

A THEORETICAL INSIGHT ON SOCIAL CAPITAL AND VARIABLES IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

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Abstract

Sound teaching usually begins with questions and phenomena that are interesting and familiar to students, not with abstractions or phenomena outside their range of perception, understanding, or knowledge. Students need to get acquainted with the things around them – including devices, equipment, organisms, materials, shapes, and numbers – and to observe them, collect them, handle them, describe them, become puzzled by them, ask questions about them,, argue about them, an try to find answers to their questions (this is purely an interactive session). Social capital is the central idea for social networks' valuable asset. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust, and tolerance that can be involved), to bring great benefits to people. The present paper is on a theoretical insight on social capital and variables in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: theoretical insight, social capital, teaching learning process

Introduction

The performance of students in public examination is falling rapidly, especially the NOV/Dec. 2010 WASCE Examination and the very low scores in University Matriculations Examinations (UME). This fall in performance is in most times analyzed based on the effectiveness of teachers in the teaching – learning process. However, an important factor that affects that process is in most times ignored which has to do with the teacher student - relationship in the process of teaching and learning. This negligence had caused the problem of mass failure in public examinations by students in public schools to linger.

In addition to that, there is the increasing record of school violence, truancy and absenteeism in public schools (Oyadonghan 2014). These problems have raised a lot of issues for parents on determining which schools to get their children admitted. The result is the mass exodus of students from public schools to private schools each year. More so, a poor teacher – student relationship affects class room management (Osokoya, 2010), students perception of /and respect for teachers, and the subject being taught. In most cases a negative attitude is developed toward the subject being taught, which affects students interest on the subject and develop hatred for disciplines that require a credit pass in such subjects to develop ones career. The attendant problems are numerous which account for a fall in performance in public examinations.

James coleman's (1988) contribution to the concept of social capital was to theorize it in a way that illuminated the process and experiences of non-elite groups. In other words, he argued that those living in marginalized communities or who were members of the working class could also benefit from its possession. Drawing upon a base of rational choice theory, Coleman (1990, 1994) looked to social capital as part of a wider exploration of the nature of social structure. He argued that social capital was defined by function: "it is not a single entity,

but a variety of different entities, having two common characteristics; they all consist of some aspect of a social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1994). Coleman's exploration is that social structures and institutions are better suited to cultivate reciprocity, trust, and fellow feeling.

As a public good, social capital is almost entirely benign in its functions, providing for a set of norms and functions that allow individuals to cooperate for mutual advantage and with little or no dark side.

Social Capital

Woolcock classified social capital into the following:

- Bonding social capital which denotes ties between people in similar situations such as immediate family, close friends, schoolmates, classmates, and neighbors.
- Bridging social capital, which encompasses more distant ties of like persons such as loose friendships, workmates, and members of the same profession.
- Linking social capital, which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community (Woolcock, 2001).

Putnam looked whether social capital is bonding (or exclusive) and/or bridging (or inclusive). He suggested that the former may be more inward looking and have a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups. The latter may be more outward-looking and encompass people across different social divides (Putnam, 2000). Bonding capital is good for under-girding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity.

Binding networks, by contrast, are for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion. Moreover, bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves. Bonding social capital constitutes kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological interaction.

Informal Education and Social Capital

Robert Putnam's discussion of social capital in particular, provides informal educators with powerful rationale for their activities. After all, the classic working environment for the informal educator is the group, class or organization. Informal educators' activities are geared towards the achievement of specific outcomes on individuals. In the light of the above, several points need to be outlined.

- 1) From the material put forward by Putnam and others, one can see that the single act of joining and being regularly involved in organized groups has a very significant impact on individual's health and wellbeing. It ensure that people may join groups – whether they are organized around enthusiasms and interest, social activity, or economic and political aims, makes a considerable improvements in health and social wellbeing. Encouraging the development of associational life can also make a significant difference to the experience of being in different communities. Here, we might highlight the case of schooling. Educational achievement is likely to rise significantly and the quality of day-to-day interaction is likely to be enhanced by much greater emphasis on the cultivation of extra-curricular activity involving groups and teams.

- 2) Informal educations longstanding concern with association and the quality of life in associations can make a direct and important contribution to the development of social networks (and the relationship of trust and tolerance that is usually involved) and the strengthening of democracy. Informal educator’s interest in dialogue and conversation and the cultivation of environments in which people can work together, take them to the heart of what is required to strengthen and develop social capital and civic society. Their ethical position also demands they attend to the downsides of networks in particular.

Variables in the Teaching and Learning Process

In the 1980s, several researchers developed models of the teaching/learning process that summarized much of what was known about increasing test scores (Huitt, 2003). At the same time that researchers were focused on accounting for all the factors related to school achievement, others developed models of effective teacher practice (Slavin, 2003).

A major problem that envelops all these modes is that they focus on improving test scores; yet the public is concerned about students’ character, self-esteem and social development. Recent attempts to hold schools, and especially teachers, totally responsible for student achievement presents a problem in that there are multiple factors not under the control of building-level educators that contribute to educational achievement (Huitt, 2003).

The following model is an attempt to consider most of the possible answers to the questions: why do some students learn more than others? According to the model, the reasons can be classified into four categories. (Huitt, 2003).

A Transactional Model of the Teaching/Learning Process	
Context	All those factors outside of the classroom that might influence teaching and learning.
Input	Those qualities or characteristics of teachers and students that they bring with them to the classroom experience.
Classroom Processes	Teacher and student behavior in the classroom as well as some other variables such as classroom climate and teacher/student relationships.
Output	Measures of student learning taken apart from the normal instructional process.

Output

According to Huitt (2003), the most important of these categories is the Output category because the variables in the rest of the categories are used to predict or relate to the variables measured in this one. For example, when we ask “Why do some students learn more than other students?” we must first be clear about what we mean by “learning”. We must also be clear about how we measure learning. Hummel and Huitt (1993) used the term W.Y.M.I.W.Y.G. to emphasize the importance of outcome measures.

At the present time in this country, when we say “How well or how much has the student learned” we mean “How well has the student done on a standardized measure of student achievement in the basic skills of reading, language arts, and mathematics?” If we change what we mean by learning (we want to know how much science and social studies students have learned or we want to know if they have developed appropriate social skills) or if we change the particular measure of learning (use the Metropolitan Achievement Test instead

of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills), then we may change the important variables that relate to student learning. As we will see, there are a variety of outcomes that are important in today's world (such as cognitive development and character) that are not presently discussed when we talk about student learning.

Classroom Process

The second most important category, at least from the perspective of the educational institutions and educational psychology, is the Classroom Process category. This includes all the variables that would occur in the classroom. There are three subcategories: teacher behavior, student behavior, other/miscellaneous. (Huitt, 2003). The category of teacher behavior consists of all the actions a teacher would take in the classroom and includes three additional subcategories: Planning, Management, and Instruction.

Planning refers to all of those activities a teacher might do to get ready to interact with students in the classroom. Management refers to controlling student behavior, while instruction refers to actually guiding student learning. There are a variety of specific teacher classroom variables that have been related to student learning. For example, Walber 1986), in a meta-analysis of teacher effectiveness research found support for the following individual variables:

1. Use of positive reinforcement
2. Cues and corrective feedback
3. Cooperative learning activities
4. Higher order questioning
5. Use of advance organizers

However, Rosenshine (1995) showed that the approach to instruction labeled direct or explicit instruction was most likely to positively impact on learning as measured by scores on standardized test of basic skills. Alternatively, changing the desired outcome measure puts the focus on different instructional methods. For example, if the desired outcome is creativity and independence, then open education may be a better alternative. Alternately, if better relationships among diverse students are the goal, the cooperative learning would appear to be the better instructional method (Slavin, 2003).

Therefore, it is important to specify desired outcomes and their measures before decisions are made as to the implementation of specific instructional methods. Given the moderate correlations between teacher behavior and student learning are measured outside the classroom, however, it seems prudent to focus on student behavior within the classroom and the impact that teacher behavior has on that set of variables. Student behavior includes all of the action a student would take in the classroom and include one very important variable (at least in relationship to predicting student achievement on standardized tests) and that is Academic Learning Time (ALT). ALT is defined as "the amount of time students are successfully covering content that will be tested". ALT is a combination of three separate variables: Content overlap, involvement and success.

Content overlap is defined as "the percentage of the content covered on the test actually covered by students in the classroom" and is sometimes referred to as "Time on Target". Involvement is the "amount of time students are actively involved in the learning

process” and is often referred to as “Time on Task”. Success is defined as the “extent to which students accurately complete the assignments they have given”.(Huitt, 2003).

A high level of Academic Learning Time means that (1) students are covering important (tested/evaluated) content; (2) students are “on-task” most of the period; and (3) students are successful on most of the assignment they complete. These three variables can be relatively easily measured and can be considered the vital signs of a classroom. If all of these are satisfied, then there is high probability that the classroom is functioning well. However, if any one of these variables is lower than expected, further inspection of classroom processes should be undertaken.

There are a variety of other classroom factors which have been related to student achievement such as the classroom climate and the opportunity for students to engage in leadership roles. (McNergney and McNergney, 2007). One of the most important concepts that have been developed in educational psychology during the past 30 years is that classroom process variables are the most direct link to student achievement (Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986). More specifically, the teacher’s classroom behavior (incorporated in the categories of planning, management and instruction) has a direct influence on student behavior (most importantly, Academic Learning Time) which, in turn, is most directly linked to measures of student achievement.

Input

The third major category of variables, Input, refers to descriptions of teachers and students prior to their coming into the classroom. There are again two important subcategories: Teacher Characteristics and Student Characteristics. Some important subcategories of teacher characteristics include the teacher’s values and beliefs, knowledge, thinking and communication skills, performance skills, and personality. Of course, there are many more possible subcategories but these seem to be the most important. The most important teacher characteristic (in terms of predicting how well teachers will perform in the classroom as well as student achievement) seems to be the teacher’s values and belief or more particularly Teacher Efficacy (Ashton, 1984). This variable is a measure of the teacher’s belief that students can learn and that he/she can teach.

Another important set of teacher characteristics includes the teacher’s knowledge with respect to the content domain (knowledge of subject matter to be taught), human growth and development (theories, topics, and stages), learning theory (behavioristic, cognitive, constructivistic, humanistic, social cognition), and the teaching/learning process (concepts and principles as well as their application in formal and informal environments).

This study designed to address three of these important areas: human growth and development, learning theory, and the teaching/learning process. In Nigeria, a teacher’s knowledge is evaluated through the completion of college-level courses, and passing the Teacher Certification Test (TCII) or completion of an NCE or Degree course in Education. At VSU, one requirement related to a teacher’s thinking and communication skills is successful completion of a speech course at the undergraduate level. Performance skills are measured through requirement of student teaching practice.

Finally, while there is no single personality that seems to make the “best” teacher, it is certainly a variable that has attracted a lot of interest. One measure of personality that has become popular in education circles is the Keirsey Temperament Scale. There are a wide variety of student characteristics that have been related to classroom behavior and student achievement. Bloom and other researchers (e.g. Anderson and Block 1988; Bloom, 1971) as quoted by Huitt (2003), engaged in the development of mastery learning have shown that when time to learn is allowed to vary, a student’s prior knowledge is most important. Other researchers have shown that when time to learn is held constant, as it is in most learning environments in Nigeria, then a student’s intelligence or academic ability is most important. This issue of “time to learn” is very important. If we truly believe that everyone can learn and that it is important to learn, then it would seem we would make a greater effort to provide the appropriate time to learn. However, if we believe that ability is more important and that only the most capable individuals can learn all we want them to learn, then the present system will continue to produce a result that verifies that expectation.

Other student characteristics that have been found to be important include study habits, age, sex/gender, motivation, learning style, cognitive development, socio-emotional development, moral and character development and race/ethnicity. In fact, the list of important student characteristics is so long entire books have been written on them.

Context

The category of context includes all of those variables outside of the classroom that have an impact on teacher and student characteristic, classroom processes, and output. The most immediate subcategories of context variables include school characteristics and school processes. School characteristics includes variables such as organizational structure and school size, school processes include factors related to activities such as leadership, supervisory practices and school climate. There are a wide variety of other context variables that influence the teaching/learning process. Some of the subcategories of these variables include home, peer groups, community, religious institutions, society, culture, and international conditions.

Variables related to the home environment seem especially important and include such variables as the educational levels of parents, family income/socio-economic status (SES), other parental characteristics (such as age or marital status), and a group of miscellaneous variables which includes the amount of technology in the home, the number of books and magazines in the home, and so forth. One of the variables that best predicts student achievement seems to be the level of mother’s education – especially if she did not graduate from high school (Campbell, 1991; Voelkl, 1993; Zill, 1992). This may be because the mother is the first educator of the child and the level of language usage she uses with the child is an important predictor of the child’s language usage and school achievement. A second important factor is the amount of technology in the home (Perelman, 1992). This may be because technology is such an important factor in today’s society and the more familiar the child is with technology, the more likely the child will feel comfortable in the modern classroom.

Other important context subcategories include the community (location, emphasis and education) peer groups, the society (including TV/movies, social institutions, etc.), the state and national policies (including laws, programs, and funding, the culture including values, language, art, music, etc.), and international/global conditions. A very important aspect of the latter is the

movement to the information age, which is in turn influencing all other aspects of living (Huitt, 2003). This is especially important because it is redefining the knowledge and skills that students need if they are to be successful in society. It is also having an impact on the practice of education in that alternative forms of schooling are increasingly being advocated, such as competent learning skills and evaluation. The following is a simple example of how some of these variables might interact. Context variables such as the size and region of the community impact teacher and student characteristics while the context variable associated with the family impact student characteristics. Of course, there are other important contexts that could be considered as described above.

Additional context variables associated with school and state policies combine with teacher and student characteristics to impact teacher behavior along with student characteristics influence student behavior, especially those variables associated with Academic Learning Time. Student classroom behavior then influences teacher classroom behavior in an interactive pattern. Student classroom behavior, therefore, is the most direct influence on student achievement as measured by instruments influenced by state policies. Student achievement at the end of one school year then becomes a student characteristic at the beginning of the next. Additional outcome variables that are important for success in the information age can be considered in the same manner.

Summary and Conclusion

School principals must guide teachers to align learning experiences with the stated objectives. Learning activities need to be aligned with the chosen objectives to optimize pupil achievement. The objectives provide direction for changes to be made within the learner. The learning activities assist in bringing about the necessary modifications. Too frequently, the objectives have been stated too broadly and thus provide little help in knowing what the objective means. The other extreme is to write objective which are too specific, resulting in facts, only, being taught.

Thus, a happy medium must be sought whereby objectives are specific enough to agree upon what will be taught and, at the same time, possess adequate leeway to provide for higher cognitive levels of subject matter being taught such as critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving (Guilfoyle, 2006). School principals need to help teachers choose learning activities which are varied to develop maintain learner interests reading experiences, audio visual aids, discussions, small and large group work, as well as the integration of technology need to be incorporated into the curriculum.

The principles of Social Capital will help the school system to achieve the followings.

1. Individual differences must be provided for including interest differences, diverse learning styles, and multiple intelligences. Teachers must assist students to develop
 - Quality self-concepts whereby there is no confidence for achieving
 - Feelings of curiosity in knowledge and skills being taught
 - Habits of being responsible for objectives to be attained
 - Traits of friendliness in learning to accept each student in the classroom and school
 - Polite behavior avoiding rudeness, and negative judgmental statements made about others (Ediger, 2008).

2. A school climate needs to emerge which encourages optimal student learning. This implies, too, that the environment for learning encourages quality teaching. Learners need to feel respected in a relaxed environment for learning. Pupils must be actively engaged in learning. Interest needs to be a major factor in teaching pupils in securing their attention. Any learning experience may be made interesting with appropriate selections made. They must be understood by pupils since each becomes a building block for ensuing activities. Quality sequence stresses that pupils are able to relate previous with subsequent subject matter. A good school climate then emphasizes providing for individual differences in an environment conducive to learning (Tighe and O'Conner, 2005). Each principal needs to have good understanding ways of grouping learners for instructional purpose. Placing students into groups is not done for the sake of grouping but rather to assist learners to achieve well. There are a plethora of means of placing pupils into groups to advance achievement for each. If, for example, individualized reading is being stressed, then no groups need be formed. In a nutshell, each student selects a library book to read of his/her choosing and then have a conference with the teacher to appraise achievement after its reading. Also, a one on one conference may be conducted with the teacher and an involved pupil to discuss a learning strategy. Or, the short discussion may help the pupil in follow-up writing activity. The conference may be held at the pupil's own desk. Motivating pupils in achieving is always important. A small group may be formed when three or four pupils have read the same paperback and discuss its contents in a peer committee setting. Standards need to be followed by peer members so that each might do well in classroom setting. There are times, too, when peer teaching may be stressed. A peer may do well in assisting learners in word attack skills. There is a purpose, here, in using peer teaching and that being a peer's proficiency in helping others in instructional situations (Cai, 2008).
3. Small groups may be formed by the teacher to teach an advanced set of achievers. These learners are progressing satisfactorily at a more rapid rate than others in the classroom.

What has been diagnosed as being a common problem to a given set of learners might well also provide for small group instruction. The problem may pertain to

- a. Use of context clues in reading
- b. Reading critically, creatively, and/or to solve problems
- c. The pupil monitoring his/her own reading achievement
- d. Reflecting over what has been read
- e. Specific difficulties in using phonics (Bloodgood and Pacific, 2004).

Small groups may also be used in clarifying what was presented in large group instruction. When large groups are used to initiate a lesson or unit plan of teaching, then questions will arise which can be handled in smaller group settings. The grouping plan used must meet the needs of involved learners. The plan implemented is to assist pupils to achieve more optimally. There is a purpose inherent in developing each grouping plan.

Adequate supervision must be used in each plan. The school principal needs to assist teachers to think through as to which plan of grouping will help learners achieve more optimally under the circumstances in the school and classroom settings.

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