



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR SUITABILITY FOR THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined instructional strategies widely used in the educational system of Nigeria, and identified three most suitable ones for the present system of education in Nigeria. The paper x-rayed the importance of teachers as key determinants of any viable economy. The paper went further to examine the nature of teaching and its involvements, and subsequently looked at instruction as a learner-centered activity. Five widely used instructional strategies in the Nigerian classroom were examined to determine the ones that are best suited for the system. Finally the paper opted for three namely Discussion, Project and Guided-Discovery Strategies as most suitable for now, with the application of questioning strategy continuously in any teaching and learning situation.

KEYWORDS:..

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the key determinants of any buoyant economy. Their activities can make or mar the economy. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), section 8 and subsection B reiterates: "Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development". The policy goes further to state the goals of teacher education thus.

- Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system;
- Encourage further, the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large, and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment, and make them adaptable to changing situations, and
- Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

The Nigerian present educational system is a dynamic one that needs high calibre of teachers who are equipped as stated above. Teachers are expected to do their best in order to move the nation's citizenry forward through their dynamic instructional strategies and classroom management. This dynamism call for constant examination of the nature of teaching and learning.

Nature of Teaching and Its Involvements

Teaching is a dynamic process of imparting specific knowledge to learners. Onwuegbu (2002:6) perceives teaching as "an art that involves the rigour of modelling and remodelling an individual exposed to its processes". On the other hand, he sees teaching as a science that uses a systematic and orderly approach, to alter an organism

exposed to its paths. Byrne (1970) defines teaching as a conscious behaviour that makes learning more probable and more efficient.

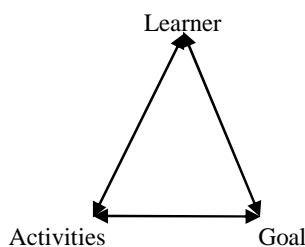
The job of a teacher is not just to teach, but also to guide learning and develop curiosity to solve confronting problems of learners. When teachers guide the learning of their students, they give them the benefit of the knowledge and experience which they have gained themselves. (Ozigi and Canhan,1979). The authors posit that the fundamental objective in education is to solve problems which students are now expected to do successfully. In this regard, Onwuegbu (2002) emphasizes that a good teacher is not necessarily one who is fluent with words, nor is he or she one who dishes out knowledge; rather, he/she is one who possesses at least the following three qualities: Knowing the subject matter; how to deliver it and how to get to know the learners better.

Instruction and Learner Centred Activities

With the emphasis on curriculum and instruction, and 'Education for All,' teachers are left with the tasks of evolving new strategies to communicate the basic principles, skills and knowledge effectively. In line with this, Mkpa and Izuagba (2004) state that the curriculum must be an active one in order to achieve the laudable goal of "Education for All". According to them, 'Activity Curriculum' is child-centred in the sense that the selection and organization of content and learning experiences are based on interest, needs, aspirations and problems of learners. They see the job of the teacher as identifying these needs and interests of the learners, and organizing instructional activities based on them.

A teacher as an instructor is expected to be a provider and resourceful, and be able to carry the children along. When a teacher is resourceful, he can initiate meaningful learning in students. Learning according to Onwuegbu (2002) is then a process through which behaviour is initiated, modified or changed. He emphasized that a

resourceful teacher will have to arrange the learning environment with these three factors in mind- the Learner; his Activities and Goal. The author depicted these factors in a triangular form, which he called “the Learning Triangle”



Source (Onwuegbu, 2006:6)

In this triangle, an active learning is encouraged, as the students talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, and relate it to past experiences.

Okafor (1984) explains that students have objectives, as well as teachers. As a result, if they are to participate wholeheartedly in the purpose which directs their learning activities, they must be given the privilege of participating in the formation of these purposes. This is in line with the pragmatists' view of 'openness' in the curriculum. Okorie (2004) concurring with this view warns that any learning that is not child-centred is not worthwhile, and should as a matter of urgency, be discarded. Mkpa (2009) views teaching as an act that involves a lot of activities to facilitate learning. As an activity, it constitutes a body of actions intended to induce learning through conscious and deliberate efforts (p.104).

It then implies that the students' interests and needs are paramount in any school activity. The teacher therefore must try to discover those interests and needs in order to channel them into their learning experiences, so as to make learning purposeful, stimulating and rewarding for the students.

Mbakwem (2009) highlighted the characteristic nature of active curriculum that can guide a teacher as he adopts any strategy in teaching:

- The felt needs, interests and purposes of the learners determine the educational programme;
- Common learning results from the pursuance of common interests.
- Children are always actively engaged in doing something, and
- No strict planning in advance is involved in its preparation (p.57).

Widely Used Instructional Strategies in the Nigerian Education System

Instructional strategies are basically the art or science of teaching to achieve immediate results. Mkpa (2009) explains that they may take different forms based on the subject-matter content to be taught. The author posits that a combination of good teaching methods and strategies, with a proper selection and integration of media materials help the teacher to impart useful knowledge to the learners. Some of the widely used strategies examined by this paper include among others: Lecture Method,

Discussion Method; Questioning Method; Project Method and Guided Discovery Method.

LECTURE METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

This method of instruction is traced to the middle age when the Jewish teachers adopted it as a method of teaching and indoctrinating their members. Mkpa (2009) stated that teachers in those days are perceived as custodian of truths, and whatever they say is accepted without arguments. Presently in Nigeria, this is the commonest method of instruction, where the teacher is perceived as “knowing it all”, while the students merely sit to listen and copy notes.

Mkpa (1987) states that in lecture method, the teacher dominates the whole lesson segment. Onwuka (1981) sees the teacher's role as imparting of knowledge to the learners whom he assumes are 'blank', and need to be filled up with the teacher's wealth of knowledge. According to the author, the teacher presents new information to the students, and allows them to gain a better understanding of the information. A teacher using this strategy needs to use ideas and words that are familiar to the students, and deliver them in a systemic way. He or she is expected to repeat and emphasize key points of the lesson.

Advantages of Lecture Method

- a) Large course content is covered easily
- b) It is a suitable method for many subjects;
- c) Many students stand to benefit at the same time,
- d) It is a good method to train students in listening and writing skills

(Onwuka, 1981:169 and Mkpa 1987: 278).

Disadvantages of Lecture Method

Lecture methods have some obvious disadvantages:

- a) Individual differences are not taken care of in this method;
- b) There is the risk of destroying learners' initiatives
- c) It forces students to accept the teacher's views as final, while students are not made active participants, and
- d) Much content is covered so quickly without proper comprehension by the students.

DISCUSSION METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

A study of the history of communication among the people of the earth discloses many related forms of oral expression. They may be in form of talking, conversing, discussing, arguing among others (Yoakam, 2000).

Discussion is a method of learning, and in the actual educational setting is the fundamental structure of problem-solving (Jowith, 1995). Discussion is an “instructional method that embodies the democratic properties and processes of free guided and purposeful expression of views and ideas on a given issue, problem or situation” Discussion involves two or more people trying to solve a given problem, and being guided by a teacher or a student, who is well informed on the problem at hand. Mkpa (2009) explains that students are presented with a problem which they have to work on as a group to solve.

They are expected to think individually, and make their contributions. By so doing, they build their self-concept with the teacher's guidance. From the above explanations, it is therefore clear that discussion process helps the teachers to evaluate learners' areas of interest, attitude to learning and extent of comprehension. Discussion can help students develop their leadership skills, and also aid in their acquiring team and co-operative spirit.

Advantages of Discussion Strategy

- a) A good discussion draws on students' imagination, memory and power to do reflective and creative thinking;
- b) Discussion gives students the opportunity for creative expression and the inter-change of ideas;
- c) This strategy helps in problem-solving and handling of identified students' difficulties;
- d) It helps learners to develop learning skills and enrich attitude formation, and
- e) Discussion may be delightfully informal and intimate, and rich in the discovering of new ideas. (Wellington, 1990: 8).

However, discussion strategy has its own *problems or disadvantages*

Disadvantages of Discussion Strategy

- a) Students occasionally struggle to express themselves, and this may affect their active participation;
- b) Discussion is extremely difficult to use especially with young ones who are yet to develop their cognitive abilities, and
- c) If discussion forum is not well handled it may involve wondering from one topic to another by the students, without achieving the set objectives.

QUESTIONING METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

Questioning strategy is one of the popular means of communication in the classroom popularized by a Greek philosopher- Socrates. Onwuka (1981) posits that the strategy involves being skillful in questioning students, in order to get the right answers from them. For example, it may go this way:

Teacher: Is the global warming experienced now man-made?

Student: Yes Sir!

Teacher: How? Please explain more!

Mkpa (1987) reiterates that questioning constitutes the main technique for encouraging students' abilities. He warns that teachers need to frame questions in a way to elicit responses in the three domains of the educational objectives. In doing this, questions can be useful at each stage of an instructional activity – beginning of the lesson; half-way in the lesson, and at the end. In addition, Onwuka (1981) makes it clear that teachers should be kind and helpful to students when they present questions to them. He warns that long and ambiguous questions should be avoided; rather, questions should take the pattern of normal day to day conversation between individuals.

Advantages of Questioning Strategy

As a popular way of teaching, questioning strategy have the following advantages:

- a) Questions evoke critical thinking and reasoning in students;
- b) They lead to the development of latent abilities in learners as they learn by doing;
- c) This strategy suits all other types of methods of teaching; and
- d) Questioning is a good tool for diagnosing learning difficulties of students. (Mkpa, 1987: 282, and Onwuka, 1981: 176).

Disadvantages of Questioning Strategy

With its enlisted advantages above, this technique still have some obvious set backs:

- (a) Questioning technique may not favour all the students, as there is the tendency of wrong framing of questions by teachers, and
- (b) Some teachers' questions are limited to the lower order questions of mere recalls, to the detriment of higher order questions (Mkpa 1981: 283 and Onwuka, 1981: 176).

PROJECT METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

This is an action packed method of instruction that keeps the students busy all through. John Dewey initiated this method of instruction but was subsequently developed by his faithful followers. According to Mkpa (2009: 109) "Project is a systematic planned undertaking of a set of tasks by the learners, in which a given period of time is allocated and learners are taught with special reference to the topic, or project or site". Similarly, Onwuka (1981) sees a project as a meaningful purposeful activity given in an area of students' works.

Onwuka goes further to classify projects into four groups namely:

1. **Construction projects** which involves construction of given materials.
2. **Aesthetic projects** involve play groups, drama, music, pictures, among others. Students can work on any of these areas to develop their latent critical abilities.
3. **Intellectual projects:** This category according to the author involves the presentation of some challenging problems that will involve the ingenuity of the students to solve i.e. presenting a proposal and practical action models, to curtail global warming effects.
4. **Verification project:** This project type according to Onwuka involves solving a problem using another method entirely new from the conventional method. This may involve drawing a map of Nigeria using the computer or open-space sketching among others.

The author now emphasizes that the major role of the teacher in project method is merely to guide the students as they execute their projects.

Advantages of Project Strategy

- a) Bello in Mkpa (2009) believes that a well planned and executed project will assist the learners to come into actual practice of life activities in their surroundings;
- b) Project method enables pupils to acquire whole hearted purposes and to pursue them to a satisfactory level;
- c) It helps students to work together as a group, and clearly see the purpose of whatever tasks they are given;
- d) Students acquire enough learning experiences through the problem solved, and
- e) Project method makes school work real, and help to unify many school subjects, as the students apply the acquired knowledge from them to execute their projects. (Onwuka, 1981: 179 and Mkpa, 2009: 109).

Disadvantages of the Project Strategy.

Onwuka (1981) observes some inherent set backs in the use of this strategy:

- a) Project method consumes time and much content may not be covered at a time, and
- b) The organization may not be properly done nor appropriate guidance given;
- c) The project method leaves wide gaps in the content to be covered, and not all school activities may fit into this strategy, and
- d) Not all teachers may effectively deliver their subjects using this method, as it needs extra care to organize.

GUIDED DISCOVERY METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

This is one of the newest methods of instruction in the Nigerian classroom. It was developed by Skinner and Ausbel as cited by Mkpa (2009). This strategy according to Mkpa (2009) helps learners to develop thinking and decision making abilities. The procedure involves keeping back the answers to a problem, and guiding the students to discover them. The teacher encourages the learners to make progressive efforts as she applies commands and cues to guide them in their search. In the process, learning materials, facts, concepts and problems are presented to the learners in gradual progressive steps; i.e. from one step to the next successive step, till the answer is arrived at.

Nwani (2006) reiterates that guided-discovery method is becoming one of the popular methods used in our education system. To him, the strategy involves the use of exploration, manipulation and experimentation to discover new ideas. Furthermore, the method involves tactical approach that demands creating a problem, and allowing the students to find the answers by themselves. In an experimental study he carried out, Nwani (2006) discovers that this strategy is better for the teaching of map work in geography than other methods.

Advantages of the Guided-Discovery Method

Nwani (2006:61) and Mkpa (2009:57) highlight the following advantages of the guided-discovery method:

- (a) Guided-discovery method motivates students and make them to be more interested in the study, and
- (b) Guided-discovery method provides instant feedback to the learners.

Disadvantages of the Guided-Discovery Method

- (a) The method tasks the strength of both teachers and learners in its sequential steps of operation, and
- (b) It may discourage the efforts of the students if the step by step procedure is not properly arranged to elicit positive responses.

SUITABILITY OF SOME OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Teaching is a dynamic approach to effect changes in learners. For effective learning to take place, effective strategies need to be adopted. To do this, certain considerations need to be made like: knowing the nature and characteristics of the learners, and their interests and needs (Mkpa 1987). Inyiama and Adibe (2005) reiterate that a better knowledge of the learners will enhance learning, and that three categories of learners are always in the classroom; *fast learners, average and slow learners*. Also Inyiama and Nwafor (2006) identify the learners in the classroom this way: Visual, Aural and Kinesthetic learners. Visual learners according to the authors learn better when they see what they are learning in order to create mental pictures of new information. For the aural learners, they maintain that this group of learners prefers to hear new information; so they are mostly good readers and listeners. The kinesthetic learners on the other hand are good performers. In essence, this group excels when given the chance to practice what they are learning.

Therefore to make learning exciting, the learning styles of the learners should be encouraged through using diverse teaching strategies. The strategies so far discussed like Lecture, Discussion, Project, Questioning and Guided Discovery Methods are popularly used in the Nigerian classrooms. Like earlier highlighted, each of the methods has its advantages and disadvantages. A combination of the strategies will go a long way to help learners with special consideration given to their learning styles. The Authors have after critical considerations on the methods/strategies presented opt for the *Discussion, Project and Guided Discovery Strategies* on the ground that these strategies expose learners to active participation. This active participation of the learners can further be encouraged by guiding them using *questioning technique*. When the need arises, lecture methods can be adopted if the learners are matured enough to assimilate the content and to take notes. On the whole, the subject content and the readiness of the learners will guide the teacher on which strategies to use when teaching. The teacher is now expected to devise means of remedying the disadvantages of any of the strategy he/she is using by proper preparation and hard work, and to carry all learners along in the process of teaching/learning. In addition, the teacher should devise exciting educational or instructional media to fully engage the students in active learning. For the pragmatists, an active classroom is where the students are

busy doing what they are learning, while the teacher guides them.

CONCLUSION

Teachers as key determinants of any viable economy are entrusted with the responsibility of educating the nation's citizenry. This they can do by adopting effective teaching strategies to guide the learners to acquire the basic knowledge, for useful living. Popularly used instructional strategies in the Nigerian classroom include the following among others: Lecture, Discussion, Project, Questioning and Guided Discovery Strategies. Each of the strategy has its own advantages and disadvantages.

The Authors strongly makes a case for an effective adoption of Discussion, Project and Guided Discovery Strategies because; the students are actively involved when they are used as teaching methods. The lecture method can occasionally be used for the mature class to cover up course content. Questioning strategy is a communication process between the teacher and the learner; so it should be used continuously in the teaching and learning process.

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