

PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AWARENESS AND UTILIZATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN KWARA STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The study examined public primary school teachers' awareness and utilization of international best practice in Kwara State. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study and 300 public primary school teachers were sampled. A questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents after the instrument was tested for reliability. The reliability value of 0.79 was obtained from the instrument. Two research questions were put up and answered with mean score. The findings of the study revealed that public primary school teachers were aware of international best practice ($\bar{X}=2.54$) but they did not put them into practices in their classroom ($\bar{X}=2.34$). Based on these findings, the researcher recommended that seminar and workshop should be organized for primary school teachers by government so as to encourage them to make use of international best practices in the course of discharging their duties. Also, government should provide instructional facilities that will enable teachers to create good atmospheric conditions for pupils.

Keywords: International best practices; Teachers' awareness; Teachers' utilization

Introduction

Primary education in Nigeria is the foundation of an educational system which needs to be given utmost attention if the country truly wants to have quality education for the citizens. Education is a veritable tool to achieve national development and any country that wants to achieve great development in all aspects of national development needs to give top priority to education especially early childhood education. It is also believed that the quality of teacher determines the quality of education. Therefore, it is very essential to look at the activities of teachers in primary schools with the intention of knowing whether they are aware of best practice, if they are aware, are they practicing it.

A best practice is a method or technique that has been mostly accepted as superior to any alternatives because it brings about solutions that are superior to those attained by other means or because it has become a standard mode of doing things for example, a standard means of complying with legal or ethical requirements (Daniels & Bizar, 1998). The source further stated that a best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has tested to reliably lead to a desired outcome. A commitment to using the best practices in any discipline is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to insure success. The term is used frequently in the fields of health care, government administration, the education system, project management hardware and software product development, and elsewhere (Daniels & Bizar, 1998).

In software development, a best practice is a clear method that leads to a successful step in product development. Throughout the software industry, several best practices are widely adopted. Some of the more commonly utilized are: an iterative development process, requirement management, tone control and modification mastery. An iterative (meaning repetitive) development process, which progresses in incremental stages, helps to maintain a focus on manageable tasks, and ensures that earlier stages are successful before the later stages are attempted. Requirement management addresses the problem of creeping requirements, which is a state of affairs in which the customer calls for additional changes to the merchandise that are beyond the range of what was originally projected. To defend against this common phenomenon, requirement management employs strategies such as certification of requirements, sign-offs, and methodologies such as the use case. Quality control is a strategy that defines objective measures for assessing quality throughout the development process in terms of the product's functionality, reliability, and performance. Change control is a strategy that tries to closely monitor changes throughout the iterative procedure to insure that records are intact for changes that have been created and that unacceptable changes are not undertaken (Daniels & Bizar, 1998).

A best practice tends to circulate throughout a field or industry after a success has been attested. Nevertheless, it is frequently noted that demonstrated best practices can be slow to propagate, even inside an establishment. According to Friedman (2006), the three main roadblocks to adoption of a best practice are; lack of knowledge about current best practices, lack of motivation to make changes involved in their adoption, lack of knowledge and skills needed to behave thusly.

Best patterns are an integral component of a curriculum that exemplify the connection and relevance identified in educational inquiry. They interject rigor into the course of study by developing thinking and problem-solving skills through integration and dynamic scholarship. Relationships are built through opportunities for communication and teamwork. Best practices are applicable to all grade levels and provide the building blocks for instruction. Best practices motivate, engage and prompt pupils to learn and achieve. Pupils who receive a balanced curriculum and possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to translate and connect ideas and abilities to translate and

connect ideas and concepts across disciplines will be successful as measured by standardized tests and other indicators of pupil's success (NC Teacher, 2006). Primary education is very important in any educational system because this is the foundation of all education. The foundation needs to be solidly built so as to have solid edifice. Best practice improves the quality of education in primary schools and this underscore the importance of this concept in primary schools. This practice is not common in this country but widely used in developed country. Also, there is a dearth of research on this concept in Nigeria and these reasons attracted the researcher's attention to look into primary school teachers' awareness and utilization of best practice in Kwara State, Nigeria.

According to Tomlinson (2003) there are four best practices for teachers at primary schools, these are as follow: Teaching a balanced curriculum: Balanced curriculum educates the whole of a child and it is founded on the best knowledge of how children develop and learn. Teaching an integrated curriculum: The pattern of integrated curriculum involves students in the unit development process. It affords them the opportunity to identify issues, develop questions, plan inquiry, divide tasks, research information and share the learning process and contact. Technology resources are also embedded into the daily practices of the classroom. Differentiating instruction to satisfy individual pupils needs: A differentiated curriculum is one where teachers adapt the curriculum in different ways to satisfy the need of their students. The content taught, the process used, the product expected, or the physical factors of the environment created may be modified to help students achieve success. Task choices and flexible grouping may be used to accommodate knowledge and interests of small groups or individual students. Proving active learning opportunities for pupils to internalize learning: Active learning is a process in which the students are engaged in hand-on activities rather than passively receiving knowledge. Students interact with others to construct meaning of new ideas and concepts based on their background knowledge. Active learning is fast paced, fun and personally engaging because students have the chance to try things out, use their senses, ask questions and discuss with others. Assignments are designed to pass upon the science, skills and knowledge that students have or must acquire. Cooperative learning, problem solving, and project-based learning are dynamic learning strategies.

Indicators of Best Practices in Primary Schools

According to Zemelma, Daniels and Hyde (1998) Classrooms that exemplify best practices are easy to notice as soon as you enter the room. The followings are what you are going to observe in best practices class room: Project materials and books are many; Pupils are active and focused on their work; Teachers most times use collaborative or authentic tasks that put pupils at the center of the learning process; Seating arrangements are clustered, different and functional with multi instructional areas; Classrooms are activity-based spaces as different from "sit and get" lectures; Teachers are pro-actively engaged with different groups; There is happiness feeling of purposeful movement, creative thinking and a vital and vibrant atmosphere and environment; Educate the total

of a child; Provide competing environment; Prepare pupils for future success in school and in life; increase growth and development through an enriched environment; Create active participant rather than passive observers; Provide active learning opportunities.

Similarly, in best practices physical environment, the structure of classroom environment is very imperative. Research on the classroom environment indicated that the physical environment can affect the behaviour of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999; Stewart & Evan, 1997; Weinstein, 1992), and that a well-arranged classroom tends to improve student academic performance and behaviour outcomes (MacAulay, 1990; Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995; Walker & Walker, 1991). Also, the classroom environment acts as a sign to learners and others regarding what teachers' value in behaviour and learning (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992). If a classroom is arranged haphazardly and does not support the type of schedule and an activity a teacher has planned, it can mar the teaching and learning process. However, a well arranged classroom will facilitate teaching and learning process.

In a best practice environment, the classroom should have spatial structure. The spatial structure of the classroom describes how students are seated, where the learners and teachers are in relation to one another, how classroom members move around the room, and the overall sense of atmosphere and arrangement. The research on classroom environment revealed that classrooms should be arranged to accommodate different forms of activities throughout the day and to meet the teachers the teacher's instructional goals (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992).

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study:

1. Are primary school teachers aware of best practice in Kwara State primary schools?
2. Do Primary school teachers utilize best practice in Kwara State school classrooms?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study because it's afforded the researcher an opportunity to select respondents through appropriate method. All teachers in public schools in Kwara State constituted population for this study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 public schools in each of the three senatorial districts in Kwara State (Kwara North, South and West). The total numbers of thirty (30) public schools were selected in this study. In each school, 10 teachers were randomly selected regardless of the class and the total numbers of 300 teachers participated in this study.

Researcher's designed questionnaire was used as instrument to obtain data from respondents. The items of the questionnaire were drawn from the literature based on the indicators of best practice in schools. The instrument was in three sections, section A contains demographic data of the respondents, and section B contains 10 items to

measure teacher awareness of best practice while section C contains 10 items to measure utilization of the best practice in schools. The researcher gave copies to other lecturers in department of early childhood and primary education, Kwara State University for face and content validity. The reliability of the instrument was tested using test re-test method at the interval of three weeks. The reliability score of 0.79 was obtained.

Results

Research Question 1

1. Do public primary school teachers aware of best practices in schools in Kwara State?

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of Best Practices

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1	I am aware it is necessary to teach my pupils with relevant materials	2.87	Agreed
2	I am aware it is necessary I engage my pupils in classroom activities	3.03	Agreed
3	I am aware it is necessary that the seating arrangement in my class should support my teaching	2.47	Disagreed
4	I am aware it is necessary that my classroom should be activity-based	2.28	Disagreed
5	I am aware that it is necessary I engage my pupils in group activity	2.43	Disagreed
6	I am aware that it is necessary I pay attention to the development of whole of a child	2.23	Disagreed
7	I am aware that it is necessary I allow my pupils to ask questions in the class	2.75	Agreed
8	I am aware that it is necessary to give room for classroom interaction	2.64	Agreed
9	I am aware that it is necessary to provide challenging environment for the pupils	2.55	Agreed
10	I am aware that the class activities should support child development	2.11	Disagreed
	Weighted Average	2.54	Agreed

Table 1 revealed that teachers in primary schools are aware that it is necessary to teach their pupils with relevant instructional materials ($\bar{X} = 2.87$). Also the respondents are aware that it is very important to engage their pupils in classroom activities ($\bar{X} = 3.03$). Respondents agreed that it is necessary to allow pupils to ask questions in the class ($\bar{X} = 2.75$). Primary school teachers are aware that pupils should be given room to interact

actively in the classroom ($\bar{X}=2.64$). Teachers admit that it necessary to provide challenging environment for pupils ($\bar{X}=2.55$). However, respondents are not aware that it is necessary that the seating arrangement in the classroom should support their teaching ($\bar{X}=2.47$). Similarly, teachers are not aware that classroom should be activity-based ($\bar{X}=2.28$). Teachers are not aware that it is necessary they engage their pupils in group activity ($\bar{X}=2.43$). In a similar vein, teachers are not aware that it is necessary to pay attention to the development of whole of a child in the classroom ($\bar{X}=2.23$). Lastly, teachers are not aware that class activities should support child development ($\bar{X}=2.11$).

On the overall, primary school teachers were aware of international best practices in the classroom. This was supported with weighted average mean of 2.54.

Research Question 2: Do primary school teachers utilize best practice in the classroom in Kwara State?

Table 2: Utilization of best practices by teachers

S/N	Items	Mean	Remarks
1	I do teach my pupils with relevant materials	2.10	Disagreed
2	I engage my pupils in classroom activities	2.48	Disagreed
3	I make the seating arrangement in my class to support my teaching	2.04	Disagreed
4	I make my classroom to be activity-based	2.42	Disagreed
5	I engage my pupils in group activity	2.43	Disagreed
6	I pay attention to the development of whole of a child	2.28	Disagreed
7	I allow my pupils to ask questions in the class	2.13	Disagreed
8	I give room for classroom interaction	2.49	Disagreed
9	I do provide challenging environment for the pupils	2.33	Disagreed
10	I make sure the activity in class support child development	2.70	Agreed
Weighted Average		2.34	Disagreed

Table 2 revealed that primary school teachers agreed that classroom activity should support child development ($\bar{X}=2.70$). They were teaching their pupils with relevant instructional materials ($\bar{X}=2.10$); failed to engage their pupils in classroom activities ($\bar{X}=2.48$); did not make seating arrangement in the class to support their teaching; and did not make their classroom to be activity-based ($\bar{X}=2.42$). They did not engage pupils in

group activity ($\bar{X}=2.43$); did not pay attention to the development of whole of a child in the classroom ($\bar{X}=2.28$); allow their pupils to ask questions in the class ($\bar{X}=2.13$); give room for classroom interaction ($\bar{X}=2.49$) and lastly, they did not provide challenging environment for the pupils ($\bar{X}=2.33$). Above all, primary school teachers were not utilizing international best practices in their classroom as indicated by the mean score of 2.34.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study revealed that teachers were aware of international best practices in primary schools. The finding of this study was not consonant with the finding of Friedman (2006) who posited that teachers were not aware of international best practices. The reason for this finding could be attributed to periodic seminar and workshop organized for the teachers which might have educated them on some of these best practices. Conversely, the study revealed that primary school teachers were not utilizing international best practice in the course of discharging their responsibilities. This finding corroborates the study of Friedman (2006) who stated that most teachers were not utilizing international best practices in teaching students in their classroom. The reason for this study is not farfetched. In Nigeria, through observation by the researcher, it was discovered that most teachers found it difficult to put into used most of what they have learnt during training and in-service provided for them. The attitude of some teachers toward teaching as a profession affected some of these international best practices in the schools in Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is strongly believed that international best practice should be used by all teachers at various level of education, most especially teachers in primary education because this is the foundation of all education, if this is embraced by teachers it will enhance better performance from the students. Conclusively, the study revealed that primary school teachers were aware of international best practices but failed to utilize them in their classroom. This is called for attitudinal change from the teachers at the primary school level.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

- Seminar and workshop should be organized for teachers in primary school on international best practice that are obtainable in the world. This should be done with the intent of reminding and updating teachers' knowledge on international best practices to afford Nigerian teachers opportunity to compete favorably with their counterpart throughout the world.

- Government should provide materials that are culturally appropriate to facilitate the smooth utilization and implementation of international best practices in schools.

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