

Teachers' Effectiveness and its Influence on Students' Learning

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Abstract

The main thrust of this review is the perceived central position of professional focus to the effectiveness of any category of teacher in Nigeria. According to literature, indicators like instructional delivery, students' assessment, learning environment, teachers' personal quality, motivation, and subject-content- knowledge among others were used to measure teachers' effectiveness. Distraction, professional development, interpersonal relationship and punctuality were seen as essential components of professional focus that determines teachers' effectiveness. Recommendations suggested were based upon these components of professional focus.

Keywords: professional focus, professional development, interpersonal relationship, teacher effectiveness, punctuality.

INTRODUCTION

Darling-Hammond (2010) defined an effective teacher as one who is intellectually challenging, motivating students, setting high standards and encourages self-initiating learning. Anderson (2004) viewed an effective teacher as those teachers who achieved the goals set for them or goals set for them by others like the Ministry of Education.

Effective teachers are very important for students learning. However, teachers' effectiveness is difficult to define since there has not been a consensus agreement on what measured quality teacher (Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011). However, it is possible to measure some teachers' attribute like interaction with student, teaching strategy, motivation, pedagogical content knowledge and classroom management through qualitative research approach. These teachers' attributes could act in a long way to determine teachers' effectiveness. Stronge, Ward and Grant (2011) identified four dimensions that were used to characterize an effective teacher as follows:

- Instructional effectiveness
- Uses of assessment for student learning
- Positive learning environment and
- Personal quality of the teacher

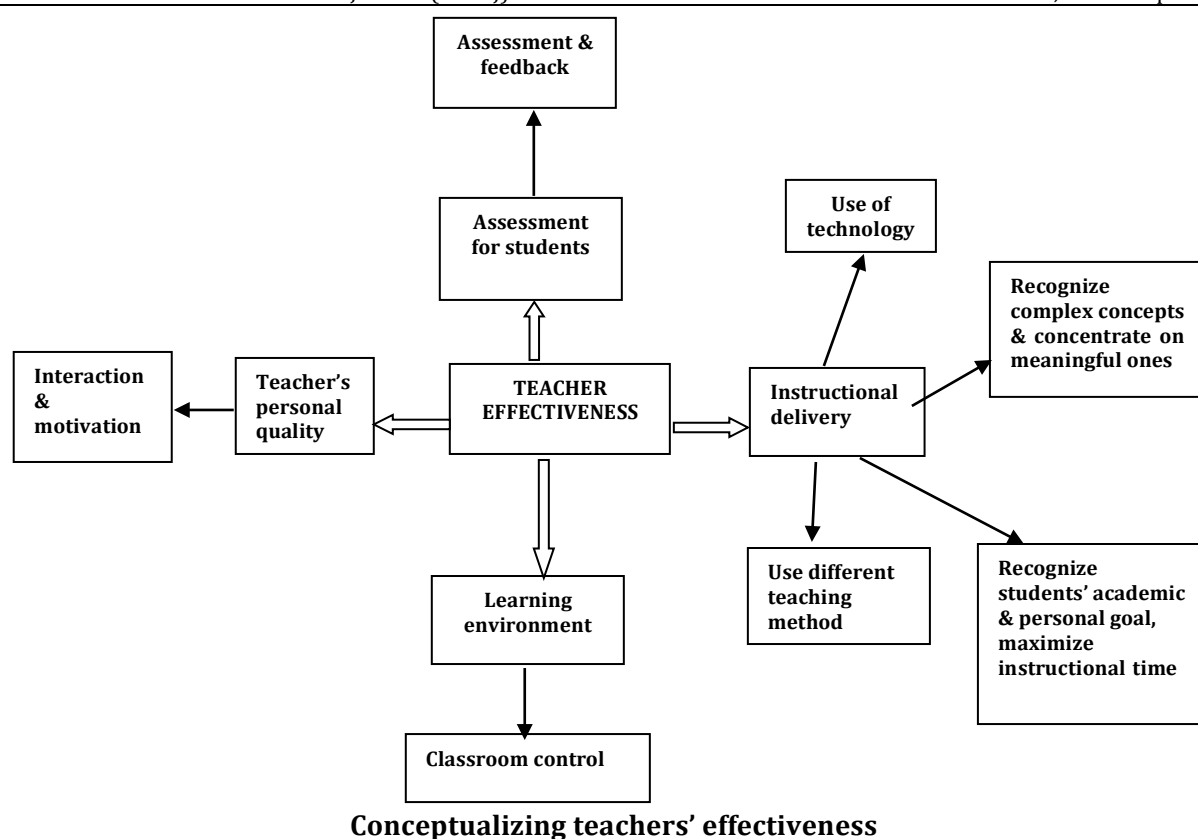


Fig.1: Conceptual framework

From the figure above we could measure an effective teacher by his or her instructional delivery; the way he or she uses assessment to measure students' learning; his or her interaction with students' learning environment and the personal qualities of the teacher. An effective teacher should be able to use different type of teaching method and know when and how to change from one method to another in a lesson (Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011; Aina, 2013).

An effective teaching should not only be concern with students' academic goals. Teachers' effectiveness should encompass concern for students' personal goals. Students enter into classroom from different background and they have come to the class with different mind apart from academic which an effective teacher should bear in mind. An effective teacher should always maximize instructional time and make good use of it (Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011). A teacher who wastes time in classroom discussing on nonessential thing is not effective.

An effective teacher must have a high expectation about learning. A teacher who has low expectation of his or her students about learning a concept would not care if at the end of the teaching students doesn't understand the concept. If on the other hand, the teacher had aimed high on students understanding of the concept; but at the end of the lesson the students doesn't understand, the teacher should be moved to seek for the cause and possibly teach the concept again for improvement in understanding.

Effective teacher especially in science make use of different type of technologies in his or her classroom (Aina, 2013a). There are many applications of technologies in teaching and learning depending on the knowledge of the user (Collis and Moonen in Nguyen, Williams and Nguyen 2012). The use of technologies is an imperative for all effective teachers in schools today.

Effective teachers do not ignore complex concepts or topics in the curriculum but rather he or she will do everything possible as an effective teacher to ensure that such concepts are meaningful to the students.

Assessment and feedback is very important to students learning. Aina and Adedo (2013) found that feedback is very important in teaching and learning because it improve student learning. Every effective teacher should know how, when and the type of assessment and feedback needed in his or her lesson. We have different types of assessment, whichever form it might take, assessment activities takes much time of the teachers and has an important place both in teachers and students' lives (Ceyhum and Erodogan, 2013).

Maintaining a positive environment for learning is the responsibility of an effective teacher. It is easy to distinguish between a teacher who is effective and the one who is not effective by the way they manage their classroom when lesson is going on. Managing classroom very well for effective learning is the responsibility of an effective teacher. The ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their students is central to achieving good educational outcomes (Oliver and Reschly, 2007). Orji (2014) affirmed that effective teaching requires among other things basic management skill which include understanding of the nature of classroom. Oliver and Reschly, (2007) cited Berliner that the teacher who have problems in classroom discipline is frequently ineffective in classroom.

An effective teacher will always interact well with students both within and outside the classroom because this is very important to students' learning. Interaction between teacher and student in school is very important and effective teachers should ensure maximum interaction that will enhance learning in the classroom. Aina (2013b) faulted lack of adequate interaction between teacher and student as one of the reasons Physics students do not perform well academically. Interest and achievement of students lie within the teacher and students interaction/relationship in a given subject (Onah and Ugwu, 2010). Creating classroom environments that promote positive cultures with healthy interactions can motivate students to channel their energies and desires to reach their goals (Nugent, 2009, p. 1).

Teacher-students interaction is very important in school as it aid student success. The interaction between teacher and student is essentially the fundamental basis for teaching. A good teacher-student relationship may be even more valuable for students with behavior and learning challenges (Caballero, 2010).

Most students learn best in the environment where they are able to freely express their feeling and this could be a situation when they are free with the teacher. Knoell (2012, p. 12) agreed that learning occurs best in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions and in which learner feel appreciated, acknowledged, respected and admired. Students who enjoy a close and supportive relationship with a teacher are more engaged and work harder in the classroom, persistence in the face of difficulties and cope better with stress (Hughes and Kwok, 2007).

The importance of interaction is underscored by the new teaching paradigm called Peer Instruction (PI). Peer Instruction is an instructional strategy for engaging students during class activities through a structured questioning process that involves every student (Crouch, Watkins, Fagen and Manzur, 2007). Peer Instruction is a cooperative-learning technique that promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills (Rao and DiCarlo, 2000). Peer Instruction (PI) is an interactive approach that was designed to improve the

learning process (Rosenberg, Lorenzo and Manzur, 2006). This method has the advantage of engaging the student in interaction among themselves and with the teacher. The effectiveness of PI is centered on being able to encourage students' interaction in the classroom within themselves and with the teacher.

Apart from those attribute of teachers' effectiveness mentioned above, others that are very important in measuring teachers' effectiveness are motivation, content knowledge and students' homework. Motivation could act as a catalyst for many science students who have lost interest in the course, may be because of the abstract nature of the subject (Adeyemo, 2010; Aina, 2013b) or because of teachers' poor strategies of teaching (Wanbugu, Johnson and Francis, 2013). According to Christiana (2009), motivation is very important to students' learning. Where this motivation is lacking because of teachers' ineffectiveness the result is always not good.

Teacher effectiveness in classroom is very important and where a teacher is not effective in teaching, students' academic performance will be poor. The importance of teacher effectiveness must not be toyed with and that is the more reason it is not appropriate to employ unqualified teacher to schools.

Any effective teacher should know the importance of homework in teaching and learning and should ensure he/she regularly administers it to the students. Homework is recognized as one indicator of successful schools and successful students. Teacher should design homework that is more effective and encouraging which allows low-ability students to complete at the given time (Epstein and Voorhis, 2001).

Content knowledge is very important and a serious factor to be considered for any effective-teacher. It is what a teacher knows that he/she will teach students. Obodo (1990) said if teachers are not sound in the content of what he or she teaches, there will be problem in both quality of learning and students' academic performance. There is no way a teacher who is deficient in the subject knowledge will be effective in teaching. When a teacher is not very sound in content knowledge he or she will have low self-efficacy.

Studies have shown that teacher self-efficacy is important variable in teachers' effectiveness that is consistently related to teacher behaviors and students outcomes (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003). The assumption by some people that teacher who has low self-efficacy cannot be effective is supported by Podell and Soodark (1993) that, high efficacy teachers are more apt to produce better students outcomes because they are more persistent in helping students who have problems. Studies revealed that teachers who have high level of self-efficacy regarding their ability to teach can produce superior student achievement across a range of academic disciplines (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003).

Bandura (1993, p.140) believed that teachers who perceive themselves efficacious will spend more time on students' learning, support students in their goals and reinforce intrinsic motivation. Barnes (1998) posited that there is positive correlation between self-efficacy and teachers' effectiveness. Teacher self-efficacy accounts for individual differences in teachers' effectiveness (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003).

Teachers' effectiveness is very important in teaching which could be a factor to use in raising the academic standard of any dying school. Xu, Ozek and Corrotore (2012) pointed out that moving effective teachers to disadvantaged schools could potentially raise student performance in those schools.

Effective-teachers should have the knowledge and the skill requires to achieve the goals (self-goals or school goals) and be able to use the knowledge and skill appropriately if the goals are to be achieved (Anderson, 2004). The effect of teachers' effectiveness on student achievement is both additive and cumulative; teachers' effectiveness increase students' academic achievement (Sanders and Rivers, 1996).

Professional focus

Professional focus is the hallmark of teachers' effectiveness. Teaching is a profession and therefore for anyone to be effective in this profession he or she must be focused. The problem we have in teaching profession in Nigeria today is loss of focus. Many other professions in Nigeria like medical and banking are effective because people who practiced the profession remain focused. Inadequate emphasis on professionalism in the teaching domain is a plague to teachers' effectiveness. This Olanipekun (2013) hints at while appraising SSCE English language curriculum in Nigeria. To him, such teachers lack the teaching methods; they cannot even follow the progress of a child psychologically, emotionally and otherwise in learning the language via continuous assessments and tests. Probably, this inadequate emphasis on professionalism lead teachers into the loss of focus and made them not values the profession.

As observed by Stronge et al (2011) that effectiveness can be measured by instructional delivery, assessment of students' learning, learning environment and personal quality of the teacher. All these could only be possible for someone with a professional focus. Once the professional focus is not there those constructs also becomes mere mirage. Four things come to mind when we are talking about professional focus, which are distraction, professional development, interpersonal relationship and punctuality.

Distraction

Many things distract our teachers today. Many doctors and bankers will never allow anything to distract them. You hardly can see any medical doctor seeking for teaching job in schools; but teachers are seeking for job in bank and even in hospital. Many teachers are business men and women; they bring goods to sell in schools. Any little opportunity they have they quickly advertise and sell their products within and outside the school. Such teachers have lost professional focus because they are distracted therefore cannot be effective. They were trained as teachers and no other things. This is distraction. An effective teacher focuses on his or her teaching job without being distracted by any other assignment while on the job.

Professional development

Professional development is activities that develop an individual skill, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2009). It is a conscious and systematic steps to ensure teachers up-grading and continuous self-improvement (Oluremi, 2013). Professional development is critical to the retention and improvement of any teacher in classroom (American Association of Physics Teachers, 2009, p.22).

An effective teacher constantly and consistently develops his or her teaching skill and knowledge. A teacher who remains on the job and failed to develop his or herself through seminar, conference and workshop for years has lost his or her professional focus. As a teacher more than 40% of the skill and knowledge I possessed now was not got during pre- service training but during in-service training.

Interpersonal relationship

Schools are not established in communities where there are no human beings. Even if schools are located where there are no human beings yet students in the classroom have parents or guidance. An effective teacher will always create opportunity to interact with the immediate community and the parents. This is probably one of the good qualities of Finnish teachers that earned them world recognition.

Finnish teachers formally work in the classroom teaching, preparation for class and two hours in a week to plan school work with their co-teachers. Finnish teachers' work is devoted to the improvement of classroom practice; the school as a whole and also work with the community (Sahlberg, 2010).

A teacher who does his or her work all alone without interacting with co-professional and students' parents has lost his or her professional focus. Teaching is not restricted into classroom alone. There should be that interpersonal relationship between individuals, groups and organization in the community for a holistic development of our students.

Punctuality

There is a saying that "punctuality is the soul of a business". A teacher who comes late to class under any guise is not effective. Coming late to class is tantamount to wasting instructional time and according to Stronge et al (2011), an effective teacher should maximize instructional time. When a teacher has formed a habit of coming late to class, it is obvious that such teacher has been distracted and lost teaching focus.

Therefore, through qualitative research method we can measure teachers' effectiveness using Professional Focus as conceptualized in the Venn diagram below.

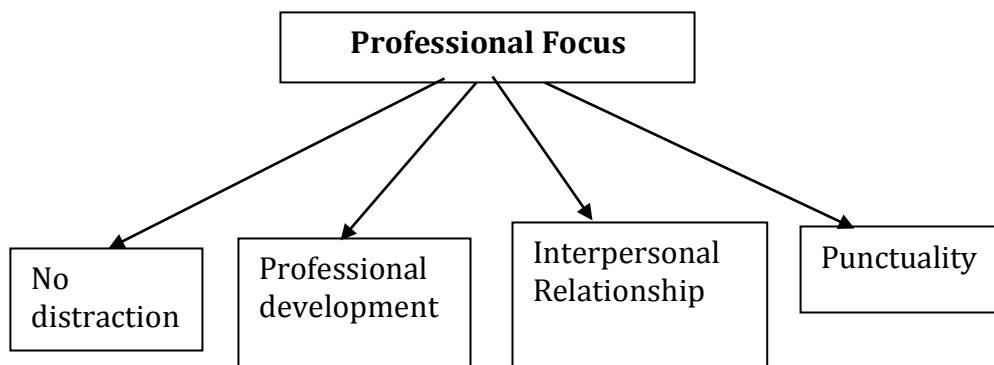


Fig.2: Professional Focus

CONCLUSION

Teachers' effectiveness is very important to student learning and it could be determine through qualitative research method. According to literature, instructional delivery, students' assessment, learning environment, teachers' personal quality, motivation and subject-content-knowledge are indicators among others used to measure teachers' effectiveness. The perspective of this paper is that professional focus is the hallmark of teachers' effectiveness. The paper posits that, lack of distraction, good professional development, interpersonal relationship and punctuality are essential components of professional focus that make a teacher effective.

Recommendations

In view of this conclusion, the following recommendations are suggested:

- All forms of distractions in teaching profession should be removed where practically possible;
- Attendance of seminar, conference and workshop must be made compulsory for all categories of teachers. Where necessary teachers should always go for in-service training to update their skills and knowledge;
- Teachers should cultivate the idea of always relating with individuals, groups and organizations outside the school communities purposely for students' learning;
- Teachers should take teaching job seriously and ensure prompt attendance to their classes.

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