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In-Law Interference And Marital Adjustment Among Secondary School Teachers In Bayelsa State: Influence Of Gender And Educational Qualification

Emelah, Patricia Mitta & Dr. Janet Amasingha Kebbi

**Department Of Educational Guidance And Counselling,
Faculty Of Education,
Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
[*priestteks@gmail.com](mailto:priestteks@gmail.com) 08165587234**

ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which in-law interference and marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State, with emphasis on the influence of gender and educational qualification. A descriptive survey design was employed to guide the research. The study was directed by four research questions and corresponding hypotheses. The population comprised all 6983 married teachers in the 217 secondary schools in Bayelsa State, from which a representative sample 378 was drawn. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire, validated by experts, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha yielding a coefficient of 0.83. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using independent sample t-tests at a 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 26. Findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers based on gender and educational qualification. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment based on gender and educational qualification. Despite the lack of significant differences, the overall mean ratings indicated that both in-law interference exert a high extent of influence on marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State.

Keywords: In-Law Interference, Marital Adjustment, Gender, Educational Qualification, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are indispensable assets in the Nigerian state if the goals of education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education are to be achieved. The teacher remains the central element in the implementation of educational programmes at every level (Ikogi, et al., 2021). Their performance, motivation, and overall productivity are greatly influenced by the level of satisfaction derived from both their professional and personal lives. This implies that the wellbeing of teachers, particularly in their marital relationships, directly impacts their effectiveness and commitment to educational goals. Hence, understanding the factors that influence marital stability and adjustment among teachers is crucial to sustaining their professional competence and emotional balance.

Despite their critical role in national development, teachers in Nigeria face multiple challenges that affect both their professional and personal lives. These challenges include poor remuneration, inadequate welfare, and lack of recognition by relevant authorities. Obineli (2020) observed that teachers often suffer

from occupational stress and maladjustment, which sometimes result in marital strain and dissatisfaction. Similarly, Olubusayo (2014) noted that teachers who experience marital difficulties tend to be defensive, irritable, and pessimistic in their interactions with colleagues and students. Although numerous studies have examined teachers' professional challenges, there is limited empirical evidence on how external family factors such as in-law interference affect teachers' marital relationships in Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa State.

In-law interference has been identified as a major source of conflict in marriages, influencing communication, trust, and overall marital satisfaction. It involves the intrusion of extended family members—especially parents or siblings of either spouse—into the private affairs of a couple, often leading to tension and emotional distress (Akpapuna & Agube, 2019). In many African societies, including Nigeria, cultural expectations and family structures permit significant involvement of in-laws in a couple's domestic and financial decisions. This interference may manifest through unsolicited advice, criticism, or control over family resources, thereby undermining the couple's autonomy and marital harmony. When persistent, such interference can erode trust and weaken the emotional bond between partners.

Marital adjustment, on the other hand, refers to the continuous process through which couples manage conflicts, communicate effectively, and maintain mutual understanding to ensure a stable relationship. Fincham and Beach (2019) describe marital adjustment as encompassing critical dimensions such as communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, and shared goals. A high level of marital adjustment reflects a couple's ability to cope with stressors while maintaining satisfaction and emotional stability in their relationship. However, the presence of external stressors such as in-law interference may disrupt this balance, leading to emotional strain and dissatisfaction.

Gender and educational qualification are also important variables that may influence how couples respond to marital challenges. Gender differences often shape the way men and women perceive and react to family-related stressors, including interference from in-laws (Olowookere, 2020). Likewise, educational qualification may determine an individual's coping strategies, level of tolerance, and communication skills in managing family conflicts (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2018). Therefore, examining the influence of these demographic factors provides a more comprehensive understanding of how in-law interference affects marital adjustment among teachers.

It is against this background that this study investigates in-law interference and marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State, focusing on the influence of gender and educational qualification. The study seeks to fill a critical gap in understanding how external family pressures impact teachers' marital stability and, by extension, their psychological wellbeing and professional performance.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined in-law interference and marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State, with emphasis on the influence of gender and educational qualification. Specifically, the study achieved the following objectives:

1. To examine the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender.
2. To ascertain the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent does in-law interference influence marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender?
2. To what extent does in-law interference influence marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. Charles-Owaba (2019), defined descriptive survey research design as the one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few individuals or items considered to be representatives of the entire group. The study population consisted of all the married 6983 teachers in the 217 public senior secondary schools in Bayelsa State. A sample of 378 teachers out of 6893 was used for the study. Taro Yamen formula was used to determine the minimum required sample size of 378. A simple random sampling technique by balloting was used to select 3 out of the 8 Local Government Areas. Simple random sampling was used to select five (5) schools from each of the local government areas. All married teachers shown in the nominal roll of the fifteen secondary schools were purposively selected to form the sample of the study. The instrument used for data collection is titled “In-Law Interference, and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire” (IIMAQ), developed by the researcher. The instrument had two sections namely A and B. Section A consisted of 3 items that measured the demographic data of the respondents in the study. Section B consists of 14 items that measured in-law interference as a trigger factor in marital adjustment. The instrument is structured in a four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE=4) High Extent (HE=3) Low Extent (LE=2) and Very Low Extent (VLE=1). To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to expert review by specialists in Educational Management, Computer Science and Measurement and Evaluation. Feedback from the reviewers was incorporated to refine item wording and ensure clarity and relevance. Operationally, to test for the reliability of the instrument used, a pilot study was carried out using 20 teachers randomly selected from four schools outside the area under study. Cronbach Alpha reliability formula was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument. The objective was to determine the internal consistency of the items used in the instrument. The reliability coefficient for the instrument was 0.83. The researcher personally visited the sampled schools and with the approval of the principals and vice principals, copies of the instrument were administered to the teachers. The teachers were briefed on the modalities and the reasons behind the administration of the instrument. This method ensured a high return rate.

Simple percentage and histogram were used to present the demographic data. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested using an independent sample t-test at a 0.05 level of significance. The data was analysed with Statistical Package for Social Science version 26. The decision rule for answering research questions was arrived at by finding the average of the 4-point rating scale, thus; $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$ Any item with a mean of 2.50 and above was interpreted as a high extent, while mean scores below were interpreted as a low extent. For the hypotheses, the decision rule was that if the calculated p-value was greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis would be rejected, otherwise, it would not be accepted.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent does in-law interference influence marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation on the extent to which in-law interference influence marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender

S/N	Items Statements	Male N=125			Female N=247		
		\bar{x}	Sd	Decision	\bar{x}	Sd	Decision
1.	My in-laws frequently interfere in our marital decisions	2.54	1.00	HE	2.85	.96	HE
2.	I feel comfortable discussing issues with my spouse without the involvement of in-laws	2.80	1.02	HE	2.91	1.02	HE
3.	In-law interference causes tension between me and my spouse	2.82	.90	HE	2.88	.87	HE
4.	My spouse prioritizes the opinions of their family over ours as a couple.	2.80	.95	HE	2.84	.98	HE
5.	My spouse and I effectively resolve conflicts together	2.97	.94	HE	2.88	.100	HE
6.	I feel emotionally supported by my spouse	2.92	.93	HE	2.92	.90	HE
7.	We have mutual respect's opinions and decisions	2.88	.95	HE	2.88	.97	HE
8.	My spouse and I share household responsibilities fairly.	2.94	.94	HE	2.90	.96	HE
9.	My work as a teacher is challenging, hence it affects my marital function	2.98	.95	HE	2.90	.93	HE
10.	In-law interference affects our ability to make decisions as a couple.	2.81	.96	HE	2.86	.97	HE
11.	Communication between me and my spouse is open and honest	3.05	.92	HE	2.94	.97	HE
12.	In-law interference leads to arguments between me and my spouse.	2.84	.89	HE	2.89	.93	HE
13.	Our marital satisfaction decreases when in-laws are overly involved	2.84	.96	HE	2.85	.94	HE
14.	I feel distant from my spouse when my in-laws interfere excessively.	2.84	.96	HE	2.71	.99	HE
Grand Mean		2.88	.95	HE	2.87	0.95	HE

Source: Survey Data, (2025) *LE=LOW EXTENT, HE=HIGH EXTENT Cut-off Mean = 2.50

The data in Table 1 shows that in-law interference significantly influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State for both males and females, with all mean scores falling within the "High Extent" (HE) range. Female teachers reported slightly higher mean scores than male teachers on most items, indicating they may be more sensitive to in-law interference in their marriages. For instance, females had higher mean scores on statements like "My in-laws frequently interfere in our marital decisions" (2.85), "In-law interference leads to arguments between me and my spouse" (2.89), and "In-law interference causes tension between me and my spouse" (2.88), compared to males with respective means of 2.54, 2.84, and 2.82.

Conversely, male teachers reported marginally higher mean scores on items related to positive spousal communication and conflict resolution, such as "Communication between me and my spouse is open and honest" (3.05) and "My spouse and I effectively resolve conflicts together" (2.97), suggesting they perceive better management of marital dynamics despite external pressures. In all, both male and female teachers recognize in-law interference as a considerable factor affecting marital adjustment. The grand

mean scores for male (2.88) and female (2.87) teachers are nearly identical, confirming that in-law interference is a pervasive issue impacting marital relationships regardless of gender.

Research Question 2: *To what extent does in-law interference influence marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation on the extent to which in-law interference trigger marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification

S/N	Items Statements	Graduate N=263			Postgraduate n=109		
		\bar{x}	Sd	Decision	\bar{x}	Sd	Decision
15.	My in-laws frequently interfere in our marital decisions	2.85	.96	HE	2.83	.99	HE
16.	I feel comfortable discussing issues with my spouse without the involvement of in-laws	2.91	1.02	HE	2.79	1.02	HE
17.	In-law interference causes tension between me and my spouse	2.87	.87	HE	2.81	.92	HE
18.	My spouse prioritizes the opinions of their family over ours as a couple.	2.84	.97	HE	2.78	.97	HE
19.	My spouse and I effectively resolve conflicts together	2.88	.99	HE	2.97	.96	HE
20.	I feel emotionally supported by my spouse	2.91	.91	HE	2.93	.94	HE
21.	We have mutual respect's opinions and decisions	2.86	.97	HE	2.93	.96	HE
22.	My spouse and I share household responsibilities fairly.	2.90	.97	HE	2.93	.96	HE
23.	My work as a teacher is challenging, hence it affects my marital function	2.91	.94	HE	3.01	.91	HE
24.	In-law interference affects our ability to make decisions as a couple.	2.90	.95	HE	2.89	.85	HE
25.	Communication between me and my spouse is open and honest	2.84	.98	HE	2.83	.95	HE
26.	In-law interference leads to arguments between me and my spouse.	2.92	.96	HE	3.11	.92	HE
27.	Our marital satisfaction decreases when in-laws are overly involved	2.88	.93	HE	2.86	.87	HE
28.	I feel distant from my spouse when my in-laws interfere excessively.	2.85	.94	HE	2.83	.97	HE
	Grand mean	2.88	.95	HE	2.85	.94	HE

Source: Survey Data, (2025)

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation of responses from graduate and postgraduate secondary school teachers on the extent to which in-law interference affects marital adjustment in Bayelsa State. The data reveals slight variations in the responses of graduate and postgraduate teachers. Graduate teachers generally reported marginally higher mean values in several items. For instance, they had higher mean scores for items such as “My in-laws frequently interfere in our marital decisions” (mean = 2.85), “In-law interference causes tension between me and my spouse” (2.87), and “In-law interference affects our ability to make decisions as a couple” (2.90), compared to their postgraduate counterparts with mean scores of 2.83, 2.81, and 2.89 respectively. These values suggest that graduate teachers perceive in-law interference as slightly more influential on their marital relationships than postgraduate teachers do.

Conversely, postgraduate teachers recorded higher means in items such as “My spouse and I effectively resolve conflicts together” (2.97), “My work as a teacher is challenging, hence it affects my marital function” (3.01), and “In-law interference leads to arguments between me and my spouse” (3.11), which are slightly above the corresponding values for graduate teachers. This may indicate that postgraduate teachers, despite potentially having more conflict-resolution skills, still experience the adverse effects of in-law interference in particular areas of marital adjustment.

Both groups reported mean values consistently above 2.50 for all items, which places their responses in the “High Extent” (HE) category. The grand mean for graduate teachers was 2.88, slightly higher than that of postgraduate teachers (2.85), suggesting that graduate teachers perceive a marginally greater overall influence of in-law interference on their marital relationships.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test analysis on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	T	P	Remark
Male	125	2.88	.95	370	.096	.924	Accept H01
Female	247	2.87	.95				

Source: SPSS OUTPUT (2025)

The summary of data analysis presented in Table 3 shows the independent sample t-test analysis on the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender. The result indicates that with 370 degrees of freedom, the p-value is 0.924. Since the p-value is greater than the critical value of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification.

Table 4: Independent sample t-test analysis on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification.

Edu Qua	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	T	P	Remark
Graduate	263	2.88	.95	370	.278	.781	Accept H02
Postgraduate	109	2.85	.94				

Source: SPSS OUTPUT (2025)

The summary of data analysis presented in Table 4 shows the independent sample t-test analysis on the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification. The result indicates that with 370 degrees of freedom, the p-value is 0.781. Since the p-value is greater than the critical value of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H₀₂) is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from Research Question 1 revealed that the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender is high. Both male and female teachers reported experiencing significant challenges related to in-law interference that affect their marital relationships. This indicates that in-law interference is a considerable factor influencing marital

adjustment for secondary school teachers regardless of their gender. Furthermore, findings from Hypothesis 1 showed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on gender. This suggests that both male and female teachers are equally affected by in-law interference in their marital lives, with neither gender reporting significantly higher or lower levels of disruption.

The high extent to which in-law interference impacts marital adjustment underscores the pervasive influence of extended family dynamics on the marital relationships of teachers in Bayelsa State. It highlights how pressures or conflicts originating from in-laws can strain the marriage, affecting communication, emotional well-being, and overall marital satisfaction. These findings have important implications for family counselors, educational administrators, and policymakers, who must recognize and address the role of extended family relations in supporting healthy marriages among teachers.

The absence of a significant gender difference in the experience of in-law interference challenges any assumptions that one gender might be more vulnerable to such external family pressures. Instead, it suggests a universal challenge that calls for inclusive approaches in marital counseling and support services that consider the impact of in-law dynamics on both male and female teachers. This finding aligns with previous studies by Obineli (2010), Ebinuwa-Okoh (2011), and Okpamen (2019), who reported that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between various family and emotional factors and marital adjustment, indicating that these issues transcend gender lines among married individuals.

The results from Research Question 2 revealed that the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State based on educational qualification is high for both postgraduate and graduate teachers. Both groups reported similar experiences of in-law interference affecting their marital relationships, indicating that educational attainment does not substantially alter the degree of influence that in-laws have on marital adjustment. This suggests that whether teachers hold postgraduate or graduate qualifications, they are equally susceptible to the challenges posed by in-law interference in their marriages.

This observation was further confirmed by the findings from Hypothesis 2. The independent sample t-test analysis yielded a t-value of 0.278 with 370 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.781, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment based on educational qualification. Therefore, the impact of in-law interference on marital adjustment does not differ between teachers with postgraduate qualifications and those with graduate qualifications.

The lack of significant variation in responses based on educational qualification may be due to the cultural and familial dynamics that transcend academic achievement among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State. In-law interference, as a socio-cultural factor, likely affects individuals similarly regardless of their level of education. This reinforces the notion that marital challenges arising from extended family involvement are pervasive and not mitigated by higher educational status.

These findings are consistent with the works of Okonkwo and Igbokwe (2020) and Eze and Nwachukwu (2021), who found that socio-cultural influences on marital relationships tend to affect individuals similarly across different educational backgrounds. The results emphasize the importance for family counselors, educators, and policymakers to develop interventions that address in-law interference in marital relationships without presuming educational qualifications as a protective factor. Supporting teachers through counseling and family mediation services that consider cultural contexts can help reduce the negative impact of in-law interference on marital adjustment across all educational levels.

CONCLUSION

The study established that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference influences marital adjustment among secondary school teachers based on gender and educational qualification. Similarly, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings on the extent to which in-law interference triggers marital adjustment based on gender and educational qualification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion drawn, and its counseling implications, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Family counselors and educational administrators should implement inclusive marital counseling and support programs that address in-law interference as a universal marital challenge affecting both male and female teachers, regardless of gender differences.
- ii. Policymakers and school authorities should design culturally sensitive family intervention programs that help teachers manage in-law interference effectively, recognizing that such challenges persist across all educational qualification levels.

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