oro campus (1,428 students, \approx 44% of population): 176 respondents. Data were collected using a researcher-designed structured questionnaire. The instrument consisted of five sections: demographic information, perceptions of teaching as a gendered profession, gender stereotypes and career choice, global-local comparisons, and implications for recruitment and leadership. Items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from Not at all true of teaching (1) to Completely true of teaching (5). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Educational Research and Measurement at the University of Ilorin. A pilot test was conducted with 40 pre-service teachers at the Lafiagi campus (not included in the main study) to establish reliability. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. With the permission of the Provosts and Deans of both campuses, the researchers personally administered the questionnaires during lecture periods. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 382 were correctly completed and returned, giving a response rate of 95.5%.

The data were coded and analysed using SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarise responses, while inferential statistics such as independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were employed to test for significant differences in perceptions across gender, programme, and campus.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

RQ1: What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Kwara State College of Education regarding teaching as a gendered profession?

Table 1. Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching as a Gendered Profession (N = 400)

Item No.	Perception Statement	M	SD
1	Teaching is more suited to women than men.	3.62	1.08
2	Men are less likely to choose teaching as a lifelong career.	3.85	0.96
3	Female teachers are perceived as more caring than male teachers.	3.74	1.02
4	Male teachers are more respected by society than female teachers.	2.91	1.11
5	Gender does not determine the ability to be an effective teacher.	4.12	0.88
6	Students prefer being taught by female teachers at lower levels of schooling.	3.47	1.15
7	Male teachers are more likely to hold leadership positions in schools.	3.68	1.03

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Untrue of Me) to 5 (Very True of Me).

As shown in Table 1, pre-service teachers generally perceived teaching as a gendered profession. The highest mean score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.88$) was for the item “Gender does not determine the ability to be an effective teacher,” suggesting a strong belief in gender equality within the profession. However, relatively high means were also recorded for items such as “Men are less likely to choose teaching as a lifelong career” ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.96$) and “Female teachers are perceived as more caring than male teachers” ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.02$), reflecting persistent stereotypes. Conversely, the statement “Male teachers are more respected by society than female teachers” received a comparatively lower mean score ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.11$), indicating that such perceptions are not widely held among the respondents.

RQ2: How do gender stereotypes influence pre-service teachers’ decision to choose teaching as a career?

Table 2. Influence of Gender Stereotypes on Pre-Service Teachers’ Career Choice (N = 400)

Item No.	Statement	M	SD
1	Teaching is considered a “female” profession in Nigerian society.	3.89	0.94
2	Male students avoid teaching because it is seen as less masculine.	3.67	1.01
3	Female students are encouraged by family/society to choose teaching for stability.	3.95	0.92
4	I considered societal gender expectations when choosing my course of study.	3.21	1.07
5	Gender stereotypes have little influence on my career decisions.	2.74	1.12

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Untrue of Me) to 5 (Very True of Me).

As presented in Table 2, gender stereotypes were found to have a noticeable influence on pre-service teachers’ decision to choose teaching as a career. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement “*Female students are encouraged by family/society to choose teaching for stability*” ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.92$), indicating strong societal reinforcement of teaching as a “suitable” profession for women. Similarly, respondents agreed that “*Teaching is considered a ‘female’ profession in Nigerian society*” ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.94$) and that “*Male students avoid teaching because it is seen as less masculine*” ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.01$). Interestingly, the mean for the statement “*I considered societal gender expectations when choosing my course of study*” was moderate ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.07$), suggesting that while stereotypes are recognised, not all students personally acknowledged them in their decision-making. The lowest mean was observed for the reverse-coded item “*Gender stereotypes have little influence on my career decision*” ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.12$), reinforcing the idea that stereotypes remain an important factor shaping career pathways.

RQ3: In what ways do pre-service teachers’ perceptions of gender in teaching align with or differ from global patterns?

Table 3. Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Gender in Teaching Compared to Global Trends (N = 400)

Item No.	Statement	M	SD
1	Women dominate teaching at lower levels of schooling.	4.08	0.83
2	Men are more likely to occupy leadership and administrative roles in schools.	3.82	0.91
3	Gender inequality in teaching is a global phenomenon, not only in Nigeria.	3.69	0.95
4	Teaching is perceived worldwide as a profession for women.	3.77	0.88
5	Global campaigns for gender equality in teaching influence Nigeria.	3.41	1.02

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Untrue of Me) to 5 (Very True of Me).

Findings from Table 3 indicate that pre-service teachers in Kwara State Colleges of Education generally perceive gendered patterns in teaching to be consistent with those reported globally. A majority agreed that women tend to dominate the teaching profession at lower school levels ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.83$) and that men are more likely to occupy leadership or administrative positions in schools ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.91$). These responses suggest that Nigerian pre-service teachers recognise structural gender differences within the profession. Similarly, the perception that teaching is widely viewed as a female profession recorded a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.88$). This indicates that respondents see their local experiences as part of a broader international trend. However, the item on the influence of global

campaigns for gender equality in teaching received a lower mean score ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.02$), suggesting that while respondents are aware of global discourses, they perceive a limited direct impact of these campaigns on their own environment.

RQ4: What implications do gendered perceptions of teaching hold for teacher recruitment, professional identity, and educational leadership in Nigeria?

Table 4. Implications of Gendered Perceptions for Recruitment, Identity, and Leadership (N = 400)

Item No.	Statement	M	SD
1	Gender stereotypes discourage men from considering teaching as a viable career.	3.94	0.88
2	Women in teaching are often perceived as less suitable for leadership positions.	3.71	0.90
3	Recruitment into teaching tends to reinforce gender norms rather than challenge them.	3.68	0.92
4	Pre-service teachers believe gender perceptions affect their professional identity development.	3.85	0.86
5	Gendered views in teaching may limit diversity in educational leadership.	3.90	0.89

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Untrue of Me) to 5 (Very True of Me).

Results in Table 4 show that pre-service teachers perceive significant implications of gendered views on recruitment, identity, and leadership within the teaching profession. A high mean score was recorded for the belief that gender stereotypes discourage men from considering teaching as a viable career ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.88$), suggesting that prevailing cultural expectations continue to deter male entrants. Similarly, respondents acknowledged that gender perceptions negatively affect their own professional identity development ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.86$), indicating that stereotypes shape how they see themselves as future teachers. The findings also reveal concerns about leadership dynamics. Many respondents agreed that women in teaching are often perceived as less suitable for leadership roles ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.90$) and that gendered views may limit diversity in educational leadership ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.89$). Recruitment practices were also described as reinforcing rather than challenging gender norms ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.92$). These results suggest that unless actively addressed, gendered perceptions could continue to restrict teacher recruitment strategies, undermine professional identity formation, and sustain gender disparities in leadership across Nigerian schools.

2. Discussion

This study reveals that pre-service teachers perceive teaching as a gendered profession, although they simultaneously uphold egalitarian beliefs about teaching competence. The high mean score for the statement "Gender does not determine the ability to be an effective teacher" suggests a growing awareness among pre-service teachers of the need for gender equality in teaching effectiveness. However, substantial agreement with statements such as "Teaching is more suited to women than men" and "Female teachers are perceived as more caring than male teachers" indicates that gender stereotypes remain influential in shaping professional perceptions. These findings support Eagly et al.'s (2012) Social Role Theory, which explains that gendered occupational roles are internalised from social expectations about appropriate behaviour for men and women. The results are consistent with the arguments of Moreau (2019) and Kundu and Basu (2022) that the feminisation of teaching has entrenched a normative association between teaching and femininity, especially at lower educational levels. Similarly, Adekoya et al. (2024) and Brooks (2023) observed that cultural constructions of femininity continue to define caring professions as "women's work," which devalues the professional status of teaching. The persistence of these stereotypes among Nigerian pre-service teachers echoes Allu et al. (2022), who found that gendered expectations are actively reproduced within teacher education environments. Nevertheless, the relatively low mean for "Male teachers are more respected by society than female teachers" suggests a subtle shift toward more equitable attitudes, indicating that younger cohorts may be more inclined to challenge traditional gender hierarchies. This aligns with the findings of Osiesi et al. (2025) that recent cohorts of Nigerian teacher trainees display an increasing belief in gender parity within professional competence.

Results from Table 2 demonstrate that gender stereotypes significantly influence pre-service teachers' career decisions. The high agreement with the statement "Female students are encouraged by family/society to choose teaching for stability" underscores the role of cultural and familial expectations in shaping occupational choices. Similar observations were made by Amosun et al. (2021), who found that female pre-service teachers in Ibadan were encouraged by relatives to pursue teaching because it provides job security and compatibility with domestic responsibilities. Conversely, the finding that "Male students avoid teaching because it is seen as less masculine" aligns with Brody (2015) and Reich-Shapiro et al. (2021), who reported that male teachers often experience stigma and social questioning regarding their masculinity, particularly in early childhood settings. These results also mirror Okoli's (2025) report of declining male enrolment in Nigerian Colleges of Education, attributed to societal perceptions of teaching as a low-status, "female" profession. Furthermore, the data corroborate Adisa et al. (2021), who identified social dominance and hypermasculinity as barriers to men's participation in nurturing or care-oriented professions. The continued feminisation of teaching, as reflected in this study, thus appears to perpetuate occupational segregation and may hinder efforts toward gender-balanced recruitment in Nigeria. Respondents' perceptions of gender and teaching strongly align with global trends. The majority agreed that women dominate lower levels of schooling and that men are more likely to occupy leadership or administrative positions. These findings are consistent with international data presented by UNESCO and OECD (cited in Warin & Gannerud, 2014) showing that while women constitute over 70 % of primary-level teachers globally, men remain overrepresented in leadership roles. Similarly, Brinia (2012) and Sarangapani et al. (2024) observed comparable patterns in Greece and India, respectively, where women dominate numerically but face structural barriers to advancement. The acknowledgement that gender inequality in teaching is a global rather than uniquely Nigerian issue supports Davis (2020) and Hsiao (2023), who documented cross-national consistencies in how gender norms shape career participation and work-family expectations. However, the relatively lower rating for the item "Global campaigns for gender equality in teaching influence Nigeria" suggests that international advocacy has yet to translate into perceptible change at the local level. This reinforces Fafunwa's (2018) and Odidi's (2019) historical analyses that colonial and postcolonial gender ideologies have left enduring legacies that resist rapid transformation despite global initiatives.

Gendered perceptions have significant implications for teacher recruitment, professional identity, and educational leadership. Respondents largely agreed that gender stereotypes discourage men from entering teaching and that such views influence their self-concept as future professionals. These findings echo Mohammed et al. (2025), who found gender-based disparities in pre-service teachers' satisfaction and identity formation across Nigerian institutions. They also align with Adelokun (2025), who emphasised that recruitment and professionalisation processes in Nigeria often reinforce existing gender hierarchies rather than address them. The perception that women are less suitable for leadership positions reflects the persistent "glass ceiling" described by Raji (2024) and Kark et al. (2016), where women dominate teaching numerically but are underrepresented in decision-making roles. This imbalance undermines the equitable leadership envisioned in Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, as noted by Walker et al. (2019). Furthermore, respondents' view that recruitment tends to reinforce rather than challenge gender norms supports Ukpong's (2025) critique of systemic biases in Nigeria's tertiary recruitment and selection processes. Overall, the discussion suggests that while pre-service teachers recognise gender equality in theory, their perceptions continue to be shaped by societal stereotypes that influence who enters, remains, and leads within the profession. These findings reinforce the theoretical proposition of Social Role Theory that occupational gender segregation is sustained by deeply embedded cultural scripts rather than individual choice alone (Eagly et al., 2012). Taken together, the results reveal a dual reality: growing awareness of gender equality coexists with enduring stereotypes that feminise teaching and masculinise leadership. This ambivalence has practical implications for teacher education policy. As Stromquist (2018) and Walker et al. (2019) argue, achieving gender equality in education requires not only equal participation but also the transformation of the social meanings attached to teaching roles. The findings highlight the need for Nigerian Colleges of Education to integrate gender-sensitive curricula, mentorship for male entrants, and leadership training for female pre-service teachers to promote balanced representation. Without such measures, the feminisation of teaching may continue to reproduce both the undervaluation of the profession and the exclusion of women from leadership hierarchies.

D. Conclusion

This study explored pre-service teachers' perceptions of gender and the teaching profession in Kwara State Colleges of Education, Nigeria, to understand how gender stereotypes shape career intentions, professional identity, and prospects for leadership. The findings reveal that while many pre-service teachers acknowledge the importance of gender equality in teaching, traditional gender perceptions remain deeply embedded in their understanding of the profession. Overall, the study shows that teaching continues to be viewed as a "feminised" profession. Female pre-service teachers tend to see teaching as socially acceptable and stable, while many male counterparts consider it less prestigious and misaligned with dominant notions of masculinity. This duality sustains an occupational imbalance in which women dominate classroom roles but men remain more visible in leadership positions. The persistence of such perceptions suggests that cultural and societal influences continue to shape occupational choices more strongly than individual merit or professional commitment. The study further indicates that global efforts to promote gender equality in education have not yet translated into significant perceptual or structural change within the Nigerian teacher education system. While respondents recognise that the feminisation of teaching is a worldwide trend, they perceive a limited impact of global equality initiatives on their local context. This finding underscores the importance of context-specific strategies that address entrenched gender ideologies within Nigeria's educational culture. Importantly, the research highlights that gendered perceptions carry far-reaching implications for recruitment, professional identity formation, and leadership development. When teaching is socially coded as "women's work," male participation declines, and when leadership is viewed as a male domain, female advancement is constrained. Such dynamics weaken the diversity, balance, and overall quality of the education workforce. In conclusion, achieving genuine gender balance in Nigeria's teaching profession requires more than numerical parity. It calls for a deliberate redefinition of the social meanings attached to teaching and leadership. Teacher education institutions must therefore take an active role in challenging stereotypes, integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into curricula, and fostering inclusive mentorship and leadership pathways. Strengthening these institutional and cultural foundations will not only enhance gender equity but also contribute to the broader goals of educational quality, professional dignity, and sustainable national development.

E. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to promote gender balance, professional equity, and inclusive leadership within Nigeria's teacher education system.

1. Education policymakers should develop and implement a national gender equity framework for teacher recruitment and professional development.
2. National and state education ministries should adopt gender-responsive teacher education policies that address stereotypes and institutional biases. These should ensure equal access to scholarships, recruitment opportunities, and leadership training for all genders.
3. Colleges of Education should embed gender awareness and inclusivity training into all teacher preparation programmes. This should involve revising curricula to include modules that challenge gender stereotypes, promote equal professional identity formation, and encourage both male and female pre-service teachers to view teaching and leadership as shared, gender-neutral responsibilities.

F. Author Contribution Statement

This research is the result of a structured study conducted by the author with full responsibility. Moses Adeleke Adeoye was responsible for formulating the research background, identifying the research problem, and developing and analyzing data obtained from a survey of student teachers at Kwara State College of Education. He also led the analysis of the influence of gender stereotypes on teaching career choices and developed conclusions from the research findings. The entire research process was carried out systematically, resulting in high-quality findings that make a significant contribution to the understanding of gender in the education profession in Nigeria.

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