



Developing Academic Staff for Effective Teaching: A Focus on Sharing of Expertise in Universities in Nigeria

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Author's contribution

This work was carried out by author COA. She designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. She managed the analyses of the study. She managed the literature searches. She read and approved the final manuscript.

Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Aims: This study was to examine the extent of sharing of teaching skills among professors and junior academic staff in universities in Nigeria.

Study Design: This study was a descriptive design.

Place and Duration of Study: The study took place in universities in south west, Nigeria, within ten months. The average time for the face to face interview was approximately 30 minutes.

Methodology: A qualitative research was employed using semi-structure interview, observation and participative observation. A sample of twelve professors were purposively selected based on years of experience as professors, while sixteen academic staff of senior lecturer and below were sampled from four universities in south west, Nigeria, making a total sample of twenty eight. Five research questions were raised and answered. Research questions were subjected to descriptive analysis.

Results: The finding of the study showed that professors shared the teaching skills in both formal and informal forms; however formal way was more prominent. It also revealed that the professors showed high level of willingness to share expertise by responding positively

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on their willingness to share their teaching skills. The study also came out with the finding that junior colleagues rarely initiated intention to share teaching skills. The study identified barriers to sharing of teaching skills as: ignorance, non-accessibility of professors due to tight schedule, time constraint, and work overload for junior academic staff, environmental challenges, individuals' ego, attitude, and position hindrances. The strategies to share expertise were identified in the study as: orientation for fresh academic staff, imbibe culture of sharing, rating teaching high as promotion criterion, and closeness of junior colleagues to professors.

Conclusion: It was concluded that Sharing of teaching expertise is a ready tool to develop teaching skills of academic staff. It was therefore recommended that university system should encourage interpersonal sharing of teaching expertise among academic staff. Junior academic staff should be given orientation on the need to acquire new idea on teaching skills, and the need to initiate intention to learn.

Keywords: Academic staff; teaching expertise; effective teaching; sharing expertise; developing staff.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities all over the world attach much importance to experience and development on the job to the extent that professors are perceived as experts and authority in their area of specialization. [1] viewed universities as such places, where professors develop their expertise over a lengthy period of time especially their teaching expertise. They said most university professors are responsible for the evolution of their own teaching skills and abilities. Through informal processes, and in some cases formal processes, professors share their expertise about teaching. Teaching expertise is the height attained by academic staff in getting adequate knowledge and skills in terms of pedagogy, teaching style, method and subject matter that enhance his teaching effectiveness. However, it does not indicate that the professors are encyclopedia of knowledge, and that they have monopoly of knowledge. Never the less the professors could still gain knowledge from younger generation. It is pertinent to ascertain the extent to which junior colleagues could benefit from the wealth of experience of senior colleagues. Teaching effectiveness is the extent to which performance in teaching activities yield results that meet with the stated objective of the course of programme. The objectives of university education among others includes; academic achievement, research, consultation and community services. Developing teaching skills to enhance academic achievement cannot be over emphasized.

[2] explained that professionals learn through study, apprenticeship, and experience, both by expanding their comprehension of formal disciplines by finding new ways to use them to achieve specific ends, constantly moving forward and backward from theory to practice so that each enriches the others [3] He suggested three modes of continuing professional education: instruction mode, inquiry mode and performance mode [3]. In the instruction mode, learning is passive and the content of learning is formal knowledge. Learning in the inquiry mode is exploratory and cooperative, which produces a "synthesis or creation of new techniques or concepts". In the performance mode, learning is "more active and involves practice in the actual work setting. Houle's continuing professional education model encompasses theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge.

[2] explained how experts grasp situation with deep tacit understanding with their model of skills acquisition. They present five levels of skills acquisition: novice, advanced beginner,

competent, proficient and expert. They described experts as those who no longer rely on rules, guidelines, or maxims, intuitively grasp situations based on deep tacit understanding, use analytic approaches only in novel situation or when problems occur; and have vision of what is possible [5]. They suggest that experts understand situations as integrated wholes rather than as discrete parts.

Formal continuing professional education programmes are commonly made up of conferences, seminars and lectures in which formal, abstract and general knowledge is transferred from experts to the professional works [1]. Local specific and practical knowledge can be devalued in the formal sessions [6]. The formal programmes may be aligned with the interest of practicing professionals who think knowledge from practice is far more useful than what they acquire from the more formal education [6]. [1] revealed that expert teaching professors need opportunities to interact with and be observed by novice professors.

[7] noted that, universities typically do not have formal programmes to establish these types of interactions between novice and expert teaching professors. [1] revealed the need for universities to systematize the ways in which novice contact, observe, and collaborate with expert professors, and that the sharing of expertise between expert workers and their mentees should not be left to chance encounters.

Quality teaching has been the desire of world Class University. Quality teaching lies at the heart of a great university [8]. Faculty works hard to maintain academic excellence, Professors whose teaching is not at the level they desire improve significantly through working with accomplished colleagues. University of Virginia Academy of teaching recognizes exemplary professors who have generously and collaboratively shared their know-how with Faculty and graduate teaching assistant colleagues through out the university community, especially across departmental and school boundaries. The academy engages its members to share their expertise with a broader audience of colleagues through a series of programmes which further raise the level of pedagogy at the university of Virginia [8].

Developing teachers on the job is aimed among others at creating effective teacher. An effective teacher is one who learns from teaching rather than the one who has finished learning how to teach [9]. Staff development is the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills specifically to accumulate more and up-to-date knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, teaching techniques, instructional management, so as to enhance job competence. [10] said that staff development is the interaction among colleagues arising from school activities and programmes, and that development starts from inception of service and through the service years, so that teachers could be well orientated to their job. [11] submitted that the school routine administrative activities build up a lot of experience in teachers, which subsequently enhances professional and administrative development of teachers.

Effective teaching involved the ability to apply research finding to classroom practice. Effective teaching also combines human relations, skills, judgement, intuition knowledge of subject matter, and understanding of learning into one unified act, resulting in improved learning for students, [12].

Effective teaching is the imparting of knowledge with relevant subject matter, adequate pedagogy, improvement of student learning and accomplishment of overall goal of educational institution. Effective teachers have a good command of their subject matter and

a solid core of teaching skills [13] having a thoughtful, flexible, conceptual understanding of subject matter is indispensable to be an effective teacher. The knowledge of subject matter includes a lot more than just facts, terms and general concepts. It also includes knowledge about instructional strategies, goal setting and planning, classroom management, motivation, communication, working with diverse students, and technology [13]. Effective teachers develop identity, seek advice from experienced teacher, maintain their own learning, and build up good resources and supports.

Competent and experienced teacher can be an especially valuable resource for beginning teacher as well as for other experienced teachers. Increasingly, teachers engage in collaborative consultation in which people with diverse areas of expertise interact to promote, competent instruction and provides effective services for students. A number of research studies have compared beginning teachers and experienced teachers. In general, experienced teachers are more likely than beginning teachers to: have confidence in their decision making and problem solving strategies; have expertise in managing their classroom; and have extensive knowledge of instructional strategies.

This study was based on social exchange theory, with attention to; individuals participation in a relationship out of a sense of mutual benefit rather than coercion. Individuals will seek to maximise their gains and minimise their cost in terms of time and energy invested in a relationship. The study was also linked to management support for knowledge sharing, which is also based on social exchange theory. Management support for knowledge sharing has been shown to be positively associated with employees' perceptions of a knowledge sharing culture,(employee trust, willingness of experts to help others), and willingness to share knowledge [14]. [15] found that supervisory control (perceived supervisor influence over utilizing the knowledge management support in organisation appropriately), was a significant predictor of individual effort which was related to the frequency of knowledge sharing. [16] found that a manager's control of rewards for a desired behaviour (reward power) and employees' belief that the manager had knowledge and expertise in the area (expert power) were positively related to employees' self reported knowledge sharing.

University education in Nigeria has attached much importance to experience on the job. The system is exercising restraint in allowing the old and more experienced professors to leave the system. The retirement age of professors from sixty-five to seventy has received the attention of legislators. The retirement age is still awaiting the final approval. The experience acquired by professors all over the years seems to be valued, and it appears the younger generation of academic staff would learn from it. Based on observations, many of the academic staff were not actually making use of opportunity at their disposal to learn from senior colleagues. The purpose of this study therefore, was to find out the extent of expertise sharing among university academic staff. It was specifically to examine how professors share their expertise with their junior colleagues, and their extent of willingness to share their expertise. It was also to examine the extent of junior academic staff to initiate intention, to learn from professors, and to find out perceived barriers to sharing of teaching expertise. The following research questions were raised to find solution to the problem of the study:

1. How do professors share their teaching expertise with junior colleagues?
2. What is the extent of professors' willingness to share their ideas about teaching?
3. What is the extent to which junior colleagues initiate intention to learn from professors' expertise?
4. What are the perceived barriers to sharing of teaching expertise?

5. What are the strategies for improvement in sharing teaching expertise among academic staff?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research. The qualitative approach is often used when interests are high on the processes that take place within a context [17]. Qualitative research permits the examination of a phenomenon within a setting [1]. The observation of how professors share their teaching knowledge occurred in real life situation. Observations and participant observations strategies were adopted. The study also employed the strategies of contacting respondents through mobile phone, SMS and e-mail messages. The data were gathered from the respondents using semi- structured interview. The average time for the face to face interview was approximately 30 minutes. The interviewees freely expressed their beliefs and opinions.

The subjects used for this study consisted of academic staff in universities in Nigeria. This study took place in public universities in South West, Nigeria. Four Universities were sampled using simple random sampling from thirteen universities. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the professors, based on the year of experience; at least five years experience. Three professors were selected from four universities, making a total of twelve subjects. Four academic staff of the rank of senior lecturer and below were sampled from each of the sampled universities, making a total of sixteen subjects. The total sample was twenty eight. This exercise covered ten months.

The subjects were basically categorized into the two: professors and the academic staff of senior lecturer and below. The study involves inductive form of data analysis in which the researcher gathered the data and then developed an understanding and generalizations were drawn. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Research question one

How do professors share their teaching expertise with junior colleagues.

The professors in their responses gave explanation on their sharing of teaching expertise. The study revealed the mode of professors' sharing of expertise with their junior colleagues. The sharing of expertise takes the form of inter-personal interactions, dialogue, and discussion. Expertise sharing was also in form of group teaching, teaching practice, seminar, giving instructions, lectures, responses to questions, instructional and collegial supervision. The professors' responses revealed that the teaching expertise sharing with junior colleagues also involved teaching style, methodology and strategies for making learning student centered, learning enhancement, strategy of keeping students busy, preparation for learning and keeping students gainfully engaged. One of the respondents explained how he shares teaching knowledge with junior colleagues.

I do share teaching knowledge with junior colleagues through group teaching. I follow them to lectures rooms, I teach, they make observations. I also watch them while teaching. But in

most cases they have not been coming personally to ask questions on teaching strategies, style or any information concerning teaching. In few cases they have been coming to seek information on administrative issue”.

A respondent also bore his mind;

“I have been partaking in sharing my teaching skills with junior colleagues through seminars, conferences and lectures. Sharing of teaching skills with colleagues has been restricted to organized programmes. I have rarely been involved in interpersonal sharing because the situations for that were not available. Junior colleagues rarely demanded for that. I would be willingly available to give information concerning my teaching skills”.

It was revealed that suggestions to improve the teaching, grading and marking of scripts, vetted by team leader before submission, were parts of experience gained from professors’ interaction with the junior colleagues. Proof reading and offer suggestions on examination questions, marking guide and moderation of examination scripts, and scores, form part of sharing expertise. The study revealed that professors have been engaging in sharing expertise in formal ways in most cases, for instance in sharing expertise in workshops, seminars, and orientation programme for new academic staff.

3.1.2 Research question two

What is the extent of professors’ willingness to share their ideas about teaching?

The professors showed high level of willingness to share their ideas, and experience about teaching. The study confirmed that professors were willing to share their ideas, methodology, knowledge of pedagogy, and styles about teaching. The professors were enthusiastic, they were ready to share, but they wanted junior colleagues to approach them.

3.1.3 Research question three

What is the extent to which junior colleagues initiated intention to learn from professors.

It was revealed by this study that junior colleagues rarely initiate intention to learn from professors. In few instances junior colleagues bring problems that are of little relevance to teaching assignment. Junior colleagues in their responses revealed their level of time constraint and ignorance in demanding from senior colleagues on the knowledge related to their teaching job. Junior colleagues also said that in most cases the professors were not easily accessible due to their tight of schedule of duties. It was also revealed that junior colleagues consulted frequently and more on administrative issue than on teaching. One of the respondents among the junior colleagues explained;

“I have not been seeking deliberate information on teaching. I do not know it is necessary, more so that I have not been observing other colleagues who engaged in such. The situations where I have learnt from senior colleagues are through seminars and conferences and in most cases through handouts and journals”.

3.1.4 Research question four

What are the perceived barriers to sharing of teaching expertise?

In the course of this investigation series of factors were identified as barriers to sharing of teaching expertise. Junior academic staff rarely seeks for deliberate assistance. There was ignorance on the need to make move on sharing of teaching expertise. There was the challenges of non- accessibility of professors to their junior colleagues. There was also time constraint on the part of junior colleagues; they were always busy with results computation, project supervision and students services. Environmental challenges have posed constraints on the junior colleagues to seek for sharing teaching expertise. For instance the inadequate facilities: office accommodation, irregular electricity supply, and inadequate office furniture, equipment and generally inadequate office convenience.

It was also revealed that individual differences and individual ego, some people are not collegial they could not work as a team, non- cooperation, non accessibility and poor interpersonal relation have constituted barriers to sharing of teaching expertise. Barriers have also been due to non- approachable attitude, age, gender and position barriers, on the part of senior, furthermore arrogance of junior, carefree attitude of professors who are solitary in nature and individualistic in thinking and action. The professors who occupy positions; for instance the Directors of programmes, Heads of Departments, and Dean of Faculties, were somehow not easily accessible to junior colleagues due to tight schedule of duties. Colleagues of opposite sex sometimes exercised restraints in their closeness to share information.

3.1.5 Research question five

What are the strategies for improvement in sharing teaching expertise among academic staff?

The responses from the subjects in the course of this study revealed that, strategies to enhance sharing teaching of expertise should be devised. It was suggested that there is the need for orientation for young and junior academic staff on the need to imbibe the culture of sharing teaching expertise. The orientation should be given on the need for junior colleagues to be thirsty for knowledge in teaching. It was suggested that knowledge in teaching should be rated high in promotion. It was also suggested that the work load of junior colleague need to be reduced to have more time to consult and benefit from expertise knowledge, and that the work environment to be conducive for teaching. There is the need for junior colleagues to get closer to senior colleagues and frequently engage in knowledge sharing. One of the respondents; a professor explained that;

“Sharing of teaching skill is a worthwhile activity. I want to believe that it is necessary to do that, but the junior colleagues have not been coming. I believe if junior colleagues are giving orientation on why and how to seek for more information. It is expected of them to learn from wealth of experience of senior colleagues”.

3.2 Discussion

The professors shared their teaching expertise in both formal and informally situations, but mostly in formal form. The formal means was usually through seminars, workshop, lecture and group teaching. Expert disseminated their expertise in informal way; such as dialogue, discussion, observation and taking of instructions from superior colleagues. [18] asserted that formal training programmes for new professors that are limited to workshops and institutes can be ineffective, and they do little to help novices observe and adopt expertise of

expert teaching professors. Systematic approaches should be developed that allow novice teachers to observe the practices of expert teachers and interact with expert teachers [1].

The professors expressed high level of willingness to share their ideas about teaching. The study confirmed that professors were willing to share their ideals about teaching. There is a connection between the finding of [1] that expert teaching professors need opportunities to interact with and be observed by novice professors. The willingness of the professors to share teaching expertise could be translated to realities while opportunities to interact and be observed are available.

The junior colleagues rarely initiated intention to learn from professors' teaching skills. [1] said that the initiation of the sharing process by novice, needed the novice's openness to new ideas. They said sometime the decision making to seek expert teachers' help, totally depended on a novice teacher.

Series of barriers were identified to sharing of expertise, such include: ignorance, non-accessibility of professors, work overload for junior colleagues, environmental challenges, inadequate working facilities, attitude, individual differences and position. [1] substantiated the need for universities to systematize the ways in which novices contact, observe, and collaborate with expert professors. They further said that the sharing of expertise between expert workers and their mentees should not be left to chance. [19] suggested that to overcome work setting barriers that prevent contact with professors, time and space need to be structured to allow professors to meet, chat, and work in an atmosphere that encourages free and open exchanges. [1] shed light on environmental barriers within universities such as working schedules and physical settings that restrict the sharing of knowledge about teaching among professors.

The study revealed strategies to enhance sharing of teaching expertise among academic colleagues in universities, orientation for junior colleagues and the need to be thirsty for knowledge, imbibe culture of teaching skills sharing, reduced work overload, rating teaching high as criterion for promotion.

4. CONCLUSION

University education desires improvement in the pedagogy in this century, because the students should be able to compare favourably across the globe. Sharing of teaching expertise is a ready tool to develop teaching skills of academic staff. The study established that, professors engaged more in formal sharing of expertise than the informal form. They also showed high level of willingness to share teaching expertise with junior colleagues. Furthermore the junior colleagues rarely initiated intention to learn from professors. Teaching and learning in this digital age still rely on the skills acquired by academic staff. University system should encourage informal sharing of teaching expertise. Sharing of teaching expertise among academic staff is imperative in the enhancement of effective teaching. The professors as experts have to share their teaching skills with junior colleagues. The willingness of professors to share their teaching skills is translated into reality while opportunities are made available. Junior colleagues' openness to show interest in acquiring new ideas go along way in enhancing their desire to initiate intention to learn from professors. Sharing of expertise should not be left to chance.

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. University system should encourage inter- personal sharing of teaching skills among academic staff, to complement formal way of sharing.
2. The junior academic staff should be given orientation on the need to acquire new idea on teaching skill and the need to initiate intention to learn.
3. Professors should be accessible and ready to work as a team leader, and carry along junior colleagues.
4. Quality assurance in teaching should be pursued through proper mentoring and good teaching leadership.
5. Developing academic staff deliberately through expertise sharing should be adopted by the university as a strategy and also a culture.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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