
Developing Effective Teaching Skills: What Teachers Should Know

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ABSTRACT

*The dynamic nature of teaching in today's modern world requires that teachers must be professionally trained for them to have requisite skills of teaching. Teacher's professional skills development is a *sine qua non* for effective teaching. This is because teachers who have no teaching skills tend to impart wrong information to their students. On the basis of these, this paper focused on: Guiding principle of effective teaching, the acquisition of teaching skills, developing effective teaching skills and the end useful recommendations were proffered.*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality and professional development has been a subject of discussion among educationists in recent times. There is also public outcry about the declining quality of education in Nigeria which many educationists attributed to lack of professional development skills for modern teachers. In his submission, Ali (2010) stressed that one of the areas of recent increased concern expressed by Nigerian students, parents, schools, examination agencies, employers of labour and proprietors of schools has centered more on depressing poor quality education, imbalances between areas of dire educational needs and areas of graduate output, wastages in education occasioned by confusing, contradictory policies as well as ordinary citizens' government's real intentions in reaffirming the processes and product of education. The place of quality education in national development cannot be overemphasized. This is because quality education is being considered as the veritable tool for sustainable development of any nation in the world. The development of any country lean greatly on the kind and nature of education put in place. If the education system is of high quality, the future of the country will be bright, but if the education is of low quality, the future of the country will be at stake. In fact any nation that toys with the quality of her educational system be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary level, could be regarded as toying with the future of the nation. The question here is do we really have quality teachers with professional skills in our schools?

In an attempt to address the question posed, Adeleke (2006) laments that the education sector in Nigeria has suffered the plight of inadequate instructional materials, inadequate qualified teachers, poor funding syndrome, inadequate instructional facilities and lack of motivation among others. This demands urgent attention because teachers are the major hub around which the

successful implementation of a new curriculum revolves. The quality of teachers should be what matters as only quality teachers are able to deliver quality teaching. For it is any quality teaching that would promote positive learning climate, select appropriate instructional goals and assessments, using curriculum effectively, and employing varied instructional behaviours that could help students learn to high levels. In reaction to the relevance of teachers in the teaching and learning episode, Ukeje (1993: 46) succinctly enunciated by saying that:

The teacher is the most important single factor in any teaching- learning episode. Teachers are at the hub of any education system. For upon their number, their quality, their devotion, and their effectiveness depend on the system, and no education system can be stronger than its teachers.

However, since teachers are regarded as very important elements in teaching and learning episode, their professional skills development should be vigorously pursued. Developing effective teaching skills by teachers is paramount for effective teaching. The theoretical knowledge, high level of professional mastery or scholarship does not necessarily mean that a person will be a good and effective teacher. The essence of being an effective teacher lies in knowing what to do to foster pupil's learning and being able to do it (Kyriacou, 20001, p.1). It is a well-known fact that theoretical foundations for building teaching skills are provided in lectures and seminars but the actual acquisition of the skills, with regard to their nature, should certainly be a matter of methodically controlled practice and not of trial and error performance during teaching as the case may be.

Developing effective teaching skills is a sine qua non for effective classroom delivery. Teachers who lack teaching skills are likely to impact wrong information to their students. Kriacou (2001) emphasizes three important elements of teaching skills: knowledge, decision-making, and action. Kriacou further states that knowledge is not restricted to theoretical knowledge of the subject matter but it also comprises knowledge about the pupils, curriculum, teaching methods, the influence on teaching and learning of other factors, and knowledge about the teacher's own teaching skills. Therefore, teacher's professional skills development, especially at the primary and secondary school is the key factor that should be considered. Acquisition of teaching skills is a process between knowing what to do and being able to do it. Controlled practice accompanied with appropriate professional feedback can help get over difficulties and move towards mastery.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

By definition, teaching is the act of impacting knowledge, skills, attitude and values to the learners. It is process whereby students are made to learn the unknown. During the process of teaching, behavior of learners changes from not knowing to knowing. When such a thing happens, learning has taken place. Effective teaching cannot take place in a vacuum, but through an effective teacher. An effective teacher is the one that acquires the basic skills of teaching and is able to translate it into practice. Teaching could be said to be effective when it is meaningful. An effective teaching is the one in which students learn with ease. Teaching that involves students collaborating, solving problems, discussing, brainstorming, arguing debating and coming out with ideas and facts could be said to be effective. An effective teaching is the one which has no fixed agenda, scheme and being rigid to the scheme, but being flexible, fluid, experimenting and having confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances. Effective teaching entails listening, questioning, being

responsive and remembering that each student and class is different. Good and effective teaching has to do with substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge (Josiah, 2009).

Effective teaching is not only about motivating students to learn, but it involves teaching them how to learn and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful and memorable. Good teaching entails eliciting responses and developing both oral and verbal communication skills of your students. An effective teacher always respects the views of students whenever they are right. In an effective teaching, the teacher should not be too authoritarian in taking decisions, about learning situations in the classroom. During effective teaching, the teacher should put the interests, needs and aspirations of students' paramount. Teachers are expected to always put challenging questions to students that would make them to think critically before coming out with the solutions. A good teacher should also be an attention seeker by playing jokes with students from time to time. A coherent utilization of different methodologies by teachers could be another way of effective teaching. This is because effective application of modern strategies of teaching could motivate students to learn effectively and meaningfully. In a non-effective teaching, students are not involved, they remain as passive listeners to what the teacher teach and do.

THE ACQUISITION OF TEACHING SKILLS

Teachers who wants to be successful in their classroom lessons must acquire some basic teaching skills. Teaching skills are not acquired without study and diligent practice. This paper would assist the teacher to see the need to acquire the basic skills of teaching, help them to start thinking about teaching skills, help them understand their purpose and assist teachers in practicing their application in either stimulated or classroom situation.

There are basically three stages of acquiring teaching skills:

i. Cognitive Stage

In this stage, the teacher is expected to study and observe the skill, know the purpose of using it and how it will benefit their teaching. This stage help teachers to isolate the various elements of the skill, their sequencing and the nature of the final performance. In other words, teachers will form the concept of the skill in this stage.

ii. Practice Stage

There is a common saying that practice makes perfect. Complex skills cannot be learned without a great deal of practice. It is not possible for a teacher to acquire basic skills of teaching without constant practice. For example, an experienced teacher can perform well in the classroom than a beginning teacher. Similarly, the flexible use of teaching skills in a variety of combinations required by different classroom situations cannot be learned without practice. The use of training techniques such as microteaching (Allens & Ryan 1969) allow the student teacher to practice specific teaching skills under controlled conditions. In this case the controlled condition involves a short practice period (5 – 10 minutes), a small class (4-7 pupils), and the practice of single skill (Perrot, 1977).

iii. Evaluation Stage

The third stage in acquiring teaching skills is to obtain knowledge of results or feedback, which involves evaluation. Practice is greatly improved by receiving feedback regarding a performance. The need or feedback in skill acquisition has been repeatedly demonstrated

by research studies in which subjects are given considerable amount of practice in a skill, but are deprived of any feedback regarding their performance. Without feedback their performance does not improve. Teaching skills must be exercised with pupils in real teaching situations, teachers' probability of success will be greatly increased if teachers first develop a thorough understanding of certain teaching skills; if you arrange controlled practice situation which are reality based; and if you received feedback so that you might adjust your teaching when necessary (Perrot, 1982).

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHING SKILLS

Teaching is a complex activity that requires people with requisite skills to handle. As the world is changing so as the teaching is changing. The traditional methods of teaching which mostly teacher centered are no longer in practice. Teachers of today are expected to develop effective teaching skills in order to go hand in hand with the changing world. There are a lot of effective teaching skills which teachers are expected to acquire for them to become effective teachers. This paper discusses some of such effective teaching skills thus:

a. ***Knowledge of Subject Matter***

Teachers who are knowledgeable about their subject matter would be able to impart sound and functional knowledge, skills, values and attitude to their students. The skills of knowing the subject matter is a prerequisite for effective teaching. Teachers who knows their subject matter well earn respect and confidence from their students. Teachers who have skills of teaching have thorough knowledge of their subject content and skills. By so doing, they inspire their students best learn concepts, contents and skills. Teachers with effective teaching skills use their knowledge of learning processes to determine which will be most effective to help the particular students in their classes learn successfully.

b. ***Methodology Skills***

Teachers who uses range of teaching methodologies in their classrooms are bound to have a successful lesson. A skillfully teacher who display varying methodologies of teaching would likely motivate students to learn and possible develop students' interests towards his/her subject. Teachers who uses multiple methods of teaching are likely to systematically gather data about student understanding and ability. Some modern methods in use today includes: play way method, discovery learning method, discussion, collaborative, cooperative, concept mapping, minds mapping, active learning e.t.c.

c. ***Classroom Control and Management Skills***

A skillful teacher must have the knowledge of managing the classroom. An effective teacher knows how to manage and ensure good behavior of students. Effective teachers always provide a safe and orderly environment, both physically and emotionally. By so doing, students can achieve their potentials with ease. They know students learn best if they are in a classroom where they feel safe and confident to attempt new tasks even if at first they are insure about how to take them. Good classroom management skills start with setting certain ground rules to stress the importance classroom dignity. An effective teacher always controls the classroom when even there is any disputes among students. More importantly, teachers are expected to establish a good rapport with their students so that a positive,

productive and safe learning environment is created in the classrooms. An effective teacher should organize the classroom in such a way that the sitting arrangement is good enough for conducive learning to take place.

d. Classroom Discipline Skills

No effective teaching will take place in a classroom where discipline is lacking. A disruptive class cannot be a good learning environment. Discipline is a vital component of effective classroom management. Discipline ensures that positive behavior is encourage inside classrooms. The most important discipline skills an effective teacher should have includes being respectful, responding to students needs and reciprocating their interest. By so doing, discipline can be maintain in the classroom.

e. Good Communication Skills with Students and Parents

Teachers who are skillful in communication always provide opportunities for their students to understand what concepts they are teaching. Good communication in classroom make students to be attentive and understand the subject matter. Poor communication of ideas in the classroom could leads to poor understanding of the content taught. Being able to communicate with not only your students but with parents and staff is an essential skill that is require of any teacher. It is crucial to be able to talk clear and concise in order to get your point across to your students. An effective teacher is also expected to communicate with parents of their wards. By so doing, you constantly interact with parents and you will be able to bridge the gap between what is happening in school to what is expected from a particular student as the case may be.

f. Innovative and Creative Skills

An effective teacher should be innovative and creative. The teacher can do this by trying to do new things from new educational apps to teaching skills and electronic devices. Being innovative means not only trying new things, but questioning your students, making real world connections and cultivating a creative mindset in your students. It's simply means getting your students to take risks and having students learn to collaborate with one another. Here the teacher is expected to incorporate 21st century learning skills that prepare students to be innovative and creative to meet the future challenges.

g. Good Questioning Skills

Effective teaching cannot take place without good questioning coming from the teacher. Teachers who possessed good teaching skills always orchestrates effective classroom discussions, questioning, and learning tasks that promote higher- order thinking. Teachers should ask challenging questions that would make their students think logical before answering them. Asking general questions who can define science, social studies, introductory technology during teaching should be avoided. Direct questions that are specific should always be ask in the classroom eg Musa what science, what is technology is? etc.

h. Time Management Skills

For effective teaching to take place, time management must be taken into consideration. This is because effective time management skills are vital for providing quality education to students while also meeting the specific learning needs of each students. Teachers who are

poor time managers are bound not to effectively deliver in their classrooms. An effective teacher plans his/her lesson within the stipulated time. Teachers who are not good time managers seem to plan lessons that are so ambiguous that cannot be completed within the time allocated for the lesson. An effective and skilful teacher should ensure that the best use of classroom time by framing and structuring assignments which will help students sit for studies while at home. An effective teacher always attaches importance to the time taken by students to complete their assignments.

i. Observation Skills

Teachers are the facilitators of learning in the classrooms. As they teach, they also observe the activities of their students. In fact it is the prime responsibility of teachers to have a thorough understanding about the cognitive, emotional and social development of students. The teacher could do these by carefully observing the students as they come to the class for the day activity. Classrooms always consist of students coming from different ethnic, religious, and parental background. It therefore makes sense to a teacher to be aware of the learning capabilities of different students. It is common knowledge that a class can be a mix of slow learners and intelligent students. This sometimes becomes a challenge that teachers face day in day out when they need to adopt specific teaching patterns so that no student is left behind. Through careful observation, the teacher would be able to understand the innate abilities of each student and this should help the teacher to match the teaching pace.

j. Patience

An effective teacher must cultivate the habit of being patient. Managing a classroom full of students that come from different parental backgrounds and upbringing is not an easy job. It is obvious that one day some students may decide to test your patience. But if you lose your nerves and become impatient during such testing times, the end result would only produce negative outcomes. However, by being patient and working smoothly with trouble students individually, definitely, you would be able to improve your classroom atmosphere effectively.

k. Individual Differences Skills

Acknowledging individual differences is a skill that must be known by teachers. Effective teachers personalize the learning for their students. They do this by knowing that their students develop at different rates and that in every classroom there will be a range of students' abilities and attitudes. The teacher accomplishes this by accommodating the different needs of students in their class rather than pitch their teaching to the middle, letting some students be bored while others struggle or are unable to do the work expected of them.

CONCLUSION

Education is an instrument par excellence for national development. As no nation can develop without qualitative education. Quality education can only be obtained through quality teacher since no education system will rise above the quality of its teachers. Developing effective teaching skills should form a fulcrum of the national discuss. For without effective teachers

teaching in our schools, there would be no quality education. Developing effective skills should also be one of the objectives of the Nigerian curriculum. It is only when teachers are professionally trained, the country education system would be of high quality. Teaching as a profession cannot take place in a vacuum but through teachers; it then became imperative for the country to have teachers that have professional skills to teach in our schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what have been discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Governments at all levels should take professional development of teachers with upmost priority. They could do this by training and retraining of teachers through organizing seminars, conferences, and workshops for their teachers to update knowledge on professional teacher skills development.
2. Government alone cannot do everything for the development of teachers, as such others stakeholders in education such as private schools proprietors should also provide avenues for the teachers to acquire requisite skills of teaching through sponsoring of teachers to attend conferences, seminars, symposium, workshops aim at improving teaching effectiveness of teachers.
3. School proprietors, federal, and state governments should ensure that only qualified teachers are employed to teach in schools. By so doing, students' performance would improve significantly hence the development of the nation.
4. No teaching can take place in a vacuum. Government at all levels, school proprietors and stakeholders in education should put heads together to fashion out ways of providing adequate instructional materials in schools.

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