ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Survey of Students' Opinions as a Strategy for Improving Lerner-friendly and Defective Classroom Encounters

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Abstract

Based on the fact that virtually all the experiences to which learners are exposed in formal education are derived from a combination of psychological considerations, the expectations and prescriptions of the subject discipline, the society and its culture, the ideas of educational philosophers and curriculum experts, and that no conscious effort is normally made to consult the learners for opinions even at the secondary and tertiary education levels, the deschoolers have accused the school of teaching a hidden curriculum. Worried that even the prescriptions that are usually considered as contributory to effective teaching methodology are attributable to the ideas and principles enunciated by educational psychologists and philosophers, the researcher embarked on a pilot survey of students' opinions about teacher effectiveness. A questionnaire of the data blank to was administered to a sample of 80 Senior Secondary II students randomly selected from two Federal government Colleges (one boys' and one girls') located in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Effort was made to ensure gender balance in the selection of samples. The subjects were asked to state three objectives of being in school, three expectations from teachers and three objectives of being in school, three expectations from teachers and three hateful teacher-behaviors. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Results showed that adolescents in secondary schools were fully aware why they were in school and could discriminate the qualities of effective teachers. The researcher recommends that a realistic perception of effective teaching methodology should be a blending of the perspectives from teachers' pedagogical insights, the students' perspectives and the perspectives of the society that is the consumer of the college output.

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INTRODUCTION

Under this topic, we have three variables to deal with; they are teacher, the learners and the environment. The teacher and the learners constitute the key dramatis personae in the teaching-learning process while the environment is the arena where the encounters take place. The learner is the recipient of the educational diet. The teacher is responsible for the instructional design and so is constantly challenged to make the best choices amidst subject varying influences that compete for attention and emphasis. These influences we shall identify as Area Influences, Administrative Influences and Curriculum Influences. They all provide certain constraints and limitations to compound the input constraints into the process of schooling. An astute teacher will employ her Teaching Influences to ensure that the output is of the quality expected by the society. The interaction of these influences that effect classroom encounters is illustrated in figure 1 as Functional Model of the School (Taylor et al 1978).
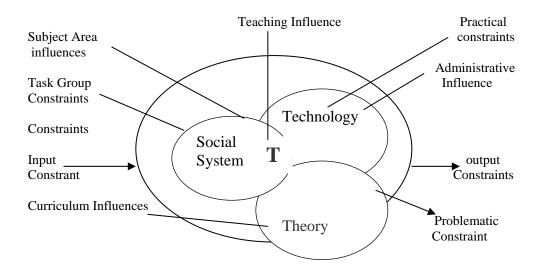

Fig 1: Functional Model of the school (after Taylor et al, The English Sixth Form: A Case study in Curriculum Research in Reid, W. A. 1978).

The environment at which learning takes place embodies both the physical and the social environment in terms of conduciveness and permissiveness respectively. The physical environment or place of learning may be a well- furnished classroom, or a thatched hut in

rural area, or a laboratory, or a field of play, or evening the farm for practical agriculture. Wherever the place of learning is located, the teacher is expected to inject certain strategies that will make the encounter (the lesson) an enjoyable (friendly), effective and successful one. The social

environment consists of the teacher-learner, teacher-teacher, and learner-learner relationships. Therefore, the issue of effective classroom encounters should be considered, not only from the perspectives of the teacher, but also from those of learners as well. We note also that the concept of effectiveness can be very broad, ranging over purpose, effort and accomplishment and having many and complex determinants. Thus, while the school principal may perceive effectiveness in terms of students' performance at external examinations, parents' perception may center on how the students behave at home and also perform at external examination. The proprietor of the school may use a combination of performance indicators which sum up to a rather challenging conditionality: "If the students have not learnt, then the teachers have not taught".   However, the Federal Ministry of Education (1993) defined effectiveness as: *…....the extent to which the set goals or objectives of a school programme are accomplished. Such effectiveness can be seen in relation to quality, quantity, equity of equality of educational instruction given to learners.*

In another development, Anikweze 91982) while investigating the factors affecting effective teaching and learning of geography in Kaduna state secondary schools, considered effective to mean efficient" or efficacious". In this regard, efficiency refers to the extent to which the inputs produce the expected output in a school setting. Thus, effective teaching and learning would produce intended happy confluence between teacher behaviours and the achievement gains are the product variables of education, i.e. the learning outcomes both intended and incidental, immediate and delayed. Therefore, whatever may be considered an effective classroom encounter must have a bearing to this vital process-product paradigm of instruction. As highlighted by Adesua (2003), "productivity is the relation between output and input".

In the school system, the learner is both the input and the output. As the input the learner is supposedly without certain repertories of behaviour and skills, and incompetent in performing and accomplishing certain tasks whose achievements would constitute the teacher's instructional objectives. As the output the learner's behaviours are expected to have undergone some changes and transformations that he/she can now perform certain previously specified tasks with appreciable competence or proficiency. Incidentally, virtually all the experiences to which the learners are exposed in formal education are derived from a combination of psychological consideration, the expectations and prescriptions of the subject discipline, the society and its culture including the desires of parents and the ideas of educational philosophers and curriculum experts. The psychological considerations are based on the inferences from the study of the child but in practice, no conscious effort is normally made to consult the learner for opinions even at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

In this regard, most of the prescriptions that are usually considered as contributory to learner-friendly strategies and effective teaching methodology should be credited to the tested ideas and principles enunciated by educational psychologists and philosophers. Nevertheless, in spite of a huge catalogue of research findings backing up, and even refining the psychological principles of learning, there have arisen two schools of thought known as the "Deschoolers" and the "New Romantics". The deschoolers wish to abolish schools   having   accused   the   current

educational system of being highly inefficient and wasteful of money, and schools creating the illusion that all learning is the product of teaching (Flude & Ahier, 1974). The school is also accused of teaching a hidden 'curriculum' anchored on teacher roles as custodian, preacher and therapist but neglecting sociological commonsense the expects education to satisfy occupational role selection.

The New Romantics, on their part, attack certain kinds of teaching and challenge the traditional teacher-pupil relationships and the ways in which the classroom is structured. The idea of motivating the students is irritating to the new Romantics because they believe that students are intrinsically motivated to a high degree, with many elements in the environment constituting challenges for them. Hence, the learner should be free to choose his own curriculum, his own methods of working, and his own pacing. According to kohl (1970), "the role of the teacher is not to control his pupils but rather to enable them to make choices and pursue what interests them."

The stance of the deschoolers and their colleagues is suggestive of the need to recognize the relevance of the students' opinions about teacher effectiveness. Their objectives of coming to school and their expectations from teachers might differ completely from what are usually considered essential for their education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Quite often teachers tend to behave as the dominant figures in the instructional arena, giving little or no attention whatsoever to the desires and expectations of the learners. Democratic little or no attention whatsoever to the desires and expectation of the learners. Democratic principles demand that recognition should be given to human rights of learners as a way of creating conducive learning environment. The realization that learners are individual human beings with varying likes and dislikes suggests that students' opinions may vary significantly from the perceptions of teachers with regard to fruitful classroom encounters. Could a survey of students' opinions be useful in promoting effective learning if harvested by the teacher with genuine interest to satisfy the students' expectation? Do all learners know why they are in school as to harbour logical expectations from their teachers? How could there be a happy confluence between the teachers' objectives and the expectations of their learners? The desire to evolve answers to these questions prompted a survey of secondary school students' opinions about schooling and their expectations from their teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The study, as a pilot, was restricted to the Federal government Colleges located in the Abuja Federal Capital Territory. The sample consisted of 80 senior secondary II students randomly selected from two Federal Government Colleges located in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The two schools were chosen in such a way as to reflect gender balance, thus, each of the schools is a completely single sex institution admitting both boarding and day students. However, the teaching staff in each case consisted of mixed sex. The subjects ranged in age from 16 to 18 years old and so have reached the level of what in piaget's genetic epistemology is categorized as formal operation (Anikweze, 1998). At the level of formal operations, adolescents adopt scientific reasoning in considering issues

that concern self, applying all possible combinations of both reality and the hypothetical before taking decision, therefore, the validity of formal thought in the adolescent is not questionable.

The instrument for data collection was a data-blank consisting of 3-item restricted response questions which was administered with the assistance of normal classroom teachers. The subjects were asked to write five reasons why they were in the college, five daily expectations from their teachers, and five things they would not like their teachers do to them. They were instructed not to write their names on the questionnaire so that they could honestly state their views without any fear of possible repercussions if their identity were know, furthermore, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses since the instrument was designed essentially for research purposes only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The responses from the subjects were collated using tallying to identify the most common responses which are organized into absolute and relative frequencies as shown in Tables 1-3. The responses were then analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Students' Objectives of Being in school
The study shows beyond reasonable doubt that both the boys and girls are fully aware of why they are in the secondary school. This implies that they are focused most of the time to acquire knowledge from their teachers as indicated by 92.5% of the boys and 95% of the girls, and from Table 1, it is easy to see that socialization comes next to acquisition of knowledge in the priority order of why the adolescents are in the secondary school. Of course, preparation for vocation and further education equally ranked high in the preferences of the both male and female students. However, while development of skills in sports was important to as many as 10% of the male students, no female student identified interest in sports even as a necessary adjunct to school life. On the contrary, 15% of the girls regarded development of aptitude for fluency in expression as an important objective to be achieved from schooling.

Table 1: Students' objectives of being in school

Question	Responses	Male freq.	Male %	Female Freq.	Male %
	1. To acquire knowledge/education	37	92.5	38	95.0
	2. To socialize with other students	31	77.5	31	77.5
Write 5 reasons why you are in the college.	3. To acquire discipline and become responsible citizen	23	57.5	18	45.0
	4. To prepare for job & self-reliance	20	50.0	18	45.0
	5. To prepare for future education	18	45.0	23	57.5
	6. To learn more about life and help my parents	7	17.5	10	25.0

7. To qualify to became a leader	6	15.0	13	32.5
8. To develop skills in sports	4	10.0	-	-
9. To develop talent & fluency		-	6	15.0

The purposes of the male and female students for being in secondary schools were correlated using the Rank Difference method. The obtained correlation coefficient of 0.875 is high enough to warrant a conclusion that sex has no significant influence on students' intent for pursuing secondary education. Accordingly,, whether in boys' or girls' school, it is important that teachers at secondary school level should be aware of the usually unexpressed students' purposes for being in school. Undoubtedly, these purposes are bound to influence the learners' motivation to cope with class work. Furthermore, lessons that grossly deviate from the purposes expressed by the learners are not likely to be easily internalized by the students. As a consequence, teacher effectiveness may become diminished.

Students' Expectations from Teachers

With regard to students' expectations from their teachers, Table 2 shows that while punctuality in attendance to classes topped the list for the boys (75%), the girls seem to be more concerned with how their teachers treat them as humans. Although punctuality is important to 52.5% of the girls, yet a higher proportion (72.5%) expect teachers to exercise patience with students, listen to them, and treat them with respect. As if to confirm their desire for filial attention, 67.5% of the girls reported that they expect their teacher to be *friendly and caring for students* as the next in their order of expectations. About the same percentage of the boys (65%) equally expects good rapport and care from their teachers. A good proportion of the boys (67.5%) expect their teachers to possess good mastery of knowledge and to be cheerful during lesson delivery while 55% of the girls manifest similar expectation.

Table-2: Student expectations from their teachers

Question	Responses	Male Freq.	Male %	Female Freq.	Female (%)
Write 5 daily expectations from you're your teachers.	1. Punctual attendance to classes	30	75.0	21	52.5
	2. Mastery of knowledge& cheerfulness during	27	67.5	22	55.0
	3. Friendly and caring for students	26	65.0	27	67.5
	4. Patience with students, listen to them, and treat them with respect	1	42.5	29	72.5
	5. Show good examples in and out of the school	14	35.0	8	20.0
	6. Proper dressing especially female teachers	10	25.0	7	17.5
	7. Good notes with explanations.	7		7	17.5
	8. Discipline erring students	6	17.5	0	0
	9. Fair to all in marking	0	15.0	9	22.5
	10. Regularity in attendance to classes		0	16	40.0

Other expectations expressed by both boys and girls from their secondary school teachers suggest that students are concerned about the personality and moral rectitude of their teachers. Evidence from the study indicate that students take cognizance of certain character traits of their teachers including such expectations as shouting good examples in and out of the school, proper dressing, dedication to duty, objectivity and fairness in marking students' work and thoroughness in lesson delivery. However, the degrees of expectations in these areas do not show a high correlation with the sex of the students relative to their expressed objectives of entering the college. Indeed, the obtained correlation coefficient of 0.545 when subjected to test of significance with 8 degrees of freedom was not significant at .05 level (r =.545 = z value of .611<t.05 = .6319 for a df of 8). Further indications of variations between the expectations of boys and girls abound. For instance, while 40% of the girls expected their teachers to be punctual to classes, this expectation did not feature among the boys although 50% of the boys disliked teachers missing their lessons (see Table 3). On the other hand, 17.5% of the boys expected their teachers to discipline erring students but his expectation was not reflected among the girls. It is likely that the girls dread being punished and so would prefer to avoid expecting any chastisement from their teachers. However, whether the expectations are reasonable or not, the fact remains that teacher effectiveness may be affected by some of these usually unexpressed desires.

Students' Dislikes about Teachers' Attributes

Among the behaviours of teachers disliked by secondary school students, discrimination in form of bias or favoritism, particularly in marking students' work tops the list. A high proportion of both the boys and the girls (77.5% and 75%) respectively) indicated distaste for acts of discrimination. It is noted that the schools used for the study are "Unity Schools" where students are drawn form all states of the country. Hence, any teacher that manifests biased sentiments based either on ethnic affiliation or religion is bound to attract the dislike of students. Table 3 suggests that while a good proportion of both boys and girls distaste blackmail and unnecessary scolding from teachers, boys seem to have more acute disgust for teachers who inflict what in their perception, amounts to unjustified punishment than the girls. Similarly, a higher percentage of girls than boys hate snobbish attitude of teachers. Specifically, about 53% of girls and about 43% of boys dislike teachers who are prone to the use of sarcastic and abusive language.

Table 3: Students' Disliked attributes of Teachers

Question	Responses	Male Freq.	Male (%)	Female Freq.	Female (%)
Write five things you will not like your teachers do to you.	1. Discrimination in class & Marking	31	77.5	30	75.0
	2. Unjustified (corporal) punishment	26	65.0	12	30.0
	3. Blackmail and unnecessary scolding	24	60.0	19	47.5
	4. Missing lessons	20	50.0	9	22.5
	5. Snobbish attitude and use of abusive language	17	42.5	21	52.5
	6. Intruding into students private affairs &making embarrassing remarks	12	30.0	11	27.5
	7. Moral assault via indecent dressing and advances for intimate relationship	7	17.5	22	55.0
	8. Hatred and not responding to greetings	7	17.5	16	40.0
	9. Arrogant references to family and wealth	5	12.5	19	47.5
	10. Distractions-calling out students during lessons	4	10.0	0	0

Other traits of teachers that are considered sordid and disgusting by students include intrusion into students' private affaires, moral assault through indecent dressing, ignoring students when greeted, and arrogance based on status of the family. 55% of thee girls must have expressed advances for intimate relationship which they distasted while some male students felt distracted by female teachers who called them out during lessons to run errands for them.
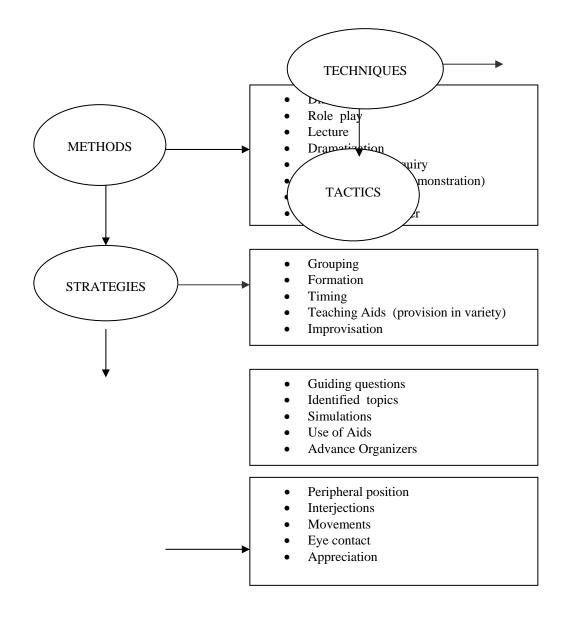
A comparison of the extent to which the scale of dislikes relates to the sex of students shows a very low correlation coefficient (.28). Apparently, what girls can easily condone might be very agitating to boys and vice versa. But more fundamental is the fact that the prevailing discipline in the two differing colleges may have influenced the students' reactions to the questions. For instance, it is possible that indiscriminate punishment of students may have been rife in the boys' school just as sexual harassment is more likely to be contemplated in the girls' school than in the boys.' Furthermore, psychological literature suggests that males are more aggressive than females (Maccoby & Jackin, 1974; Morgan, King 7 Robinson, 1981). It is therefore not surprising that higher percentages of boys than girls expressed disgust for such teachers' acts as corporal punishment, scolding, missing lessons and intruding into their private affairs.

The outcome of this study brings to the fore an important cause for reflection among educational planners and teacher educators. One would have expected an apparent

dissonance between the students' perception of an effective teacher and the characteristics of an effective teacher as perceived through the lenses of educational psychologists but that was not to be. The students' expectations and views about their cherished or ideal teacher suggest that adolescents could be rational enough to identify teachers that are endowed with creative imagination. According to Osborn (1980), imagination refers to the directing force which "lights tomorrows roads, explores today for clues to tomorrow, hunts a better way for you to live and travel." The imaginative teacher always challenges self with the question: What novelties shall I bring into this new lesson? Attempts to answer the question will usher in creativity which has to do with the ability to visualize, foresee and generate ideas. We concede that every teacher is endowed with imaginative talent but the extent to which it is invested depends on creative thinking. Thus, it is the driving force of creativity (and not the degree of native talent) that makes effectiveness remarkably unequal between two teachers. When a teacher exercises creative imagination, it will usher in creative efficiency n the job of teaching which will encapsulate all conceivable learner-friendly strategies.

The study further reveals that secondary school students can distinguish teachers who employ variety and resourcefulness in the discharge of their duties. There is o doubt that the issue of effective method of teaching is a function of the personality of the teacher (including the person's philosophy of the students. Beyond the issue of personality differentials, the manipulation of teaching skills is capable of creating a differential in the effectiveness of lesson outcomes. Miltz 91975) considered teaching skills as the specific teacher behaviours designed to help the classroom instruction become more effective. These specifics are no doubt embedded in the teacher's resourcefulness in manifesting each sub – set of methods, strategies, techniques and tactics as shown in figure 2 below.

TECHNIQUES

METHODS

- D.
- Role play
- Lecture
- Dramatization
- quiry
- monstration)

TACTICS

- er

STRATEGIES

- Grouping
- Formation
- Timing
- Teaching Aids (provision in variety)
- Improvisation

- Guiding questions
- Identified topics
- Simulations
- Use of Aids
- Advance Organizers

- Peripheral position
- Interjections
- Movements
- Eye contact
- Appreciation

Finally, adolescent students are capable of identifying teachers who are good role players. Harvighust (1981) listed nine major roles performed by teachers in the school. These are mediator of learning, disciplinarian, parent substitute, and research specialist and member of teachers' organization. The students involved in the survey were able to identify these roles through their expectations, likes and dislikes, the exceptions being the roles of teachers as research specialists and members of teachers' organization.

CONCLUSION

Most of the prescriptions regarded as contributory to effective teaching could be credited to the tested ideas and principles enunciated by educational psychologists and philosophers. However, the submissions from students involved in this survey suggest that adolescents can discriminate the 'good' from the 'bad' teachers. Evidence from the study further shows that adolescents, irrespective of sex, abhor acts of discrimination and favouritism exhibited by teachers. A recommendation that emerges from the survey is that our perception of effective teaching methodology should be a blending of the perspectives from teachers' pedagogical insights, the students' perspectives (since they are the consumers of the academic diet), and the perspectives of the society that is the consumer of the college output. It is also recommended that teachers need what may be termed self-development strategies that would assist them to become more endearing to students so that their teaching will become more effective.

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