

PERSONAL TEACHING PHILOSOPHY, PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: THEIR INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY IN NIGERIA'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS.

PROF. MICHAEL OLALEKAN OLATUNJI

Department of Educational Foundations
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria

Abstract

The paper attempts a philosophical analysis of the concepts of personal teaching philosophy, pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical skills, and effective communication. It explores the link between these concepts, and the key implications of this link for instructional quality in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. The paper proceeds to make a critical examination of the major implications of each of these concepts for instructional quality in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. The paper argues that personal teaching philosophy, pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical skills, and effective communication are essential for instructional quality. It recommends, among other things that lecturers in Nigeria's tertiary institutions should be encouraged to develop personal teaching philosophy, review such philosophy from time to time, be well grounded in pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, have appreciable level of pedagogical skills and keep growing their communication skills.

Key words: Teaching philosophy, pedagogy, communication, Instructional quality

Introduction

As enunciated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education [1], tertiary education in Nigeria is to drive national development through the training of high-level and high-quality manpower training and the provision of lifelong learning programmes. The NPE points out further that the training of high-quality manpower depends on quality teaching and learning. However, despite these assertions, the quality of most of the products of Nigeria's tertiary institutions leaves much to be desired. Yusuf² made a similar observation. He points out that complaints from employers of labour, indicate that some Nigerian graduates are unemployable despite their qualifications. In the same vein, Oyesiku³ linked the poor quality of educational outputs of tertiary institutions in the country to deterioration in teaching and learning approaches among other factors. Describing the pathetic situation of graduates of Nigeria's tertiary institutions, Mango⁴ laments that some graduates of law are not only unjust but are also collaborators in the abuse and misuse of justice, while some graduates of medical science are not only inhuman but they also suppresses public health. He argues further that the poor quality of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the result of repressive nature of teaching. According to him teaching in tertiary institution indoctrinates, smothers creativity and imagination. It induces conformity and stultifies students into blind and docile conformity and obedience

as potential public workers who should not question authority even where it is wrong. To this end many scholars have called for improved instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary institutions as one of the key ways of improving the quality of the graduates of Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Some of these scholars include Biao⁵ Usman⁶, Javed⁷ and Yusuf⁸.

According to Onwuagboke, Singh and Fook⁹, Instructional delivery is defined as tactics used by the teacher for the purpose of facilitating learning among learners. They explain further that it is a process which requires that the teacher engages the learners in the classroom such that the learners learn effectively. Such engagement is done in such a way that different instructional strategies are utilized by the teachers to support the learners in learning contents for efficient learning outcomes. The key issue in instructional delivery according to Arlington Public Schools cited in Yusuf and Sholagger¹⁰ is that the teacher engages the learners seriously such that variety of instructional strategies are employed to meet the individual learning needs. This approach in real sense makes the learning a learner's affairs and the learner is central to the whole process. The learners are given opportunities to create and share knowledge among their peers and groups while the teacher creates an enabling environment using innovative strategies. Instructional delivery can also be correctly defined as the process that shows the activities of the teacher and his students in a classroom setting. Therefore, all that the teacher does in the class in order to have a successful and productive teaching session with the students by handling the course content professionally; employing the best methods, the resources available and well utilized, the assessment modalities as well as students' interaction with the environment; all taken together constitute instructional delivery. It is implied therefore that the process of instructional delivery involves a repertoire. Furthermore, Canales¹¹ states that instructional delivery is the action the teacher does in the classroom that promotes learning by demonstrating accurate content knowledge and by addressing academic needs through a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and technologies that engage learners. Instructional strategy on the other hand, is about decision making by the teacher in order to organise people, materials and ideas for the learners to learn. The decision is concerned about the methods of teaching and materials that are appropriate for certain type of learning and the learning situation¹². It is important, that the teacher chooses the methods that are suitable for the learners' experience, maturity, age, and the learning environment. It is only when the teacher does this, that he would be able to effectively deliver learning instructions that will meet the needs and aspirations of the learners. While the importance of quality instructional delivery in ensuring that the graduates of Nigeria's tertiary institutions are of very high quality can hardly be overemphasized, quality instructional delivery itself hinges upon sound and clear personal teaching philosophy, sound pedagogical content knowledge, profound general pedagogical knowledge, very good pedagogical skills and effective communication. Consequently, this paper attempts the clarification of the concepts of personal teaching philosophy, pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical skills, effective communication, and a few others. It also examines the major implications of each of these concepts for instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Furthermore, it examines the interconnectedness of these concepts and some of their key implications for instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary

institutions.

Clarification of Concepts

Personal Teaching Philosophy

A teaching philosophy is a systematic, critical and rational process that focuses on the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and or institutional context¹³. The development of a Teaching Philosophy involves a process of gathering, assimilating, analyzing, reflecting upon, evaluating and adapting thought on effecting teaching and learning in a well organized manner. At its center is a distinctive set of aims, values, beliefs and convictions that provide an organizing vision of the teacher's direction and a rationale towards which his or her efforts are geared¹⁴. These aims should show literacy in, as well as an alignment with or commitment to teaching and learning theories that are appropriate to the students' characteristics (such as age, goals, and motivation)¹⁵. Furthermore, a teaching philosophy focuses on specific components that the individual teacher defines as critical to the teaching and learning process in a particular setting. For example, different theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning, a broad range of possible components on teaching such as teaching behavior,, teaching methods, content structure and assessment¹⁶. With respect to learning,, this important dimension could include student learning style, learning contents,, cognitive structures, and student motivation. It is also important that the criteria for assessing the extent to which a teacher's practice accommodates features that are essential to good teaching must be built into the teaching philosophy at the outset¹⁷. Developing a teaching philosophy is a dynamic process that calls for continuous reflection and constant reflection. Some of the fundamental questions that should be addressed while formulating one's personal teaching philosophy are:

- What code of ethics would I adhere to?
- What student –teacher relationship would I work towards
- How would I measure successful teaching?
- What is my motivation for teaching?
- What should students be able to do or know as a result of taking my class?
- What should students expect of me as a teacher/lecturer?
- Is my teaching actually facilitating learning?
- How do I create an engaging learning environment?
- Has my conception of teaching changed over the years?
- Why do I teach the way I do?
- What is my teaching philosophy anchored upon?
- What exactly is my theoretical and conceptual framework for teaching and learning?

In countries that have made obvious headway in teaching and learning, personal teaching philosophy is taken to be as important as one's academic credentials; it is required at the point of recruitment and assessed at regular intervals if one is employed¹⁸.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is a scientific discipline with its own philosophical and scientific orientations borne between between 18th and 20th centuries. Because of its double stance, namely the

theoretical and practical components, the discipline has continued to generate various interpretations and controversies¹⁹. For instance, it has been defined in different ways, including the study of being a teacher or the process of learning, strategies of instruction or style of instruction. Other scholars have used pedagogy in relation to the art and science of teaching children, or the theory and practice of education²⁰. Pedagogy can also refer to the relationship between the teacher and the student. Conceptually, it is due to the relationship of pedagogy to children that some scholars prefer the use of andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) when referring to teaching in tertiary institutions. However Freire used critical pedagogy to refer to the method of teaching adults²¹. Ezati et al²² however argue that if pedagogy is viewed as focusing on transmitting content in a teacher-controlled environment and andragogy on facilitating the acquisition of and critical thinking about content and application in real life as Knowles²³ points out, then both are relevant to tertiary education.

General Pedagogical Knowledge (GPK)

The first key study on teacher education knowledge²⁴ categorized teachers' knowledge into seven categories, among which is general pedagogical knowledge. This has to do with the principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that are cross curricular. General pedagogical Knowledge is not about a particular subject but it is a very important aspect of teachers' knowledge.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

This is also one of the seven categories of teachers' knowledge that Shulman²⁵ identifies in the first key studies on teacher education. It is the knowledge which integrates the content knowledge of a specific subject and the pedagogical knowledge for teaching that particular subject. It is considered as the most fundamental element of teachers' knowledge. Shulman further refers to PCK as the specific knowledge teachers possess that distinguishes them from other experts in the field. PCK explains the complex relationship between knowledge of subject and knowledge of teaching a subject by using appropriate methods and evaluation tools. PCK is the fusion of all needed knowledge, in order to teach and learn a subject²⁶. PCK has the following key elements²⁷:

1. Teachers knowledge and beliefs in regard to the purposes of teaching a subject to students of different levels
2. Knowledge of students previous knowledge on the subject and possible misconceptions
3. Knowledge of curriculum in order to foster connections between a subject and across different subjects.
4. Knowledge of different strategies for instruction (general teaching knowledge).
5. Topic representation knowledge (content knowledge, otherwise known as subject matter knowledge)
6. Knowledge of educational purpose

PCK has also been rightly considered as a "craft knowledge", which is the knowledge representing teachers' accumulated wisdom regarding their teaching practice, and guiding

their behavior during classroom practice²⁸. PCK is therefore a fusion of teachers' theoretical knowledge and constant reflection of their own practices that guide their instruction and practices in the classroom. Teaching experience however does not automatically improve PCK. This is because the connection between PCK and teaching experience is not direct. In order for a teacher to improve his teaching skills, there must be an internal motivation for improvement that usually stem from external feedback, self evaluation, and reflection. Such improvement should be deliberate and constant to provide positive change²⁹. Similarly, PCK has been correctly described as the "most useful forms of (content) representation—the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensive for others"³⁰. PCK is generally considered to be combination of two knowledge components: general teaching knowledge and subject knowledge. It enables the teacher to identify what students may find difficult to understand in a particular topic, and the teaching strategies that are ideal for such situation.

Pedagogical Skills

Pedagogical skills constitute a set of abilities of communication delivery and managing learning in the classroom³¹. Teachers' knowledge about classrooms, personal knowledge about specific students, assessments, students' motivation and social interaction skills are considered as pedagogical skills³². It is argued that managing the classroom is an important pedagogical skill to be learned by teachers besides seeking PCK³³. Some of the elements that are necessary for the teacher to successfully develop his pedagogical skills include; needs assessment, establishment of classroom culture, using appropriate teaching strategy, ability to address issue, setting goals, understanding and encouraging students, planning and conducting lessons, planning classroom and outdoor activities, making the best use of the support of colleagues especially those that are known to have acquired these skills. Increasing professional development is another necessary condition for acquiring and developing pedagogical skills. This is geared towards enriching and expanding one's general thesaurus and erudition. The teacher used to be the source of information for the students, but now the students have many sources from where they could get relevant information. The teacher therefore has to ensure that he is truly ahead of his students. It is however not sufficient to learn pedagogical skills, these skills have to be practiced increasingly.

One of the important conditions for the development of tertiary institutions lecturers' pedagogical skills is a solid philosophical training, extensive knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophical concepts, past and present³⁴. Particular attention should be paid to the study of humanistic theories. Humanism is the philosophical basis of the new (neoclassical) methodology of pedagogy. This progressive trend is aimed at strengthening the respect for human dignity and human reason as the highest values, at the free expression of human feelings and natural abilities, and the human right to early happiness³⁵. In the same vein, it is argued that there can be no talk of pedagogical skills in the real sense of the word, if the teacher/lecturer does not profess humanism and humanness, and if love for man is not a state of mind. One can study and apply a variety

of techniques, rules, and methods of teaching, but if the teacher has no internal belief in the value and nobility of the person being taught, is not concerned with the person and does not empathize for a person's specific life situation and destiny, they are not teacher but average artisans³⁶. Another crucial factor that determines whether or not a tertiary institution lecturer attains excellence in pedagogical skills is moral soundness. Students are sensitive the presence or absence of this trait and it affects their receptivity.

Effective Communication

Communication is the transfer of information, messages, thoughts, and ideas which involves a sender, a receiver and a code. Ideally, the essence of communication is either to persuade, influence, modify or change the behavior of others. With respect to education, communication is the information transmitted from a teacher to the pupils, from pupils to the teacher or amongst pupils. The entire process of teaching is itself communication. Listening and speaking are both aspects of communication. When and if the essence of communication is achieved, it can be regarded as effective. The basic components of Communication are:

- A communicator who conveys information
- A piece of information to be conveyed
- A communicant that is expected to receive information
- A means of delivering information
- A feedback or effect of the information passed across.

Communication could be verbal or non verbal. In some case, it could be a combination of the two. There are five essential components of effective communication. These are: clarity, accuracy, context, flow and culture. Within the context of tertiary institutions, whenever instructional communication is defective, one can not possibly achieve optimum instructional delivery. Similarly, when there is a breakdown in communication process either language wise or in some other ways, there is bound to be unpleasant consequences such as: ineffective classroom management, ineffective learning transaction, lose of focus by students and inability to have teaching and learning objectives achieved as expected.

Interconnectedness of Concepts and Some Implications

As mentioned in one of the earlier paragraphs, while instructional delivery is very important in ensuring that the graduates of Nigeria's tertiary institutions are of good quality, instructional delivery itself, in the real sense of the word hinges unavoidably upon personal teaching philosophy, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical skills and effective communication. A good instructional delivery cannot be guaranteed without each of these concepts, and all of them taken together, as well as made to function together. Such is the interconnectedness of these concepts and its extent. Some of the attendant implications of this interconnectedness is that instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary institutions is not as simple as it appears to be. In addition, the quality of instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary institutions will continue to leave much to be desired until these concepts upon which quality instructional delivery hinges are given sufficient attention. Furthermore, some lecturers in Nigeria's tertiary institutions do not even have a good understanding these concepts, not to even talk about putting them

into practice. The fact however remains that, whether Pure Science, Natural Science, Medicine, Architecture, Business Management, Accounting or Engineering, the need for very high quality instructional delivery in Nigeria's tertiary institutions cannot be over emphasized. Excellence in the theory and practice of pedagogy, personal teaching philosophy, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and effective communication is not a factor of years put into lecturing in tertiary institution. It is implied therefore that to attain excellence in these areas, and by implication, excellence in instructional delivery, individual tertiary institution lecturer would have to make a personal resolve to follow the right path towards excellence in the said areas. The right path is to get educated in these areas, get professionally certified and continue to be a life long learner in the same area, coupled with continued practice.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The quality of teachers is one of the most cited factors explaining the quality of an educational system³⁷. Furthermore, numerous educational reports and studies also supported the idea that Teacher quality accounted for an important proportion in student achievement and that high performing school systems are characterized by the quality of Teacher education³⁸. In alluding to this fact, Mckinsley and Company Report indicates that three things matter most: (a.) getting the right individuals to become Teachers; (b) developing them into effective instructors; and (c) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every student³⁹. However, while the importance of quality of lecturers and quality of instructional delivery in tertiary education can not be contested, it would be a welcome and reasonable development if the critical factors that are prerequisites for the attainment of quality instructional delivery as well as the improvement of the quality of teachers in Nigeria's tertiary institutions are given necessary attention at all relevant levels. These factors are: personal teaching philosophy, pedagogical skills, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and effective communication. To this end, it is suggested that each tertiary institution should be mandated to have a functioning center for excellence in teaching and learning where among other things lecturers would be taken through the theoretical and practical aspects of these factors that are prerequisites to the attainment of quality instructional delivery as well as the improvement of the quality of the teachers.

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