

*Review*

# Teachers' psychological strategies and competencies in enhancing the quality of teaching-learning in secondary schools

ASIKHIA Olubusayo

Department of Guidance and Counselling, School of Education, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija-Epe, Lagos.

**Author's Email:** olubusayoasikhia@yahoo.com

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The issue of qualitative teaching- learning process has generated academic interest in recent times. This is because the quality of education is directly or indirectly linked to teacher's adequacy, qualification, and skills otherwise known as competence. This paper therefore, focuses on the meaning, nature and relevance of psychology to teaching- learning and the psychological competencies of teachers which include key, basic and special competences and Specification of Instructional/Behavioural Objectives, Task Analysis, Selection, Modification, and Use of Instructional Materials, Selection and Use of Instructional Strategies, Evaluation of Pupils' Progress, Utilization of Resources and Behaviour Management. This is a sine-qua-non for qualitative teaching-learning in our schools.

**Keywords:** Psychological competence, qualitative, teaching, learning, educational psychology

## INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the national policy on education places high premium on the production of quality teachers who will take effective control of the nation's classroom at all levels of education. However, there has been a multidimensionality and ambiguity of the term quality as there is no simple and one-dimensional measure of quality, it is more a result of several factors, which are being more and more continuously and systematically examined by researchers and practitioners. Measures of quality are composite and include:

- quality of environment in which the learning process takes place, temporal and spatial structure, objective and subjective conditions of learning, organizational structure of the school and control in education ( Saradnici, 2008);
- quality of content being learned and being reflected through curriculum, plans, programs Unicef, 2000),
- efficient achievement of educational tasks and outcomes through appropriate content, proper selection of content in regard to the needs of students and relevance of the said content in relation to the nature of the subjects taught, age of students and the learning objectives (Saradnici, 2003);
- quality of teachers expressed through professional competences of teachers, acquired during their initial education as well as after and through teachers' motivation for work. (Kundačina, 2011)
- quality of teaching/learning process reflected through relevant activities and status of students in the process of teaching/learning.

However, the need for improvement in the quality of the teaching learning process in our secondary schools has been a major concern to educators, policy makers, parents and the society at large (Adegoke, 2001). According to Obanya (2006), the problem here is not that the teachers are not qualified because research has shown that about 70% of teachers in Nigerian schools are qualified. She further stated that the qualified teacher is not necessarily a competent teacher and may not necessarily be an efficient teacher. Noting this problem, Olusanya (2008) emphasized that one simple measure of teacher competence cum effectiveness is his/her interaction pattern in the classroom. Also the Higher

Education Commission (2008), noted that the most effective teaching is what result in the most effective learning. It is therefore very important for teachers to be well-equipped with psychological strategies and competencies that will enhance qualitative teaching learning process.

This paper therefore focuses on the following:

- Meaning, nature and relevance of psychology to teaching-learning
- Psychological strategies useful for teaching- learning and the
- Psychological competencies of teachers

### Meaning, Nature and relevance of psychology to teaching- learning

Psychology is a science concerned with the study of various types of behaviour. It studies how people think,

respond, feel and learn, why they behave the way they do and what initiate and sustain their actions (Asikhia and Williams, 2009). The aim of psychology is to understand, predict and control behaviour in terms of modifying, guiding or changing it. These processes are fundamental to teachers' understanding of the way students learn and think.

According to Child (2007), educational or learner's psychology has tried to apply the findings of general, social, developmental, and child psychology and individual differences to assist in a better understanding of learning processes which include social and moral, as well as academic learning. Learner's psychology seeks to discover, by understanding the mental, physical, social, and emotional behaviours of individuals, factors which influence the quality and quantity of learning.

During the teaching process, a teacher may encounter problems which are difficult to handle, such as dealing with low motivated, disturbed, and problematic students, tackle learning difficulties of students and control aggressive behaviour. To make the teaching process more effective, a teacher should be aware of all the advances in educational psychology, and identify and meet the educational needs of the students. The teacher should know the learner's motivational level, abilities, attitude, interests, and temperaments by observing his or her personality to solve his or her problems and involve these variables in performance.

At the same time, understanding individual differences such as intelligence, learning styles, needs and interests is necessary for a teacher if he or she wants to make teaching effective and efficient. Sometimes learners get stressed when their developmental needs are not met. Counselling of the students helps find out the stressors and determine causes of those stressors and in some cases prevents the situation from worsening. While counselling the students, the use of psychometric instruments, such as tests, rating scales, checklists, observation and interviews can help to identify their stressors. Learner's psychology can help teachers to understand students' abilities and provide assistance to students in all respects. It also shapes the personality of the learner which is well suited to the morals of society.

### **Psychological Strategies of Teachers for Effective Teaching Learning**

Teachers need to make use of dynamic and effective strategies and techniques such as reflective learning, interaction, pair-share and collaboration that will make the teaching-learning process more effective. Strategies are detailed plans for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry or sport or the skill of planning for such situations. Psychological strategies are methods, techniques and principles of

psychology that can be used to direct, guide, control and predict human behaviour in achieving a particular purpose.

Generally, teachers must be able to;

- Understand learner's psychology and its principles, and apply it to make the teaching-learning process effective.
  - Recognize characteristics of learners
  - Engage learners in active learning by using learner-centred techniques
  - Address needs and interests of learners
  - Use action and reflection in teaching process
  - Help learners learn new roles in learning process
  - Hold learners accountable for their learning
  - Stress immediacy of application of knowledge
- Specifically, teachers must be able to;

1. Know psychological theories of learning and different perspectives of teaching
2. Keep in view students' individual differences such as intelligence and cognitive styles.
3. Understand different types of students such as introvert and extrovert.
4. Have a thorough knowledge about learning difficulties of students.
5. Raise the motivational level of the learners
6. Assess the needs and interests of the students and utilize them as a source of motivation for learning.
7. Meet the developmental tasks of students such as autonomy and competence through teaching-learning process.
8. Provide guidance and counselling to the learners to manage their stressors
9. Have a thorough knowledge about the personality of the learner
10. Change the learners on the cognitive, affective and behavioural levels by inducing social and moral values.

According to the following are the essential core teaching strategies that can enhance qualitative teaching and learning among teachers.

1. Continually Encourage and Motivate. As a teacher one of your top priorities is to be able to motivate your students. It's the key to drive them to reach their potential and achieve their future dreams and goals. Student motivation is a necessity so that learning becomes a continuing, improving, interesting and hopefully enjoyable process.
2. Develop strong teacher student relationships . It is so vital to having a successful school year. You must respect, care about and show concern for, the development of your students. Teachers that create a positive learning environment and show that they care are most likely to have their students reciprocate and show respect for them and their fellow classmates.

3. Parent teacher communication is critical. When dealing with parents you must always remember to act very professionally even if you have formed a close bond with a parent. Always be ready to speak and work with parents for the betterment of their child. In some cases this may involve a fair bit of tact when dealing with difficult parents or a difficult situation. You are accountable to the student but parents are also responsible for their child and accountable to you.

4 Accountability; Teachers are responsible to their students (foremost), their parents, their schools and of course, to themselves. This is an on-going process every day, week, and month of the school year.

### Psychological Competencies of Teachers

Competencies enable a teacher to determine the educationally relevant characteristics of individual learners and to use their observation, skills and background knowledge of child development to identify specific educational strengths and weaknesses. Teachers must be able to combine, in a multitude of ways, three factors of importance in order to identify the status of the child's current functional levels and how the environment influences his functioning. The three factors are (a) resources in the environment that can provide information, (b) characteristics that are of relevance to the teacher, and (c) methods for collecting information about the child and his environment. After a comprehensive assessment has been completed, the teacher can specify behavioral objectives for the child.

According to the Higher Education Commission (2008), there are three basic competences of a teacher:

**1. Key competences:** are those competences that are needed for performing any professional activity and they include information-communication competences, social-working competences (ability of a person to make independent professional decisions, to combine his/her personal interest with the interests of a society), language competences (capability for oral and written communication in different languages),

**2. Basic competences:** show specificities of the teaching profession and include the following;

1 Organizational competences; Ability of a teacher to successfully organize educational activities of students.

2 Didactic competences; Ability of a teacher to transfer knowledge to students in a way that will make them interested in the learning process.

3 Pedagogical thinking; Reflexive ability of a teacher related to his/her own activities and the planned activities.

4 Cognitive-creative competences; Ability of a teacher to organize a process of learning with

comprehension with students, to harmonize the goals of teaching with cognitive abilities of a student.

5 Psychological competence; Ability of a teacher to respect a unique personality of a student in the teaching process.

6 Evaluative competences; Ability of a teacher to objectively look upon students' achievements and the learning process, his/her own work, professional work of colleagues, positive and negative aspects in the system of education in its entirety.

7 Advisory competences; Competence for a lifelong development of a teacher as a professional (ability of a teacher to develop professional skills, knowledge and competences during his/her entire career).

**3. Special competences:** This represents the level of competences of teachers for the content of the subject they teach and for the research of their own practice, in order to create one's own style of teaching, in the function of better achievements of students. According to the following skills are needed for teacher's psychological competencies

### Specification of Instructional/Behavioral Objectives

Skills in this cluster include the formulation of instructional objectives in terms of observable behaviors to be displayed by the individual learner, the conditions under which the behavior is to be exhibited, and the criteria for an acceptable performance. Following the diagnosis and identification of relevant characteristics of the child and his environment, the teacher must translate the child's needs into clear and unequivocal statements of behavioral objectives so that the tasks to follow can be efficiently and successfully completed.

### Task Analysis

Once the destination (i.e., terminal behavior) is known, the teacher analyzes the behavior, listing sequentially, if possible, the enroute behaviors required to master the terminal behavior. After identifying the enroute behaviors as yet unmastered by the child, the teacher performs the next tasks in the Diagnostic Teaching Model (i.e., selection and use of instructional strategies and materials). Task analysis skills, based on the assumption that learning is cumulative, enable the teacher to break down learning tasks into their components, identify prerequisite skills, and determine proper sequencing of instruction for an individual learner.

### +Selection, Modification, and Use of Instructional Materials

ere, the teacher must become aware of the wide range of instructional media, materials, technology, and criteria for their selection and modification. In addition, insight into

the assistance available from various schools and ancillary personnel is necessary.

### **Selection and Use of Instructional Strategies**

Competencies required for selecting and using appropriate instructional strategies demand that the teacher first be aware of the variety of instructional procedures available for effectively managing the educational programs of children. Then an appropriate match must be made between the objective for a given child and the appropriate strategy for having him reach the objective.

### **Evaluation of Pupils' Progress**

Competencies associated with evaluation of pupils' progress call for skill in empirical research to some extent because of the experimental nature of diagnostic teaching. Any match between learners' needs, characteristics, instructional materials and strategies is tentative and must be ascertained on an empirical basis. Included here are skills in administering and interpreting teacher-made, curriculum-based, and standardized evaluative devices.

### **Utilization of Resources**

Related to the selection, modification, and use of instructional materials is the retrieval of appropriate instructional strategies and materials. Since teachers cannot be expected to develop specialized and unique strategies and materials for each student for whom they are responsible, skill in using information retrieval systems and other resources is vital to efficient use of time. Also included are utilization of human resources in the school and community. The use of resources, both in terms of receiving and providing services, is of paramount importance to teachers. The teacher must not only know what resources are available to help him/her perform, but must also request their services in appropriate ways when needed. Moreover, special education teachers must also be ready to respond to requests for services made by others. Within this structure, teachers must effectively communicate information they have available and maintain propitious relations with resources.

### **Behaviour Management**

Behaviour management refers to ways to strengthen desired behaviors, shape new behaviors, and reduce the frequency of undesired behaviors. Included are behavior modification techniques, setting limits, developing routines, providing models, and modifying the physical environment. Behaviour management, when it becomes

an identified need of a student, is conducted according to the steps of the Diagnostic Teaching Model. However, teachers must demonstrate skills in conducting their day-to-day interaction with learners without specifically stated objectives and instructional strategies. In so doing, teachers show competence in their interactions with learners in three ways (a) stimulating desired interactions, (b) reinforcing desired interactions, and (c) responding appropriately to undesired interactions.

### **Individualized Instruction**

Individualizing instruction by means of diagnostic teaching procedures enables teachers to recognize and remediate existing learning problems and enhance learning assets that a child might demonstrate.

### **Parent Involvement**

Recent public interest in the federal support for early childhood programs and for appropriate educational programs for all students with disabilities has focused attention on the importance of parent involvement in facilitating the development of their children and in recognizing the potential effects of parental attitudes and expectations on their children. Competencies in parent counselling require skills in interpersonal relations and knowledge of the dynamics of human interactions.

### **Professional Activities**

Professional activities include participating in professional organizations, contributing to the knowledge base in special education by carrying out empirical research, and recognizing the continual need for individual self-improvement, professional renewal, and lifelong learning. Professional teachers are actively involved in their professional organizations. They may attempt to influence local, state, and national legislation in favor of special education goals, organize and attend conventions, conferences, and workshops to expand his/her knowledge, etc. Further, they analyze information from professional journals, seek and implements methods for enhancing their profession, maintain professional ethics, and communicate their ideas to others in the field by word of mouth and written expression.

### **Knowledge of Contemporary Trends**

Even though teachers completing a particular teacher preparation program may be competent in certain skills and have a knowledge of certain special education procedures, they also need to know a lot of the context into which their skills and knowledge fit and the directions that the field of special education (within the larger context

of education) is heading. Equipped with this information, professionals in special education should be more able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and arrive at their evaluation of their role and the function it serves in society.

## CONCLUSIONS

The work of a teacher goes beyond the knowledge of the subject matter (although this is equally important). Teachers must be able to apply principles in educational psychology, in order to identify and meet the educational needs of the students. Such needs include learner's motivational level, abilities, attitude, interests, and temperaments. This will doubtlessly help to solve learners' problems. Thus, teachers need to be equipped with key, basic and special competences that will enhance qualitative teaching and learning in the classroom.

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