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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF LEARNER-CENTERED METHOD OF TEACHING ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ABAKALIKI MUNICIPALITY, EBONYI STATE: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

Effective method of teaching is a key to students' high academic performances. However, many teachers are yet to realize this fact. This paper therefore, seeks to investigate impact of learner-centered method of teaching on students academic performances for national development in secondary schools in Abakaliki Municipality. A-10 item instrument tagged 'Learner-Centered Method Questionnaire' (LCMQ) was used to collect data for the study. Simple Random Sample Technique was used to select 80 teachers drawn from 10 public and private secondary schools in the study area. Also, quasi-experimental method was used to compare two teaching methods (teacher-centered method and learner-centered method) adopted in SSII A and SSII B classes of the sampled area, respectively. The findings of the study showed that students taught through learner-centered method perform better than those taught through teacher-centered method. Based on the findings, conclusion and recommendations were made to include that workshops, seminars and conferences should always be organized for teachers to help them acquire knowledge on the use of learner-centered method, schools should be well equipped to encourage teachers and students engage actively in the learner-centered method of teaching and so on.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of educators and psychologists the world over is how best to promote learning (Ugwu, 1997, Clifford, 1990 and Omebe, 2005). Little wonder then, why learning occupies important position in the whole field of psychology (Chauhan, 2013). Throughout the ages, teachers have adopted different teaching methods to enable pupils or students learn better. Such methods have been subjected to series of researches which were intended to find out those that are effective and otherwise. The need for adequate teaching methods is imperative considering the fact that it is through that medium that learners can acquire knowledge which will equip them to function optimally in the society. This is in line with the view (Nnachi, 2009) that it is through effective teaching method that people acquire desirable behavioural changes capable of creating the route for human social progress and civilization. In recent times, people lament over the falling standard of education evident in pupils and students poor academic achievements. In this vein, Ademilola in TELL (2010) frowned at the poor performances of students in Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, West Africa Examination Council and National Examination Council examinations.

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Obviously, the issue of students poor academic performances which culminate in low standard of education is mostly blamed on the teachers' inefficiency which include poor method of teaching (Ademilola, 2010). There is no doubt that in a situation where the standard of education in a country is comparatively low, development of that country becomes crippled. In order to address the ugly trend, therefore, teachers at all levels of educational institutions should brace up by adopting innovations in teaching methods which will help to boost learners' academic performances that will promote the standard of education desired in the country. Against this background, this paper attempts to investigate impact of learner-centered method of teaching on students' academic performances in secondary schools in Abakaliki Municipality Ebonyi state, South east Nigeria.

Meaning of Learner-Centered method

Learner-centered method of teaching refers to the teaching technique in which instructional process is made to focus on the learners with the teacher as a facilitator. Mkpá (2003) maintained that in the learner-centered method of teaching, learners are actively engaged in the class to function in the ways that will make them to achieve maximally. This teaching method is both activity and learner-centered as opposed to teacher-centered method whereby the teacher monopolizes the lesson talking and chalking alone.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is the observed poor academic performances of pupils and students which give rise to low standard of education in the country. The perceived decay in the learners' academic achievements might be connected with teachers' poor teaching methods which do not equip the learners to perform maximally. Posed as a question therefore, the problem of the study in more precise terms is "what is the impact of learner-centered method of teaching on students' academic performances in Abakaliki Municipality?".

Research Questions

In addressing the problems of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

- What method of teaching do teachers mostly adopt in secondary schools in Abakaliki Urban?
- To what extent do teachers adopt learner-centered method to teach students?
- How are the performances of students taught through learner-centered method and those taught through teacher-centered method?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis below is also postulated to help guide the study:

H₀:- There is no significant difference in the academic performances of students taught through active learning method and those taught through other methods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive survey method and quasi-experimental method were all used. The survey method was used to elicit information from 80 randomly selected respondents comprising of teachers from 10 secondary schools (both public and private) selected from Abakaliki capital Municipality also through random sampling technique. Oral interview was used to source information from the respondents on the psychological implications of adopting learner-centered method of teaching on the academic performance of the students.

Instruments

The instrument tagged "Learner-Centered Method Questionnaire (LCMQ)" was used. A-10 item structured questionnaire with Likert type response, of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". The instrument was validated and internal consistency determined with reliability index as 0.76 (co-efficient alpha). While the researcher personally administered the questionnaire, the two teaching methods were adopted by two different teachers. Thus, teacher A used students-centered method in SSII a while teacher B used teacher-centered method in SIIB. But the same topic was used by the teachers for each of the classes. At the end, data generated through the questionnaire were analyzed using mean. A mean score of 2.5 and above indicated opinion of the majority while mean below 2.5 showed minority

opinion. Also, the performances of the students from the two class streams on the same test given then after teaching them with the different methods employed were compared.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What method of teaching do teachers mostly adopt in secondary schools in Abakaliki Capital City? In addressing this question, data were collected and analyzed using mean. The finding was shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Methods of teaching mostly adopted by teachers in secondary schools in Abakalki capital city

| No of Respondents = 80 | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|----|----|----|----|
| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD |
| 1. | I always adopt different methods | 30 | 25 | 10 | 15 |
| 2. | I rarely use learner-centered method | 40 | 20 | 10 | 15 |
| 3. | I adopt teacher-centered method frequently | 45 | 20 | 5 | 10 |
| 4. | I do not adopt a particularly method | 35 | 25 | 5 | 15 |
| 5. | I adopt learner-centered method always | 10 | 5 | 30 | 35 |

Findings from Table 1 above show that teachers do not adopt learner-centered method. Instead they adopt other methods including teacher-centered method. Responses related to statements which constitute the variables reveal that 55 teachers accept adopting different methods always while 25 teachers reject doing that. The responses represent mean score of 2.8. Now, since this figure is above 2.5 which is the cut off limit, it stands that secondary school teachers in Abakaliki Municipality use varied teaching methods and not particularly learner-centered method. Responses to the rest of the variables similarly show that teachers use other methods. For example, responses to the last variable show that 65 teachers reject adopting learner-centered method while 15 accept. This stands for mean score of 1.8 which is below the cut off score of 2.5 and therefore testifies that the teachers adopt other methods.

Research question 2: To what extent do teachers adopt learner-centered method?

Table 2 below contains information which provide answers to this questions.

Table 2. Extent of teachers adoption of students-centered method.

| No of Respondents = 80 | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|----|----|----|----|
| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD |
| 1. | I mostly adopt learner-centered methods | 15 | 5 | 25 | 35 |
| 2. | I rarely adopt learner-centered method | 40 | 25 | 5 | 10 |
| 3. | I prefer adopting teacher-centered method | 45 | 25 | 5 | 5 |
| 4. | I don't adopt learner-centered method at all | 35 | 20 | 10 | 5 |
| 5. | I am more used to teacher-centered method | 50 | 20 | 10 | 5 |

Table 2 above shows that teacher rarely adopt learner-centered method. This claim is supported by the responses shown on the table. Thus, to teachers reject adopting learner-centered method mostly while 20 accepted. This give mean score of 2.0 which shows disagreement. On the other hand responses to items 2 to 5 show teachers acceptance of not using learner-centered method always. Specifically, responses for item 2 show that 65 teachers accept adopting learner-centered method rarely while only 15 teachers accepted adopting it always.

This gives mean response of 3.1 which indicates that the teachers rarely adopt learner-centered.

H₀: - There is no significant difference between the performance of students taught through learner centered method and those taught through teacher-centered method.

In testing this hypothesis, two teaching methods were compared namely learner-centered method and teacher-centered method.

Procedure: Two arms of SSII class (SSII A and SSIIB) were used and two teachers (teacher A and teacher B) were assigned to teach both sets of students a topic in Mathematics. Each of the two arms of the class had equal number of students with equal number of sexes and the same facilities. Above all, each arm had students of equal intellectual abilities. Then the teachers delivered their lessons based on the methods which they adopted. Teacher A who used teachers-centered method did all the talking, chalking, demonstrations and illustration alone and kept on saying to students *listen, do you understand, I hope you are following* and so on. Teacher B on the other hand actively engaged the learners. He made them explain concepts or ideas, illustrate, give examples, suggest solutions to given problems and others. At the end of the lessons, the two class streams were joined together and the same test was administered on them based on the topic they were taught. Finally, the test was marked and the result showed that SSII B taught through learner-centered method performed significantly better than SSII A students who were taught through teacher-centered method. In conclusion, students taught using learner-centered method perform better than those taught using teacher-centered approach.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study showed that the teaching method mostly adopted by teachers from schools in Abakaliki Municipality is teacher-centered approach. This is inconsistent with the views Mkpa 2003) and Ali (2011) that teaching method should be predominantly learner-centered. The findings of the study further revealed that in addition to teacher-centered method, the teachers adopt various other methods including discussion method, group method, project method and others. Although different teaching methods have been adopted by teachers throughout the ages, recent findings Mkpa (2003); Vygotsky in Wikipedia (2010) and Ali (2011) have proved that learners achieve better when they are taught using learner-centered approach. This is further proved by findings of this study which showed that the SSII B students who were taught with experimental method (learner-centered) did better than their SSII A counterpart taught with control method (teacher-centered). It is relevant to argue that students have more chances of performing better in the learner-centered method where more of their senses are involved – they hear, they see, they use their hands and so on in doing things. But in the other method the students only see and hear thereby learning with limited number sense organ. This corroborates with the adage by Confucius in Ali (2011) which states as follows:

‘What I hear I can understand;
What I see I can remember and
What I do I can not forget’

The proponents of this method advocate its use for the following reasons.

- Learners are directly and actively involved in the learning process.
- Learning is made practical and the learners have equal chances to participate.
- By being actively engaged, the learners become more motivated to learn.
- Since learners learn by doing, they benefit from corrective feedbacks given them by the teacher.
- The method affords learners chances of self-expression.
- Learners develop competitive spirit since they are organized to learn in groups.

Psychological implications: The following were the psychological implications obtained via oral interview:

Motivational and emotional influences on learning. What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner’s motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual’s emotional states, beliefs, interests and goals, and habits of thinking. Developmental influences on learning. As individuals develop, there are different opportunities and constraints for learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account.

The same basic principles of learning, motivation, and effective instruction apply to all learners. However, language, ethnicity, race, beliefs, and socioeconomic status all can influence learning. Careful attention to these factors in the instructional setting enhances the possibilities for designing and implementing appropriate learning environments. When learners perceive that their individual differences in abilities, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences are valued, respected, and accommodated in learning tasks and contexts, levels of motivation and achievement are enhanced. These are all in line with the findings of American Psychological Association’s Board of Education Affairs, November, 1997.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of the study, it was concluded that secondary school teachers in Abakaliki Municipality rarely adopt student-centered method of teaching and learning. Though they adopt various other teaching methods they mostly resort to teacher-centered method. The finding of this study has proved that learner-centered perform better than students who are taught with learner-centered method, those who taught with other methods.

Recommendation

Since learner-centered method has more positive influence on students’ academic performance, it becomes imperative that teachers should resort to that method. On this promise, the following recommendations are made:

- Since learner-centered method is still a new innovation, seminars, workshops and conferences should always be organized for teachers on how to adopt the new teaching technique.

- Teachers on their own side should go for in-service training in educational institutions to acquire knowledge on the use of learner-centered method.
- Inspectors of schools should visit schools on regular basis to ensure teachers strict compliance with the use of learner-centered method of teaching.
- Since the method requires enough equipment and facilities to ensure students active participation, government should ensure that schools are equipped with relevant learning resources.
- Population of students in classes should be moderate to enable teachers cope with the tasky nature of learner-centered approach. To this end, government should post enough teachers to schools.

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