International Faculty Best Practices Interchanges as a Tool for Tackling Global Context and Cultural Limitations to Effective Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Education

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Abstract

Nigeria university educators are resolute on keeping pace with global trends in teaching and learning but are deterred by pre-existing limitations. To achieve universal competency these limitations must be confronted. The research investigated the physical, pedagogical and cultural barriers to effective teaching and learning in Nigeria universities. A survey elicited responses of seventy five university lecturers and one hundred and fifty undergraduates from two Southern Nigeria universities on these barriers. Data analysis showed both lectures and students indicating inadequate infrastructure and facilities as major barriers; students also indicated lecturers' teaching approaches as barriers to learning. Likewise, low literacy in English Language also hindered effective learning. Based on these findings, the authors identifies global best practices as applicable in Nigeria and most African contexts, and would recommend further research, discourse and regional and international university interchange on best practices through global learning.

Introduction

The world's developing countries are in most part, yet on the threshold of attaining a globally acclaimed educational system. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and its other sub African environs, particularly, the sub-Saharan regions, commonly share the multidimensional economic, political, social and cultural backlash that impinge on the educational systems. Insofar as these challenges continue to escalate, decisive actions becomes imminent. As a major stakeholder, the Nigerian tertiary educators could effect a significant change if 'all hands are at deck'. However, this vision is farfetched. A synthetic method that was introduced in the English Language literacy programme for early elementary school pupils, drastically improved their reading and writing skills irrespective of cultural, religious and grassroots or the socioeconomic limitations [10]. This elucidates the potentials of good instructional techniques to transcend diverse barriers to bring about effective teaching and learning. The nationally sponsored Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) is a solution strategy that has made significant but imperceptible contributions to quality education. This has been of great concern to all stake holders [2, 6] and requires efficacious interventions.

But still, Nigeria is also a home of talented professionals who have evolved out of personal mechanisms and talents, with students that are apparently resilient and versatile in metacognitive skills: which the global community can readily to tap into the paradigms of success. An international scholarly exchange can uncover trends and insights needed to attain higher learning standards for all participants. This falls within the global learning philosophy.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study. What are perceptions of the physical, pedagogical and cultural barriers to effective teaching and learning of:
1. University students
2. University lecturers

Theoretical framework

The various learning theories have prescribed how effective learning can occur. Effective teaching and learning generally emanates from the principles of the constructivist learning theories of

twenty-first century which is built on the cognitive and behavioural-social learning theories. Constructivism is concerned with 'how' we construct knowledge. How we construct knowledge is a function of prior experience mental structures and beliefs (schema) that is used to interpret objects and events, this forms the basis of constructivist pedagogy, which aims at making the learning experience reflect the real world experiences [14].

The behavioral learning theories view learning as a change in behavior which occurs primarily as a function of environmental factors. Specifically, the arrangement and presentation of stimuli and the reinforcement of responses. This implies that a properly arranged environment facilitates learning [11]. The barriers to effective teaching and learning are due to the various factors that hinder the proper application of the learning theories to teaching and learning. If the lecturer is cannot to provide the proper learning environment due to institutional deficiencies; or is unable to design his instruction appropriately using proper teaching methods, effective learning is hindered.

Physical Pedagogical and Culture Context and Effective Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

Physical barriers in the context of this paper are the infrastructural and facilities related circumstances that can inhibit effective teaching and learning in Nigerian Universities. Many universities in developing countries lack the infrastructural facilities for teaching and learning. The lack of infrastructure and basic facilities for teaching and learning, overloaded classrooms; poor electricity supply, inadequate infrastructure, among others, are inhibitions to effective university education in Gambia and Nigeria[1,8]. Effective teaching and learning requires a conducive learning environment with well-equipped classrooms and all the necessary facilities and tools for learning. Unfortunately, this is not the context of many Nigerian Universities [1].

Pedagogical context in teaching and learning encompasses all instructional and student learning related aspects of university education. Poor staffing, lack of teaching tools are part of pedagogical challenges facing Nigerian tertiary institution[1]. Also included are poor attitude of students towards learning, overloaded curriculum and too much to learn in a short period of time[8]. The teaching culture in Nigerian universities has been mainly teacher centered[1], in which the students are expected to do a lot of independent learning, apply metacognition strategies to achieve their learning. This has favoured analytic students and disfavor more hands on or collaborative students.

Culture is the way of life of a social group and it includes actions, values and beliefs that can be communicated with necessary modifications from one generation to the next[13]. Culture is acquired through learning, cultural conditioning of behaviour, acts through unconscious processes. Thus, students can exhibit unconsciously a multiplicity of cultural behaviours and values depending on their back grounds. The cultural problems/challenges facing undergraduates in Nigerian universities include academic stress, cultism, and social stereotyping[1]. In Nigeria culture, stereotyping is common due to the diversity of cultures in the country. This can negatively affect students in diverse ways. Paramount among cultural challenges experienced by Nigerian university students, is inadequate knowledge of spoken and written English. The students have learned English as a second language in primary school and then use the language to learn from the third year of primary school through secondary to tertiary education. Some of these students may not have a good foundation in English, this hinders their understanding of course contents and written expressions in English[10].

Global Learning Networks and Effective Teaching and Learning

Global learning is a process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcends borders [9]. Benefits of global learning include exposing learners to knowledge and information about learning in diverse context.

Method

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to elicit responses form seventy five university lecturers and one hundred and fifty undergraduates from two Southern Nigeria universities on their perception of the barriers that hindered effective teaching and learning. These data were collected

using a "Lecturers Teaching Barriers Questionnaire" (LTBQ) and a "Students Learning Barrier Questionnaire (SLBQ). The validity and reliability of the instrument duly established. Data was analyzed using means and standard deviation. Decision rule of 1.0-2.0 indicating low barrier, 2.01 -3.0, moderately high and 3.01 – 4.0 as a high barriers to effective teaching and learning was used.

Results and Discussion
Research Question 1

Analysis of students' response to statements on their perceived barriers to effective learning revealed students rating that pedagogical barriers like: lecturers' assessment techniques (mean 3.68); lecturers' teaching approach (3.35); lectures nonuse of technology (3.40) and too many courses on the timetable (3.20) as high barriers to effective learning. Similarly they rated poor infrastructural facilities like laboratories (mean 3.47) and overcrowded classrooms (3.37) also as high in constituting barriers to effective learning. The respondents rated lecturers' attitude to students (mean 3.55) as high barrier to effective student learning. Cultural barriers such as challenges with understanding the English, financial problems, social discrimination/stereotyping were rated as moderate, yielding an overall mean and standard deviation of 3.12 and 0.43 respectively, indicating these factors on the average constitutes high barriers and the respondents are consistent in perceiving same as represented by the low standard deviation.

Research Question 2

Analysis of lectures response to statements on their perceived barriers to effective teaching revealed lecturers indicating that poor infrastructural facilities (mean 3.72) and overcrowded classrooms (3.38) were top in constituting barriers to effective teaching. Similarly, pedagogical barriers are lack of adequate knowledge on current techniques and strategies (mean 3.48); too many courses to teach (3.44); lack of technology (3.36); non motivated students (3.25) and challenges in course design (3.12). Cultural barriers such as disruptive students, students struggle with the English Language, students unable to buy the required materials for the course and students exhibit cultural and ethnic stereotyping were rated as moderate yielding an overall mean and standard deviation of 3.10 and 0.39 respectively indicating these factors on the average constitute high barriers to teaching and learning as perceived by the lecturers and their seems to be a general consensus based on low standard deviation recorded.

The above findings are in agreement with other authors [1,3,5,8, &10] and further accentuates the need for interventions in alleviating these barriers to effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The lecturers and students experience high degrees of physical and pedagogical barriers and moderate cultural barriers to effective teaching and learning. They richly benefit from global learning interchanges on best practices in student engagement and active learning strategies and management overcrowded classrooms and other strategies to surpass these common barriers.

Global Learning Networks for Best Practice Interchanges

Global learning networks between university educators will comprise of sites and platforms where educators of diverse cultural and economic contexts can interact and exchange best practices they have employed to surpass their common barriers and enhance good teaching and learning practices under the Global learning philosophy. Lecturers learn from their peers about global best practices of teaching and learning under diverse circumstances and students exchange learning ideas and practices. The typical Nigerian undergraduate is good at independent study and may have some metacognitive learning strategies their counterparts in the west can emulate. Blogs and closed emails, chat groups can be used to form inter university collaboration forums to make connections between educators and between students from universities worldwide.

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