

**MANAGING STUDENT'S LEARNING IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: PARADIGM SHIFT FROM TEACHER-CENTERED TO LEARNER-CENTERED METHODS**

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***Abstract***

*In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were clarion calls for a paradigm shift in undergraduate education from traditional methods of instruction which have focused teaching process to a new learning paradigm that would center on the learner's behaviour and the learning process. This teaching versus learning distinctions is more than a matter of semantics. The new learning paradigm suggest a new starting point for improving undergraduate education that begins with a focus on the learner and what the learner is doing in the classroom rather than focusing on what the instructor is doing / covering. Based on this, the paper examines the major implication of the new learning paradigm. The paper further concludes that we are in emerging era of classroom without walls and the academic paradigm shift from teaching to learning, and thus, it becomes very important that facilitators find new and creative ways to engage students. As a result of this conclusion, the paper recommends that it will be useful to shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered curriculum so as to improve learning in diverse classroom, curriculum planers should include learner-centered education into the school subjects and Government should organize workshops on child friendly education*

***Keywords: Managing students learning, teacher-centered and learner-centered methods***

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**Introduction**

Learner-centered teaching is an approach to teaching that is increasingly being encouraged in higher education. Learner-centered teachers do not employ a single teaching method: Their approach emphasizes different types of methods that shifts the role of the instructors from information giver to facilitating student learning.

Traditionally, instructors focused on what they did, and not on what the students are learning. This emphasis on what instructors do often leads to students being passive learners and who can not take responsibility for their own learning (Bligh, 2000). Educators call this traditional method, “teacher-centered teaching”. In contrast,

“learner-centered” describes a concept and a practice in which students and facilitators learn from one another. It poses a global shift, away from instruction that is teacher-centered. It is not intended to diminish the importance of the instruction. Instead, instruction is broadened to include other activities that produce desirable learning outcomes. In learner-centered, teachers articulate what we expect our students to learn, design educational experiences to advance their learning and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their success in achieving those expectations. Learner-centered approach to learning is also called “Student-Centered Learning or child-centered learning {Ani, 2011}. It is an approach to education focusing on the needs of the students, rather than those of others involved in the educational process, such as teachers and administrators.

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 of Nnachi {2009} which states 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 is pupil's and student's poor academic achievements. In this vein, Ademilola in Tell (2010) frowned at the poor performances of students in JAMB, WAEC and NECO examinations. Obviously, the issue of student's poor academic performances which culminate in low standard of education is mostly blamed on the teachers' inefficiency which includes 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 examine how to manage students learning in Nigerian tertiary institutions with a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered method of teaching in order to improve students' academic performances

### **The Need for Learner-Centered Alternative to the Lecture Method**

Research suggests that College instructors have a tendency to overestimate their student's level of cognitive involvement in the classroom. For instance, Fassinger (1996) surveyed more than 1000 students in over 50 classes from a wide range of disciplines that met at the same time period. She discovered that students perceived themselves as less involved in the classroom than faculty perceived them to be. While we would like to think that students are involved in reflective thinking while

listening to lecture notes, and students note taking during lecture are often performed in a reflective, mindless manner.

Prolonged performance on any passive, repetitive task such as continuous note-taking which eventually results to task being assumed by lower centers of the brain that control automatic behaviour, with limited involvement of higher (cortical) areas of the brain responsible for higher level thinking (Bligh, 2000, Mack worth, 1970), This finding is based on a saying that “During lecture, information passes from the lecturer's notes to the student's notes and through the minds of neither”. Sax (2005), an originator and long-time advocate of learning through the case studies method made a similar observation, noting that traditional lecturing is “like dropping ideas into the letter box of subconscious. You know when they are posted but you never know when they will be received nor in what form”.

In studies of behaviour, in undergraduate classroom, it was found that about half of the time during lectures, students were thinking about things unrelated to the lecture contents and up to 15% of their class time is spent fantasizing (Milton, Polio, & Eison, 1986). Student attention tends to drop off drastically after 10-20 minutes of continuous instruction.(Penner, 1984). However, it is important to note that this attention “drift” during lectures also occurs among students in graduate and professional school and among learning-oriented versus grade-oriented graduate students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Thus, attention loss cannot be seen as students problem, such as lack of motivation, lack of effort, or an outbreak of attention deficit disorder among today's youth, instead, the problem seems to lie with the lecture method itself.

It may be that listening attentively to lectures for prolonged period of time is simply not something that the human brain is particularly well equipped to do. To be precise, some neurologist and psychologist have argued that human brain may neurologically stand to process information for a long period of time because it was more adaptive for our ancient people to have short listening time, which enabled them to react quickly to a predator or prey and then shift their focus to the next life-preserving priority (Fasinger, 1996). This suggests that human brain processes new information more effectively. In shorter, attention session lasting no longer than 1 hours 30 minutes, followed by opportunities to act on that message that involve personal engagement and reflection.

Even if students wonderfully managed to sustain attention and concentration through a given 2 hours lecture, researchers opined that important educational outcome, such as higher level thinking and attitude change, are less likely to take place when students listen to lectures than when they engage in more active learning process(Pascarella, 2005). In their own contributions, Macomb and Wister (1997) said that if students are allowed to become more active and effective in meaningful learning and reasoning, they need to spend more time in active, meaningful learning and thinking not just sitting and passively receiving information. This research evidence suggests that “if an instructor's goals are not only to impart information but also to develop cognitive skill and to change attitudes, then alternative teaching

strategies should be interwoven with the lecture method during classroom presentation”.

### **Learner-Centered Strategies**

In learner-centered teaching strategies, if, all the four mentioned principles are effectively implemented at the same time, they can be expected to exert synergistic effects on multiple positive outcomes, including deep learning, intrinsic motivation and student retention. Therefore, the four principles according to Bligh (2000:64) includes:-

- 1 Active involvement learning becomes deeper and more durable when students become actively occupied in the learning process
- 2 Social integration learning is strengthened through peer interaction and collaboration.
- 3 Self reflections learning is deepened when students step back and reflect on how they are learning and what they are learning thereby transforming it into a form that makes sense or has personal meaning to them which enables them to build relevant conceptual connections between what they are trying to learn and what they have already known.
- 4 Personal validation learning is facilitated when students feel personally significant, that is when they are recognized as individuals and sense that they matter to their instructor and their classmates.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom challenge traditional, teacher-centered curriculum to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners and make the required increase in achievement gains. School violence, diverse learner needs and populations, educational renewal, and technological advances place demand on teachers in areas for which they were formally held accountable. With teacher educators, problems occur when teaching styles conflict with learners learning styles, often resulting in limited learning or no learning. Sax (2005) explained learner-centered method as a model for countering classroom challenges because of its viability for meeting diverse needs. Learner-centered classroom place learners at the center of classroom organization and respect their learning needs, strategies, and styles. In learner-centered classroom, learners can be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups on distinct tasks and projects. The transition from teaching the entire group to meeting individual learner needs involves extensive planning and task-specific classroom management.

An essential factor for a learner-centered approach is considering the individual differences of the learners, bearing in mind the slow learners in the classroom. It is based on this that Macomb (1997) explained that the focus in a learner-centered approach is on individual learner's heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs. These are the reasons why there is need for a paradigm shift from teacher-centered approach to learner-centered methods. Ani (2011) suggested the following examples of learner-centered instructional strategies to include teachers encouraging students to be

purposeful, and life-long learners using a variety of instructional strategies.

### **Benefits of Learner-Centered Approaches**

Following the new emerging teaching approaches, learners have been placed in more advantage position. The benefits includes

- 1 It makes learners to become actively engaged in the learning process
- 2 It makes students to be responsible for their own understanding
- 3 It leads students to learn how to learn
- 4 It makes students to develop a desire for life-long learning
- 5 Learner-centered approach enhances retention of knowledge and understanding and
- 6 It makes learners to gain social skills by working with one another.

### **Approaches Adopted in Learner-Centered**

Below are some approaches adopted by teachers to ensure success in classroom instructional process.

**1 Problem Based Learning:** Learners are challenged to learn by working co-operatively to find remedies to real-life problems. Curiosity and interest in the process occurs naturally as learners work in teams to solve authentic dilemmas.

**2 Inquiry/Discovery Methods:** asking searching questions moves learner's mental stimulation and quickly gets them thinking critically. Immediately situation has been presented, learners gather information by formulating their own questions. They without delay search solution in cooperative groups, or individually. A less complex form of inquiry involves questioning format whereby learners ask the teacher questions they have formulated and make educated guesses.

**3 Induction Methods:** Like inquiry approach, induction methods of teaching begin with a question or series of unknown facts or concept and move toward known information. Learners sort for answers to these unknown in an active manner. Instead of lecturing, teachers resort to play the role of facilitators or coach when applying inductive methods.

**4 Role-Play:** Role play situation requires learners to move out of the confines of traditional roles and take on the characteristics of someone else. Role-play promotes creativity and high levels of thought on the part of the learner. This approach is most successful when learners are given time to discover the character they must indicate.

**5 Simulation:** Similar to role-play, simulation requires approximating real-life situation in the classroom. Learners are engaged in the reproduction of possible situation. Simulation often involves scripted representations that enable learners to closely experience world events.

**6 Cooperative Learning:** Working together in groups or pairs, to collaborate on a specific work, benefits learners socially as well as cognitively. Learners rely on each other to reach their goals and practice social interaction acumen.

### **Conclusion**

It has become more important that teachers find new and creative ways to engage students in classroom instruction because of the deficiencies of the traditional method of teaching and learning. In addition, as methods to teach and learn continue to escalate into greater utilization of varied forms of technology, it is equally expedient that learners and teachers continue to connect through current and successful evolving means. The shift towards learner-centered teaching is a change in emphasis that will cause teachers to rethink on how to teach in order to achieve the desired instructional goals of our educational system. Finally, it is imperative that teachers should engage students to participate actively in lessons rather than doing the teaching alone.

### **Recommendations**

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:

1. 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.
2. Teachers should be encouraged by the Government to go for in-service training in educational institutions to acquire knowledge on the use of learner-centered method.
3. Supervisors of schools should visit schools on regular basis to ensure teachers strict compliance with the use of learner-centered method of teaching.
4. Since the method requires enough equipment and facilities to ensure students active participation, government should ensure that schools are equipped with relevant learning resources.
5. Population of students in classes should be moderate to enable teachers cope with the task of learner-centered approach. To this end, government should post enough teachers to schools.
6. Educational planners should include learner-centered education as a Course of study in our tertiary institutions.

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