

Assessing Teacher-Based Factors on Learner Outcome

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Abstract

The principal function of teaching is on learner outcome and achievement across grade levels. There is spirited discussion of determinants of performance among students (Tsui & Cheng, 1999; Harris and Mercier, 2000; Koziuff et al., (2001) Learner characteristics and learning styles (Kolb, 1984; Honey and Munford, 2006) are also critical to performance. Others are parental factors, school characteristics and resource availability. Hoxby (2000) equally concludes that class size is a parameter for learner performance due to close attention offered to learners. The role of the teacher needs to be re-evaluated on determining learner achievement. Teacher-based factors, therefore, play an extensive connection on the level of performance. This paper addresses the interplay among the double variables teacher commitment and teacher interpersonal skills as vector factors on learner achievement. The findings of the study will significantly insights to both teachers and school leadership to re-evaluate the role of the teacher in essence of learner performance.

Key Words- Teacher-based factors; Teacher Commitment; Interpersonal skills; performance

Introduction

The concept of teaching as a profession elicits passion and criticism in equal measure. It can be construed as dialoging with learners to achieve learning objectives. Stakeholders evaluate learning outcomes through student performance in standardized exams. A lot of rhetoric commences if learners do not perform as expected in examinations and in some cases, the blame is apportioned on the teacher. Conversely, learner performance to *par excellence* exudes vibrancy and praise for the teacher. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (1998) identify teacher quality in terms of student performance outcomes. Their research identifies teacher quality as the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. They conclude from their analysis of 400,000 students in 3,000 schools that, while school quality is an important determinant of student achievement, the most important predictor is teacher quality. This begs the question: what is the role of teachers in performance of students? In consideration of multiple factors that determine how learners perform, teacher-based factors play a cardinal role. Of these, commitment and interpersonal skills constitute as duo-matrix vectors of teacher determinants to learner performance. Reviews of literature justify the assertion.

Teacher Commitment

The concept of commitment emanates from organizational theory and behaviour. Researchers have studied the correlates of organizational commitment and workplace behaviour as performance effectiveness, job satisfaction and performance effectiveness (Koch and Steers, 1978; Bateman and Strasser, 1984; Sheldon, 1971; Day, 2000). Bateman and Strasser for example, aver that organizational commitment is multidimensional in nature and involves an employee's loyalty to the organization... degree of goal and value congruency with the organization, and desire to maintain membership.

Continuance commitment arises when an employee shows loyalty to the organization even after exit since they had cultivated continual loyalty, relationships and membership with other things or persons hence a personal investment. That is non transferable. This arises in situations when one has retired, transferred or exited from their workplace (Reichers, 1985). Meyer and Allen (1997) say that employees sharing continuance commitment with their employer attach congruency with the organization even in later times.

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For normative commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) see it as “a feeling of obligation”. Society is raised on norms and values and even virtues; ideals that are defined - expected of every individual as they relate with others. Organizational commitment affects and influence productivity. It is imperative to note that committed workers have higher yields than less committed staff. Researchers have examined expected outcomes of employee commitment (Porter et al, 1974; Reichers ,1985; Steers ,1997; Blau and Boal , 1987; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Such factors include employee retention; work attendance and job performance. This demonstrates that employees who have organizational commitment have higher affinity to production thus exhibit significant relationship between the two correlates.

Organizational commitment and teacher commitment are viewed as multi-dimensional (Crosswell, 2006). For the organization, it tends towards affective domain while the teacher’s bears on even diverse areas such as career guidance, student character development and knowledge base. Firestone and Pennell (1993) identify commitment to students as another dimension based on the intra and inter relationships. Teachers who regard students at individualized attention act as mentors and as Nias (1981) observe, ‘caring’. Teaching too requires passion and identity since it involves working for young nascent minds that are shaping their future destinies. Teacher commitment is an index of measure for school effectiveness (Yong, 1999). This justifies it as an equal index of the success of a school. Lezotte (1991) identifies seven unique characteristics that become the means of higher school achievement in academic excellence. They are: Clear school mission; high expectations for success; instructional leadership; opportunity to learn and time on task; safe and orderly environment; positive home-school relations and frequent monitoring of students. We can add teacher commitment as correlate number eight due to its critical value. Huberman, (1993) examines the teacher commitment factor as closely connected to teachers’ work performance.

Those committed to their work have intrinsic drives and aspires toward higher output. Park (2005) states that teacher commitment is determinable to school effectiveness and improvement. Elliott & Crosswell (2001) establishes a parallel between teacher commitment and passion for teaching. School leadership and management boards insist that teachers must show passion for their work- extending greater energy to teaching and concern for the learners. It is however difficult to measure the passion one has towards something unless we observe the resultant effects such as in increased productivity- and for the case of the teacher improved grades in standard exams or even better attestations of students. Students are want of exclaiming “Oh, Teacher So and So... is/was quite a good teacher.” This kind of rhetoric is an examination of the teacher’s character of exuding commitment to their work and that is why students will say in fondness such statements.

Teachers are investing multiple energies to their work despite wanton hardships such as lower salaries and wages because they understand the importance of education to an individual especially of the front of personal development and change. Governments and school authorities at large must motivate the teacher to establish and maintain commitment in the teaching profession.

We can therefore establish a framework model to examine the teacher commitment vector

$$SA_g = f(TC, F_i, \alpha) \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

where SA_g is the student achievement in grade g ; and F_i represent all the cumulative factors ranging from school , family, society, among others, α is ability and f is a function. This becomes our first equation in examination of the paper.

Teacher Interpersonal Skills

Effective communication in the workplace involves workers interacting with consumers, peers, and management. Un ange passé (2008) says that employers look for quality skills in interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving and not just the ability to complete job duties. Poor communication skills can cause irrevocable damage to relationships; affecting productivity, satisfaction, performance, morale, trust, respect, self confidence, and even physical health (Un ange passé, 2008:1-2). Interpersonal skills relate therefore how we relate with other people in discharge of duties. Interpersonal skills are sometimes referred to as people skills. Smith (2009) defines it as ability to work well with people, and involve your acceptance of others, without prejudice to achieve your goals. Robbins and Hunsaker (2003) in their study synthesized the interpersonal skills that surfaced in their researches. Most of these skills belong to three categories –Leadership, the process of communication and motivation.

Interpersonal skills under leadership relate to leadership style, handling conflicts, running meetings, team building and promoting change. The process of communication included listening and providing feedback. Similarly, motivating is broken down into goal setting, clarifying expectations, persuading and empowering.

From the above discussion, it is noted that teachers must show cultivation of these skills nevertheless. They interact with students most of the time therefore the need to establish values and skills for harmonious co-existence. Learners need to be inculcated to critical thinking skills to help them manage the challenges of day- to - day life in school and at home. Such people skills also include mutual respect, negotiation, speaking and even listening skills.

The essence of leadership drives an individual to show guidance to others and also motivate them to achieve set goals and objectives. It is also a product of interpersonal skills. There are varied leadership styles, often referred to as leader's behaviour, the result of the philosophy, personality and experience of the leader. There are the different styles of leadership - autocratic, participative or democratic and the laissez-faire. For the autocratic leadership style, all decision-making powers are centralized in the leader (teacher). Suggestions or initiatives from students are not entertained. Participative or democratic style observes on decision-making by the group with the teacher or leader giving instruction upon consulting with the students. This creates motivation among the learners as they are given ground for individual or collective responses. Finally, laissez-faire or free rein style leaves the group entirely to itself; to decide on its course of direction and space.

The teacher as a leader can exercise varied styles in different situations in the school and classroom. However, identifying the most balanced styles is critical since each of them has its pros and cons. Students exhibit diverse characteristics and to motivate them towards achievement calls for identifying with them in the leadership process. It therefore calls for experience and expertise to justify a particular approach to use.

In respect of the above discussion, interpersonal skills as cultivated by the teacher correlate with achievement. Teachers who exhibit the above traits in their personality influence learner achievement to a greater extent. This premise brings in the second framework model of teacher factor on student achievement:

$$SA_g = f(TI, \alpha) \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

where SA_g is the student achievement in grade g ; and TI represent all the cumulative factors of interpersonal communication, α is ability and f is a function. This becomes our second equation in examination of the paper.

Teacher Factor Model

From the above discussion, it is predictable that the teacher has a central role in learner achievement. Based on the two equations above, we deduce thus:

$$SA_{ig} = f(TC, F_i, \alpha) + SA_{ii_g} = f(TI, \alpha) \dots\dots\dots 3$$

$$SA_g = f(TC, F_i, TI, \alpha) \dots\dots\dots 4$$

where SA_g is the student achievement in grade g ; F_i represent all the cumulative factors ranging from school, family, society, among others, and T_i represent all the cumulative factors of interpersonal communication, α is ability and f is a function. This becomes our final equation in examination of the paper.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it emerges that teacher factors play a marked role in determining the performance of the students. This elicits concern from policy makers, school administrators and teachers themselves on the kind of teachers to recruit, hire, promote and retain. School leadership should ensure a collegial working environment so as to motivate the teachers. Also, teachers especially in developing countries, should undergo intensive training so as inculcate variety of skills especially on interpersonal level. Teachers who exhibit attractive attributes are worthwhile investing in by the school administrators and management boards. An index of measure of the model $SA_g = f(TC, F_i, TI, \alpha)$ can be designed as furtherance to this research. Other core factors such as teacher experience and teacher responsibility can also be developed to model the framework.

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