

**ANALYSIS OF LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL OF EDUCATION AS
A CONDITION PRECEDENT FOR DEVELOPING CREATIVE
THINKING AND CREATIVITY IN A LEARNER: THE NIGERIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

The paper analyzed learner-centered model of education as condition precedent for developing critical thinking and creativity in a Nigerian learner. Learner-centered model of education is considered as a system where learning activities mostly revolve around the learner with the teacher playing the role of a facilitator. It has been criticized for giving a learner undue freedom to discover things independently with minimal teacher instruction and subsequent brain overload which prevent learning being stored in long-term memory. Nevertheless, this study identifies inherent worthwhile benefits derivable from a learner-centered model of education which among other things include; developing creative thinking and creativity in a learner. Creative thinking is considered as an ability of a learner to reflect on and regulate his own mind on new and better problem-solving approaches while creativity is an application of knowledge and imagination to a given situation for the purpose of problem-solving. Learner-centered model through personalized teaching which addresses the distinct needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual learners among others develops creative thinking and creativity in a learner. However, poor funding and its attendant consequences like; deplorable infrastructure, non-availability of needed learning resources, nonpayment of teachers' salaries among others, were considered factors that militate against creating a suitable environment in which a learner-centered model of education can thrive in Nigeria's education sector. This paper therefore recommends that Nigeria's annual budgetary allocation to the education subsector should be revised upwards to reflect UNESCO's 26% benchmark so as to ensure a successful operation of a learner-centered model of education in Nigeria which will serve as a precautionary measure for the uncertain future of the country.

Keywords: Education, Learner-centered model, Precedence, Creative thinking

Introduction

Prior to the inception of western education in Nigeria, teaching and learning had already been in existence in the country. Thus, individuals were able to learn their cultures, societal activities, job crafts and expertise among others. Most of these teaching and learning activities were done unceremoniously; it was not uncommon to find a small number of the people engaged in organized teaching and learning of the community life and culture. This validates the definition of Education by Abiogu (2013) as a channel through which the society seeks to open its life to all the individuals within it and to pass on to them, its cultures for continuity and development. Within various societies in Nigeria, there are laid down rules and procedures employed to offer instruction or teaching in schools. However, the inception of western or formal education in Nigeria in the 1840s boosted the development of further teaching models (Toscany, 2016).

Over the years, continuous pedagogical development and advancement have characterized the teaching and learning process (Uruapka, 2004). The main thrust, being to develop suitable and better models to enhance efficiency in the teaching and learning process, bearing in mind the intricacies involved in the art of teaching and learning as well as the goals intended to accomplish. Teaching and learning which revolve around the teacher and the learner are co-joined and inseparable, sharing complementary roles to achieve some goals which are; intended change in behavior and the acquisition of certain life-long skills by a learner.

There are various models of teaching and learning but first, an insight to the concept “teaching model” will be given for a better understanding. Afolabi and Adesope (2010) averred that teaching model is a composition of specific instructional processes which differ from any other by the diversities of specialized activities. In his own opinion, Armstrong (2016) referred teaching model to the general principles and management strategies used for classroom instruction in which case teacher’s choice of a given model is dependent on instructional needs, the educational philosophy, nature of classroom, subject area among others. As a result, any type of teaching model adopted is driven by objectives and the choice of a given model determines to a great extent, the level these objectives are going to be realized. Deducible from the above definitions are that: there are various categories of teaching models such as teacher-centered, learner-centered, content focused, interactive/participative among others.

Any society can fashion its educational system in line with any of these models bearing in mind their peculiarities in terms of needs, characteristics and steps.

Categorization of Teaching Models

There are numerous types of teaching models, but Makokha and Ongwao (1997) broadly categorized them into four which are; teacher-centered, learner-centered, content focused and interactive/participative.

Teacher-Centered

The first among the teaching models is teacher-centered which is also regarded as the traditional teaching model. Makokha and Ongwao (1997) are of the view that the teacher in a traditional model assumes the role of an authority or master of the subject matter. As a result, the teacher is looked upon as an expert or an authority by the learner and as such is at the center of the teaching and learning processes, determining what to be learned, how it will be learned and when it will be learned with the learner being more or less actively involved in the learning process. This model is believed to predispose the learner to being passive and a copious recipient of knowledge from the teacher. For this reason, the model is argued to inhibit to a great extent, the creative thinking and creative tendencies in the learner as it does not give learners the appropriate environment required to develop creatively. This model is commonly referred to as “close-ended”. Example of a teacher-centered model includes; lecture method. The teacher-centered model has been criticized variously for didactic approach it often employs, disregarding to a great extent the role of the learner in the teaching and learning processes. Over the years curriculum and pedagogy tend to have shifted to other models like learner-centered model that recognizes the role of the learner at the center of teaching and learning processes.

Learner-Centered

The second type of teaching model is the learner-centered model. In the learner-centered model, teaching and learning processes mostly center or revolve around the learner with the teacher playing the role of a supervisor, a resource person or a facilitator rather than an authority as in the case of a teacher-centered model. According to Fung (2015), the learner-centered model is believed to be of great help in achieving high quality learning because the learner is given a sense of ownership and agency over his own learning. This model is not intended to diminish the importance of the instructional side of the classroom experience.

Instead, instruction is broadened to include other activities like; students’ reflection or creative thinking, dialogue and other engagements that help solve academic problems as well as produce the desirable learning outcomes. The adoption of a learner-centered model in the words of Wright

(2011) increases the learners' opportunity to actively participate in the classroom and engage in a self-directed-learning outside the classroom, as well as provide forums through which the learner can as well share learned information with peers. These, the author believes promote creativity in the learner. Examples of learner-Centered model are; discussion method, discovery or inquiry based method among others. In a concise and clear manner, few fundamental characteristics of a learner-centered model were outlined by Abbot (2016) as follows:

- a. Teaching and learning are personalized, meaning that teaching addresses the distinct needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual learners.
- b. Learning is proficiency-based. This means that learners advance in their education when they have demonstrated to have learned the knowledge and skills expected of them.
- c. Learners have the flexibility to learn anytime and anywhere.
- d. Learners are afforded the opportunity to make choices about their own learning and contribute to the design of learning experiences.

Content-Focused model

Content-focused model is the third in the categorization of teaching models as enumerated by (Makokha & Ongwao, 1997). Regarding the Content-focused model, the authors argued that both the teacher and the learner have to fit into the content that is taught. In the general sense, this implies that the information and skills to be taught are regarded or considered as sacrosanct or very important. Thus, a lot of emphasis is laid on the clarity and careful analyses of the study content. This model is criticized for subordinating the interests of the teacher and the learner to only the content being learned. The teacher and the learner are therefore left with no opportunity to employ other activities outside the main content of learning. This therefore is considered as a factor that discourages as well as impedes the development of creative thinking and creativity in a learner. Example of Content-Focused teaching model is Programmed learning method.

Interactive/Participative model

The fourth category of teaching model is the Interactive/Participative model. This model according to Makokha and Ongwao (1997) borrows a leaf from the three other models without necessarily laying much emphasis on either teacher-centered, learner-centered or the content-centered models. This model is driven by the situational analysis of what is the most appropriate thing to teach or learn given the situation of the teacher and the learner. Thus,

it requires a participatory understanding of the varied domains and factors. Worthy of note is the fact that the above four categories of teaching models in their very nature are not without some criticisms. However, the major focus in this study will be on a learner-centered model given the promises it holds as well as the various criticisms the model has received over the years especially in developing countries like Nigeria where a lot of factors like underfunding and lack of expertise pose as big threats.

Arguments against Learner-Centered Model of Education

The term learner-centered model of education tends to be avoided by some scholars because according to Ian (2016), it has drawn different interpretations among educators: some associate learner-centered model with techniques such as group work; others with practices whereby the teacher gives little instruction, leaving the learner to independently discover most information needed. Therefore, this model has been criticized for giving the learners undue freedom to discover things by themselves with minimal teacher instruction. This as Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) argued is inappropriate as it most likely leads to brain overload on the learner and as a result prevents learning being stored in the long-term memory.

A learner-centered model of education also requires a lot of human and material resources to effectively operate. Therefore, in developing countries like Nigeria where the educational sub-sector is underfunded and consequently bereaved of most vital resources like well-trained manpower, instructional materials among others, a learner-centered model of education may not yield better results (Schweisfurth, 2011). The questions that readily come to mind given the many flaws argued to becloud a learner-centered model are;

- i. Could there be worthwhile benefits derivable from a learner-centered model, especially with regard to developing creative thinking and creativity in a learner?
- ii. If there are inherent benefits derivable from a learner-centered model, how can they be harnessed?
- iii. What challenges need to be tackled to ensure that a learner-centered model of education is operational in Nigeria?

Creative thinking and Creativity as inherent Benefits of a Learner-Centered Model of Education

Considering the myriads of flaws believed to becloud the learner-centered model of education, there are no doubts various inherent benefits derivable from it. Scholars like Kirschner et al (2006) believed that a learner-centered model is very beneficial to any educational system. Expressing their

views, the authors stated that when the focus of education becomes students' learning which is better ensured through a learner-centered model as against the traditional teacher-centered model, schools seem to attain higher rates of student retention. Schools as well seem to have better prepared graduates whose minds are sharpened for creative thinking to tackle real life challenges through creative means.

Creative thinking with regards to learning is defined by Alexander and Murphy (2000) as an ability of a learner to reflect on and regulate his own mind on new and better problem-solving approaches. Supporting the authors' definition, Aman (2016) posited that creative thinking is a process in which an individual or a learner generates an original, unusual and productive solution to a problem. In other words, creative thinking entails being in an optimal state of mind so as to be able to generate new ideas to tackle new challenges. Every society no doubt is dynamic in nature with various unexpected phenomena coming up like economic recession, unemployment among others as experienced in Nigeria in the recent times. Individuals therefore require creative thinking abilities to meet up with the day's demands. Creative thinking abilities are harnessed through a learner-centered model of education because a learner-centered model is properly equipped with the right tools to prepare learners to be actively involved in their own learning, monitor their own thinking as well as proffer solutions to problems through innovative ways. A learner-centered model of education also encourages independent and curious spirit in a learner by shifting from the teacher to the learner, the greater responsibility of learning, thus making the teacher's role facilitative instead of didactic. As a result, suitable environment that motivates a learner to learn independently through variety of ways is created (Weimer, 2016). In a bid to discover better and more suitable ways of learning, learners therefore reflect on the experiences gained, as well as try to link them to possible better ways to solve new problems in a life-long learning which is creativity.

Creativity is an application of knowledge and imagination to a given situation for the purpose of problem-solving (Sharp, 2016). In other words, creativity is the ability of an individual to generate a variety of different ideas through divergent thinking with the view to producing an outcome of value and worth. As a learner, being creative enables one to make connections between one area of learning and another thereby extending the learner's understanding. Since learning takes us to the future that we cannot yet grasp, creativity should be an essential aspect of learning to prepare learners for future ventures (Robinson, 2016). Given the uncertainties facing Nigeria's future with regards to her socio-economic, religious and political instabilities and the continual advancements around the world that invariably affect

Nigeria, it is therefore imperative and rational to call for the modeling of her educational system to be more learner-centered so as to develop creative thinking and creativity in learners to face this uncertain economic and sociopolitical future.

Learner-Centered Model and the Nigeria factor

Continual pedagogical reforms have characterized the educational system in the 21st century around the world. Education today is mostly based on Plato, Socrates and Dewey's premises that the learner is not an empty vessel, a blank slate or passive observer, which means that the learner has some innate potentials to be developed on his own given the right environment. However, the reverse is the case in the Nigerian Educational system in which Idogho (2016) observed that education has been based on the old traditional model (teacher-centered) where the teacher talks and students are being directed to listen. The assumption in this model is that if the teacher speaks clearly and the students are motivated, learning will occur and if learning does not occur, the logic goes; it is because the learners are not paying attention. Such factors like proper timing, the learner's interests, abilities, aspirations, motivation, and cultural backgrounds are not considered as they are capable of obstructing or encumbering learning if not properly managed.

Poor funding and consequent deplorable state of learning environment, non-availability of learning materials, unpatriotic leadership, poor formulation and implementation of educational policies and so on, have also posed a great challenge and setback in the attempt to institute and maintain a learner-centered model of education in Nigeria. The Nigerian educational sub-sector has been under-funded over the years.

This is evident in the dwindling annual budgetary allocation to the sub-sector which has remained below the 26% UNESCO approved annual budget quota to be set aside for the educational subsector (Nwachukwu, 2014). Manifestations of this under-funding as further observed by Eyiche are seen in the areas of shortage of trained staff, widespread cases of arrears of unpaid teachers' salaries, deplorable state of infrastructures, and equipment are non-existent, dilapidated or grossly inadequate. This brings us to an assertion by Enemu (2002) that until the Nigerian government begins to pay more attention to education by allocating 26% or more of her annual budget to education as approve by UNESCO, to carter for full policy formulation and implementation, infrastructural development, teachers' welfare and in-service trainings, provision of modern teaching resources among other things, the fortunes of education will continue to dwindle. This is because the needed

environment for successful operation of a learner-centered model of education will not be created. Then, the traditional teacher-centered model will prevail continually with the learners remaining passive recipients of knowledge with little control over what they learn and how it is learnt. With this situation, the learners' ability to think creatively and become creative will not be properly developed, thereby depriving the learners potent tools (creative thinking and creativity) which they would need to survive independently in the future.

Conclusion

In a country like Nigeria where there is prevalent rate of unemployment among young graduates, economic recession, uncertain future among others, it therefore becomes imperative that the educational sector be revisited and refashioned in such a way that it will be poised to assist learners become creative individuals for self-sufficiency. A learner-centered model of education given some inherent benefits is considered as the needed condition to be put in place for the development of creative thinking and creativity in learners. This is because it addresses the distinct needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual learners with regard to their total wellbeing and survival in the society. Also, learning in this model is proficiency-based, meaning that learners advance in their education when they demonstrate to have learned the knowledge and acquired the skills expected of them.

Harnessing the potentials inherent in the learner-centered model of education will therefore be achieved through proper policy formulation, implementation and increased funding of the educational sector.

This will ensure availability of suitable structures, innovative teaching resources, well trained personnel as well as minimize incessant teacher-strikes and so on. Then learners through a learner-centered model of education will be properly developed into creative individuals, who will further the political and socio-economic advancement of Nigeria as well as creatively evolve various means of revenue generation for themselves and the state rather than depending on government's white collar jobs that may not be readily available. It is until then that the anticipated economic growth in Nigeria will be ensured, because with most young graduates creating and engaging in one venture or the other, crime rate will reduce, ushering in a more friendly environment for successful economic activities and the overall national development of the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward;

- i. Nigeria's educational system should be based on a learner-centered model of education for development of creative thinking and creativity in learners as preparatory measure to brace up with the uncertain nature of Nigeria with regards to the challenges of the 21st century.
- ii. The annual budgetary allocation to the educational sub-sector should be increased as a precondition for creating a suitable environment where a learner-centered model of education can thrive.

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