

IMPROVING TEACHERS EFFICIENCY IN THE UTILIZATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

the teaching-Learning process involves an array of interactional processes at the centre of which is the teacher whose role remains germane to this overall success of an educational programme. The essence of teaching is to enhance effective learning and bring about a change in behaviour in the learners in a given direction. From this standpoint, this paper discusses vividly the concept of teaching and what instructional strategies involves. It argues that, in as much as various strategies abound for teaching and learning, their effectiveness can only be ensured by an instructional agent - (the teacher) who is academically competent and professionally equipped to utilize these strategies, upon what objectives are to be achieved. Recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of teachers in the utilization of methods are put forward.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process involves a vast array of interactional processes at the centre of which is the teacher whose role remains pivotal to the success of any educational programme. Eddie (1986) observed that in spite of the technological breakthrough in audio-visual equipment teachers have remained indispensable since they constitute the bulwark in which educational machines are made to have meaning.

There is no doubt that there has been a growing concern about the quality and intellectual aims of education in the Nigerian society. The school is being looked upon to bring to fruition the attainment of a society backed strongly by future citizens who are conscious and innovatively oriented. It is because of this that the teaching activity of the teacher falls under the searchlight of the larger society. The National Policy on Education (1981) clearly recognises the role of the teacher when it declares that "no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers"

The school system is always in a state of crisis over the issue of instructional strategies employed by teachers in instructing the students. This is so because the instructional process is what brings the teacher more often than not into contact with the learners. His/her manipulative skills coupled with his/her professional and academic ability determines to a very large extent the success of the learning programmes. Although, there are an unending list of problems which bedevil our educational system in Nigeria, one should not be tuned off by these shortcomings at the expense of the state of the arts of teaching, that is as it concerns what teachers do and how they do it within the limits of existing facilities.

However, what is important about methods is that it should be carefully utilized to cater for different branches of knowledge. The teacher's role as an instructional agent is, therefore, a complex one as he/she must master various instructional strategies and their applicability as it affects his/her area of specialization. A thorough grasp of the subject matter by the teacher is a sine qua non for an efficient management of instructional strategies in the teaching - learning situation.

CONCEPT OF TEACHING

The concept of teaching has been an area of intense philosophical analysis by philosophers and educationalists all over the world. This has been so to carve a place of pride for the pedagogic function of the teacher and to distinguish the teaching activity of the teacher from that given by parents, churches and other agencies. Bamisaiye (1985) quoting Gilbert Ryle sees teaching as:

Didactic talk, unlike most of others, is meant to better the mind of recipient, that is, to improve its equipment or strengthen its powers. Teaching is teaching someone to do which include, things and what a pupil has been taught to do, he is expected to continue to do for a fair time afterwards. Lessons are meant to be learnt and not forgotten. In a word teaching is deliberate equipping.

While Okoye (1985),

teaching is simply the art of helping others learn effectively. The word is important because an organism can learn with or without a teacher. But a teacher because he uses appropriate strategies and techniques in facilitating learning can improve the quality and quantity of learning to a level that can justify the term effective learning.

The two definitions of teaching given above furthermore reiterate the unique position and role of the teacher as a mediator in the teaching-learning process. Akinboye (1985) observed that two major concepts of teaching that had been in operation from the medieval period till now are (i) the belief that (effective) teachers are born and (ii) the belief that effective teachers are "made". He subscribes to the later view that effective teachers are made since he considers teaching as a set of stimuli initiated by the instructional agent and monitored to bring about desirable learning outcome. According to him: *this concept of teaching implies that it is a set of stimuli initiated and regulated by an individual who has been professionally trained to do so. So teaching strategies are learned and not, automatically manifested by individuals.*

Okon (1982) and Akunboye (1985) hold similar views that the teacher interacts with the learner in the learning environment through series of activities, which makes teaching a complex phenomenon. Hence **effective** teaching behaviour involves many activities which are not manifested automatically, since even the innate abilities or natural

skills are not sufficient in themselves for one to be a teacher. Perhaps, of significant note is that the pedagogical role of the teacher is not a haphazard one, but has to be undertaken in a morally acceptable manner in a way to show understanding of the peculiar characteristics of the learners,

ISSUE OF METHODS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The teaching activity as a complex phenomenon is brought about through interactional processes in the learning environment. For effective teaching to take place, various methods/instructional strategies have to be employed, to bridge the gap in the teaching - learning situation, since teaching is a separate function from learning.

Akinboye (1985) opines that: *Teaching is thus a strategy generated by the teaching to reduce or bridge the gap created in the two apparently close but separate and distinct teaching - learning process.*

In the process of teaching some of the subject matters are concepts, while others are information, while still others may be attitudes, values and skills. Each of these require appropriate instructional strategy to be applied in ensuring that the learners learn.

According to Aina and others (1982), *A method is away of doing something, it is an approach or a stand which a teacher adopts to explain a subject matter to a group of students or a student.*

On the other hand, *Methodology is the study and practice of various methods of teaching.*

The Nigeria Certificate in Education / Distant Learning System course book defines a teaching method as *a process of selecting, directing, controlling and evaluating the experiences of the child to achieve desirable learning outcomes. A teaching method may also be regarded as a broad and consistent manner of teaching that is guided by certain basic beliefs. Examples of teaching methods are the lecture, discussion, demonstration and field trips.*

These strategies can be used individually or collectively to achieve educational objectives. According to Akinboye (1985), teaching methods have been grouped in many ways, the early teaching methods are classified as traditional methods. The groupings are:

1. traditional teaching methods such as the lecture, direct and other telling methods.
2. heuristic teaching methods.
3. creativity teaching methods.
4. indirect teaching methods.
5. behavioural teaching methods.

Heuristic, creativity and indirect teaching can help the students to be creative, inventive, imaginative and original in their potentialities.

The Behavioural teaching methods is a result of the scientific consideration of the behaviours of pupils in the learning situation. It places emphasis on knowing the entry behaviour of the child before setting down behavioural goals for him.

However, the intention of this paper is not to go into the literature on methods of teaching and other related findings in the area, but to make some recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of teachers in the utilization of instructional strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EFFICIENCY IN THE UTILIZATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Curriculum instructional analysts are all too clear on the point that no instructional strategy can claim total superiority over another. But then their utilization in the process of teaching cannot be wished away as effective teaching can only be said to have taken place when a teaching results in behaviour change in the learner. According to Peters (1968) no overall generalisations about teaching methods is possible. Everything depends upon what is being taught, to whom and to how many.

In the light of this the following recommendations are made for teachers to consider while developing their lesson plans.

1. **The Teacher.** An improvement of efficiency in the utilization of instructional methods cannot take place without the assessment of the teacher himself. His professional competence must be brought to bear on the teaching - learning environment as all other recommendations can only be effectualised by a teacher who is professionally equipped. Competent teachers are known through what takes place in the classroom situation. It is important to mention some of these areas as mentioned by Resenshine and FURST (1971). These are
 - i. clarity of presentation, including organisation.
 - ii. variability of various levels of discourse, tasks and variety of materials and techniques,
 - iii. enthusiasm including movement, gesture, and voice inflection.
 - iv. task orientation; achievement orientation of the teacher.

2. Nature of the Subject Matter: The nature of the subject matter at hand is **very important** in determining effective instructional strategies to be used in (the teaching - learning environment. The subject matter has to be understood by the teachers. According to Akinboye (1985), *some of the subject matters are concepts, while others are information, while others still may be attitudes, values, and skill.* It has to be noted that the learners can only develop concepts when they see and manipulate object in concrete terms. As regards the dissemination of information, this can be accomplished **using the** lecture method. When the subject matter requires experimentation it is only advisable that it **followed for** the learners to benefit.
3. Characteristics of the Learners: Learners are of categories in any learning situation. The school has been so structured to bring out this gradation into the pre-nursery so the highest level of the educational system. It is essential for the instructional agent to bear this in mind in planning his instructional process. Individual differences between learners are well documented although only a small part of this information about differences has been considered in developing curricula. The learner's activities are dependent upon his developmental level, his intellectual power, his learning style, his past learning experience, his relations with his parents, his peer-group associations, and so on (Lassa 1984).
These characteristics are all at the disposal of the teacher to enable him decide on his instructional strategies. Learners are human beings who must be recognised in the learning situation. An instructional design process "must take into consideration this living being and be flexible enough to satisfy his needs and desires, (Lassa 1984). Whenever this is done the learner develops self confidence and is ready to be attentive in the learning environment.
4. Ensure Availability of Resources and Other Materials: Various lessons have been taught as if they are mere abstractions without a recourse to the utilization of instructional materials. According to Mbiti (1977), the whole concept of the schools is changing everywhere. The students are demanding something real and concrete. This view is supported by Minor and Erye (1971) when they said that: *Teachers must always keep in mind that the purpose of any worthwhile instructional material should be to communicate quickly, dearly and memorably. Thus materials should be prepared and used only when they will do the work of communicating better find quicker than other methods of communications.* According to Savoury (1967) a carefully planned and imaginative use of visual aids in lessons could do much to banish apathy, arouse pupils interest by giving them something practical to see and do.
5. Managing Time: The selection of content for a particular lesson should take due cognizance of the time available to cover the lesson. It is important for the teacher to ensure that the objectives set for a particular lesson period are not too many to avoid their non-completion. It is therefore suggested that related academic programmes should be organised outside school hours or at weeks-ends to avoid the disorganisation of school programmes. Field trips, for example, can be placed at weekends. How the teacher manages the time available to him determines his choice of instructional strategies.

Apart from the issues raised above, the works of Akinboye (1985), as it concerns his effort in expanding the frontiers of the pedagogical role of the teacher should be handy to all professional teachers. The views of Akinboye are hereby outlined. It is a behaviour analytic strategy which can be used for teaching and of the subjects in the education setting.

1. He should behaviourally specify the desirable behaviour he wants learned.
2. Baseline or repeated measures of entry behaviour on skills he plans to teach should be established.
3. He should evolve strategies (tools, methods and means) of increasing the frequency of responding to the skills he wants students to acquire. Adequate prompts, models and reinforcers are consistently and contingently used to motivate behaviours.
4. He should be aware of and be sufficiently competent to utilize behavioural laws and principles that:
 - a. A child's behaviour is learnt.
 - b. Learning is a product of the child's interaction with his environment.
 - c. Learning occurs through:
 - i. imitation (modelling)
 - ii. conditioning
 - iii. adequate, consistent and contingent use of reinforcer principles; primary reinforcers, secondary reinforcers, positive reinforcers.
5. He should assess (observe, interview, test, conduct experiment and appraise or evaluate) at the beginning, during the process and after a particular curricula programme has been put on.
6. He should evolve a multi-model strategy of assessment that makes provision for individual rates in progress.

These steps are useful for improving and identifying appropriate instructional strategies for the purpose of enhancing learning.

CONCLUSION

This paper contends that learning the teaching function is a complex process which can best be undertaken by a competent professional. Teaching methods are not automatically acquired that learn consequently, only through

personal commitment by teachers can efficiency in the utilization of instructional strategies be achieved. A long term excellence is a mystery. It is simply the result of building commitment (Hosey Blanchard 1988).

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