

**PROFFERING SOLUTIONS IN THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN  
THE CLASSROOM**

**BY**

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**Introduction**

The need for a paradigm shift from traditional pedagogies to modern and scientific pedagogies was orchestrated by the public outcry for the quality of students churned out from our secondary schools. This need has been heightened by the trend in the present day information and communication technology. Today's world is ruled by science and technology and for any nation to survive in the global struggle for relevance, it has to take seriously, the education of its citizens. Secondary school education, is where the foundation laid at the primary school is strengthened and

fortified; and another foundation laid for higher studies. Therefore, much attention is paid to this level of education, as any slight of negligence, will be tantamount to colossal catastrophe. In recognition of this, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2013), through the National Policy on Education, advocated for the integration of modern pedagogical strategies in order to enhance the quality of graduates of secondary school. Such strategies, among others include: use of Games, Motivational Teaching Strategies, peer instruction and assessment strategies, use of advance organizers, etc. Again, teachers of various school subjects are the implementers of every curriculum. That is, they are key players in the implementation of any curriculum. This is why emphasis is laid on the Nigerian teachers' perspective of these emerging issues (new pedagogies) in secondary school subjects for holistic development of the students. This paper looks at the concept of teaching, who a teacher is, the make-ups of a teacher, the emerging and/or best practices in the teaching profession with reference to students' reorientation, classroom instruction and students' discipline.

### **What is teaching in the first place?**

Teaching to some people is like a life dedicated to mission impossible. To begin to satisfy the complex demands loaded on teachers by government, parents, employers, children and society at large is unfathomable. Even if the demands were compatible and feasible, it would take several life times of schooling to achieve

them. Yet, despite this, the satisfactions of teaching can be immense. No other profession can experience the immediate joy of children's new learning, understanding and fulfilment or see the long term results of the commitments, enthusiasm and careers that are formed in the school.

It is very obvious that "telling students what one knows" is quite different from "teaching the students" Often times, this question of what teaching is actually, presents itself as a very simple one but yet loaded. Many have wrongly viewed teaching as "causing children to learn what the adult has in mind" (FAE, 1968). This definition, hitherto, may apply, but owing to the emerging issues in education, it is not only myopic but runs counterproductive because the adult does not know enough. A more realistic and expected definition of teaching are those that suggest that:

- Teaching is an action that points learning towards desired accomplishment
- Teaching is an action that increases the odds that potential learners will learn
- Teaching is an action to make knowledge make sense
- Teaching is an action to present learners a live opportunity to learn.

Alio (2012) summarized teaching as an attempt to assist someone to change some skills or acquire new attitudes, knowledge, idea or appreciation. The aspects of teaching include functions like informing, explaining, stimulating new ideas,

directing, guiding and administering the students. Teaching involves identifying what to learn and the learning problems. It includes evaluating, reporting and recording the performances of the students and classroom management.

### **Who then is a Teacher?**

As seen above, teaching is a system of activities designed to induce learning. In a simple and direct answer to the above question, a teacher is someone who takes up the whole responsibilities outlined above. According to Webster's new 20<sup>th</sup> century Dictionary (1995), a teacher is

- One who instructs
- One who instructs others in religion
- One who preaches without ordination.

From the above definition, the term teacher includes much more than the people found in the classroom or those registered in teachers' associations. There are, therefore, many more teachers than those officially registered as teachers. However, in the context of education in Nigeria, a person qualifies to the name "teacher" **if he/she has the registrable professional qualification, which enables him/her to be appointed to teach any appropriate level of recognized education in Nigeria, and who is of a sound mind and is mentally alert.** In addition, a teacher is someone who stimulates, directs, and has elements of guiding and administration.

Research has shown that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught (Ball, 1990). Therefore, if we expect teachers to teach in a constructivist way, we need to teach them in constructivist ways, (of course this seminar is one avenue of achieving this). Teachers are those who teach using an approach that will make learning authentic and meaningful. They do not teach without teaching materials, reference textbooks/notes (lesson note/plan); and they do not dominate the lessons, thereby making students mere passive listeners. To be able to discharge the onerous task of being a teacher in this contemporary time, one has to acquire and possess certain skills and/or make-ups.

### **The Make-ups of a Teacher (Basic Qualities)**

A teacher is made to the extent that he acquires, possesses and dispenses certain skills – instructional skills and personal skills. Instructional skills, otherwise called teaching techniques include:

- Reinforcement
- Set induction
- Stimulus variation
- Questioning
- Non-verbal communication
- Planned repetition

- Illustration (use of examples)

Personal skills on the other hand include:

- Preparation skill
- Motivation skill
- Communication skill
- Resource development skill
- Resource utilization skill
- Humanity skill
- Classroom management skill

In addition, a teacher should possess the following qualities:

- A positive attitude to his/her work
- A positive attitude to his/her students
- A good appearance at all times
- A good knowledge of his/her subject

### **Major Challenges and Possible Solutions**

1. **Seating Arrangement** - If possible, move the desks to form a circle or semicircle. Or group them together in clusters of three to four desks.
2. **Time Constraints** – Plan activities that will help them achieve this goal, but try to envision a time limit for each

3. **High Noise Levels** - Have students form small clusters with their desks where they're all facing each other. Encourage them to speak softly. Or have groups scattered throughout the classroom in small clusters on the floor.
4. **Personality Clashes** - Put the eager beavers all in one group and allow them to compete to dominate the conversation. Give shy students the chance to work with different partners. Assign special roles to the eager beavers; they can be "helpers" or "facilitators" with each group. Teach them expressions like, "That's interesting. Why do you think that?" and encourage them to get answers from their classmates instead of always providing them themselves
5. **Different academic Levels** - Divide the class based on these strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, you'll want to have stronger students modeling the right answers for the weaker ones. In other cases, it's better to have students with similar levels together in the same group
6. **Large Class Size** – This consumes time but the smaller the size of the class, the more the whole work is dependent on you.
7. **Monolingual Classes** - The challenge is particularly difficult if you have lots of smaller groups, and you are certain they are not speaking English all the time. Some creative ways to handle this is offering incentives or rewards, or using gratification as a way of helping them achieve their goal of speaking as much English as they can.
8. **Too Many Masters: Such as** parents, students, administrators like school board proprietors, etc.
9. **Teacher Burn-Out:** After reading all of these challenges, it's no wonder teachers can often feel burnt out! Feeling overworked, underpaid, unsupported, and not having enough time can make a teacher feel stressed out. We work our 8-hour day, stay late to clean up and/or prepare for the next day, bring home papers to grade, grab a bite for dinner, maybe watch an episode or two of *Game of Thrones*, then collapse from complete exhaustion—only to wake up and do it all over again. This can wear down even the most energetic teacher. Once this stress and pressure takes its toll, it's only a matter of time before it trickles down into the classroom and affects our students.

10. **Merger Salary** – Be contented with what you have Plan your expenses and prioritize them. Schools can institute uniform for some days and free dressing in one day so as to reduce the pressure from sowing of new dresses. In all, never compromise to make both ends meet, for they shall never meet.
11. Minimal Resources – Try to improvise even with the help of the students and their parents.
12. Insubordinate Students – This is well treated in the subheading ‘students’ Discipline’ below.

### **Best Practices (emerging issues) in the Teaching Profession**

This will be discussed with respect to students’ reorientation, classroom instruction and students’ discipline.

#### **Students’ reorientation**

Several researches have shown that some students have wrong orientation towards certain school subjects. For instance, such subjects like Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology Geography, Accounting, etc. are seen as difficult subjects. Students take them as something esoteric that is capable of making someone *mad*. Similarly, some students have the wrong orientation that some subjects are good-for-nothing subjects. That is, they see such subjects as subjects for the low minds. Such subjects include: Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Igbo Language, Commerce, Agriculture, Culture and Creative Arts (CCA), etc. These erroneous orientations have adverse effects on the receptive minds of the students. It even tends to derogatorily label the students that insist on offering those subjects considered as subjects for the less intelligent.



Teachers, as bridge builders are expected to help students out of this mess. Remember, these students are too tender and limited in exposure to decide rightly what is good for them. In as much as you will be tempted by the desire to promote your area of specialization, but remember, that the overall duty of a teacher is to help the child to “become what he/she can be” and not to “become what you are”. So encourage them to see that what matters is expertise and competence in whichever subject they find interesting. This is the global best practice.

### **Classroom Instruction**

Classroom instruction is an art and pertains to an act of producing behavioural changes among students. Learning takes place when behavioural changes are observed in the learners. In order to make children learn effectively, the teacher has to make use of the right teaching methods. There are some born teachers, yet a majority of teachers who have no inherent flair for teaching and are unable to arouse interest in the students to learn, can improve upon their teaching with practice and by following various methods of teaching. For choosing a right method for a given situation the teacher must acquaint himself with the different methods used in teaching. Some of the methods include: Lecture method, Discussion method, Individualized instruction method, Problem solving method, Discovery method, Inquiry method, Play (games) and Simulation method, Team Teaching method,

Project method, Questioning method, Laboratory method, Inductive method, Deductive method, Analytical method, Synthetic method, etc.

However, the choice of any of the methods is not as easy as many conceive it.

It depends on the expertise consideration of the following factors:

- The objective of the lesson
- The age and class of the students
- The nature of the students i.e. considering the biological composition of the students (whether boys or girls, deformed or normal); the average rate of assimilation of the students; and the inquisitive and instinctive nature of the students.
- The subject i.e. whether Chemistry, Biology, CRS, Commerce, Mathematics, etc.
- The time limit, usually the time stipulated by the timetable
- The topic, whether theoretical or practical in nature
- The size of the classroom
- The location of the school
- The available educational resources
- The home and social background of the students, etc.

In all, the best practice is for a teacher to sit down and prepare adequately his/her lesson. The preparation should be guided by the following questions:

- What are the specific purposes of this topic?
- Is there any historical background of this topic?
- What are the relevance of this topic in real life situation?
- What are the main challenges of learning this topic by the students over the years?
- What best method can I use to address the identified challenge(s)?
- How do I assess the learning outcome?

Satisfactory answer to these question will give rise to a perfect lesson preparation

### **Students' discipline**

It is unthinkable that a teacher would give a **valid** instruction to a student and the student fails to carry it out. Teachers whatsoever should not struggle superiority with their students. By the virtue of the teachers' knowledge, and display of competence, students are naturally made to obey the teachers. In an attempt to discipline a student, teachers should do it with a touch of professionalism. For instance, it is unethical for a teacher to administer any punitive measure that will directly hamper the academic success of a student such as:

- Depriving a boarder any meal
- Depriving a student from writing examination

- Driving students out of your class for whatever reason (especially junior students), etc. Make the student to kneel down in your class and participate in the lesson. Sometimes, they even do better because you have removed them from possible distractions.
- Of course, capital punishments are out of place here unless in extreme situations which must be documented.

On the other hand, best practices suggest that you can deprive them some pleasures such as:

- The pleasure of being with their classmates during break time
- The pleasure of taking siesta,
- Making them work when others are not working,
- Making them write a short sentence into several places, etc.

In all, teachers should administer any punitive measure with the intention to correct and to put the students aright; and not with the intention to “*show the student*” or to tell the student that you are “*the master*”. Your status as the master is a concluded issue, hence no need of show of it or trying to establish it again.

However, in an attempt to discipline a student, if the authority of the teacher is challenged by the student, then the following questions should be reviewed and satisfactory answers provided for them:

- To what extent are you competent in your area of specialization? It should be noted that the only authority a teacher has over a student is the authority of knowledge. They may be bigger in size, wealthier and even more socially connected than you are, but the amount of your knowledge humbles them.
- How professional is your relationship with the students?
- Have you compromised your dignity for cheap recognition and popularity before their parents or in attempt to have canal knowledge of them?
- Have you neglected them in their wrong doing, probably because they are not in your class or you are not on duty or you want to answer “*the good teacher*” who will turn out to be the worst teacher they ever met when they grow?
- Do you have good classroom management skills as we said earlier?
- Do you treat every student with equality?
- Do you discuss other teachers or the authorities with the students? Telling them how those people are wicked and bad even if they are in reality.
- What is your carriage within and outside the school hours?
- Where do they normally see you outside the school environment?
- Finally, how properly dressed are you both in the school and outside the school? Remember, your dressing is your address.

## **Conclusion**

Now we conclude this interaction by looking at the teacher from the vantage point of one who seeks to be a successful student of teaching, namely you. We place the teacher in central focus because teachers, as professional workers and as persons, are lenses through whom much of the organized endeavour we call education is brought to focus upon the end-object of that endeavour. The end-object of education is *not* teaching. It is *not* the system's hallmarks, i.e. report cards issued, grades completed, certificates awarded, buildings provided, money spent, or government approval bestowed. *The end-object is learning accomplished by persons called students.*

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