

LEARNING AND THE LEARNING CULTURE CRISES AND CHALLENGES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Introduction

Learning is at the centre of human life experiences and education. As a concept, psychologists since the 19th Century have delved into what is entailed in human learning and have sought to explain it based on findings from experimentations with animals as well as how these relate to observations in human behaviour, especially as they translate to acquisition and utilization of capacities and skills for educational purposes. Over the years, variety of definitions of learning have emerged by different theorists and psychology Schools of Thought which have in turn inspired an academic understanding of the term *Learning Culture* in the context of educational traditions and cultures of different societies across the globe (American Counseling Association – ACA, 2009). Specifically, the 2006 *Academic's Dictionary of Psychology* offers two basic definitions of Learning. These are that the concept, Learning refers to *Modification of a response, following upon and resulting from experience of results*; and that it is also *the process and result of acquiring individual experience* (Ramalingam, 2006). In terms of the context of Learning Culture, the 2006 *Academic's Dictionary of Sociology* refers the term by describing learning as a psychological concept involving the *modification and reorganization of a persons' behavior (perceptions, attitudes, self-image, and so forth) as a result of experience* (Hogan, 2006). Learning Culture, therefore, entails traditionally acceptable and institutionalized ways and standards of acquiring new life experiences; established ways of changing attitude and behaviours in society; institutionalized approaches to teaching and learning in formal and non-formal educational settings; and psycho-educational methodologies cultivated and utilized for teaching and learning in different Educational Systems.

Learning and the Learning Culture

Miller & Dollard way back in 1941 had described what we can regard as *Learning* and the *Learning Culture* contexts thus:

Learning takes place according to certain psychological principles. Practice does not always make perfect. The connection between a cue and a response can be strengthened only under certain conditions. The learner must be driven to make response and rewarded for having responded in the presence of the cue. This may be expressed in a homely way by saying that in order to learn, one must want something, notice something, do something, and get something. Stated more exactly, these factors are drive, cue, response and reward. P. 1 – 2.

While the concepts, *drive*, *cue*, *response* and *reward* refer to the psychological conceptualization of human learning, the established and various ways learners are driven to assimilate the cues for the expected responses for which rewards are accorded to strengthen the learning process represents the understanding of learning culture.

In as much as the learning process is universal in the human species, the learning culture differs from individual to individual and from society to society. In other words, strengthening the driving and strengthening the psychological process of learning takes different forms of approaches in different people and societies. While in the Western World, formal environments enriched with learning aids and the use of learner-centred methodologies are regarded as most instrumental for effective learning, the African Culture before the advent of Western Civilization emphasized imitation, copying and mentorship as the means to functional learning. In the Middle East and far Eastern World Civilizations, the learning culture used to be more in the context of indoctrination and memorization. No learning culture is, however static. Hence, different societies continue to put dynamism in their learning culture towards the goal of attaining functional and qualitative education. When the expected dynamism (based on philosophical, psychological and sociological postulations) become negated in society and its Education System or schools, a cycle of learning crises sets in to perpetrate falling standards and depreciating quality of education and learning in society and schools.

Core Psychological Theories Undergirding the Understanding of the Learning Process and Learning Culture

Rosallie R. Hydock portends that psychological theories of human learning basically seek to explain the cognitive processes involved in the acquisition of knowledge or skills, adding that “*Four major perspectives defining how human learning occurs are behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and postconstructivism*” (ACA, 2009). Each perspective comprises a set of psychological theories and schools of thought that seek to describe the human learning phenomenon in more or less from the same prism.

Behaviourism

Behaviourists use key terms like **stimulus**, **contiguity**, **effect**, **reinforcement**, **generalization**, and **response** to describe the human learning process. Essentially, behaviourists explain learning in terms of Stimulus-Response psychological phenomenon in human behaviour. In other words, for learning to take place, a stimulus is presented and conditions for enhancing contiguity, effect, reinforcement and generalization are provided for the elicitation of expected response. Psychologists associated with the Behaviourist School of Thought include Ivan Pavlov (Classical Conditioning); John B. Watson (Overt/Instrumentalist Behaviour); Edward L. Thorndike (Law of Effect and Reinforcement); and Brian F. Skinner (Operant/Response Conditioning).

Cognitivism

Also referred to as *Cognitive Information Processing (CIP)*, psychological theorists within the realms of Cognitivism further advance on the Behaviourist Principles to explain the concept of human learning more in terms of the systems approach entailing that learners have to be actively engaged in the process of new experiences for meaningful learning to take place. Concepts commonly used by Cognitivists to describe human learning as a psychological phenomenon include **Perception** and **Insight** (Wolfgang Kohler); **Schema, Sensory-motor, Pre-operational, Formal Operational, Assimilation, Accommodation** (Jean Piaget); **Reception, Expectancy, Retrieval, Selective Perception, Semantic Encoding, Responding, Reinforcement, Generalization** (Robert Gagne); **Chunking, Test-Operate-Test-Exit** (George Miller); **Subsumption, and Advanced Organizers** (David Ausubel), etc.

Constructivism

To the Constructivists, humans learn based on their respective individual experiences which make sense to them in relating to new information. Psychological terms like **Readiness, Spiral Organization, Extrapolation** (Jerome S. Bruner); **Zone of Proximal Development, Scaffolding** (Lev Vygotsky); **Observation, Modeling, Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation** (Albert Bandura) are some of the concepts associated with human learning as described by Constructivist Theorists.

Post-Constructivism

Some more recent psychological theorists base their explanations of human learning on what they regard as *Componential Analysis*; which describes learning as a phenomenon to be understood from the perspectives of *Information Encoding; Problem-Solving Strategy Formation, Implementation and Generalization*. Multiple Intelligence Constructs like **Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial Orientation, Bodily Kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic** (Howard Gardner); as well as the **Componential, Contextual and Experiential** Sub-theories of the *Triarchic Theory of Intelligence* (Robert Sternberg) provide Post-Constructivist descriptions of varieties of human learning.

The various theories and perspectives of human learning have utility value not only for understanding the learning phenomenon, but also can be used, especially by educational and school psychologists to appraise and diagnose learning crises in schools, homes and the larger society as a whole.

Learning and the Learning Culture Crises in the Education System and Schools

Every Education System and its' schools are essentially in place in their respective societies to achieve set out learning goals on the basis of established learning orientation and culture familiar to teachers and other stakeholders (parents, school supervisors, inspectors, etc.). In most Education Systems, schools rely on teaching and learning techniques used by teachers as taught to them based on

psychological theories and principles of learning. The schools and the Education Systems are invariably expected to facilitate a learning culture which teachers are supposed to imbibe. In the event that the Education System and schools fail in their responsibility of teacher pre-service training, teacher in-service training and continuous capacity development of professional teachers to orientate and facilitate a learning, teaching and learning culture for use in achieving the learning goals set out for the Education System, a learning crises ensues. Learning crises is basically manifest in the form of academic, psychological, pedagogical, psycho-educational and sociological distortions in expected educational outputs and outcomes (Brown, 2011). In the face of poorly trained teachers and paucity of appropriate teaching and learning facilities, especially in public schools and the Education System as we have in developing countries like Nigeria, the situation of learning and learning culture crises worsens. Some of the usually most pronounced learning crises in schools are briefly outlined herewith.

High prevalence of poor basic educational and learning skills is a most common case of learning crisis noticeable in any Educational and School System inflicted with poorly trained and ill-equipped teachers. Evidences of poor basic educational and learning skills include general inability of learners in educational settings to independently read, write well and do simple calculations easily. Other evidences of learning crises in schools include high incidence rates of undiagnosed cases of specific developmental and academic learning disabilities (alexia/dyslexia, agraphia/dysgraphia, acalculia/dyscalculia, etc.); high prevalence of learning attention disorders or deficits (inattention in class during lessons, sporadic short attention span during lessons, constant distractions during classes, long inattention span by many pupils, etc.); and persistence of patterns of underachievement and conformist learning ability tendencies (as manifested in poor results by many pupils, low learning esteem among learners, and general average academic performance by almost all pupils) – Shea & Bauer, 1994.

In developing societies like Nigeria where there are misconstrued values about western type education and schooling, the learning crises situation extends into manifestations of learning culture crises. Such learning culture crises in schools and society include mass and unchecked failure rates in examinations (especially public examinations like WAEC and NECO in Nigeria); high prevalence of *Learning Learned Helplessness* among learners at all levels of the Education System (i. e. preference for corner cutting to pass exams, resort to examination malpractice as a norm, etc); high incidence of learning behaviour dysfunctions (such as overt or covert slow learning traits, fixation to wrong learning skills, fixation to poor learning skills, etc.); and negative learning inter-relationships among learners (such as wrong learning group relationships) – Federal Ministry of Education, FME, 2007.

The Learning Crises Challenges to the Education System: The Nigerian Scenario

In the face of the incidence and prevalence of learning and learning crises in Nigeria's Education System, a number of educational development challenges are posed in the schools and even the homes (FME, 2007).

The foremost learning crises challenge in contemporary Nigeria's Education System is the phenomenon of falling standards of education. Although the phenomenon of falling standards of education in Nigeria's Education System has been subjected to academic and theoretical debate by some experts, the reality from empirical evidences of learning achievement and teacher capacities over the years has proven that indeed, standards in terms of expected academic skills and knowledge capacities in particularly public schools have depreciated, and continued on a free fall in the country (FME, 2007). The poor teaching capacities of teachers in arresting the falling standards of education is obvious evidence of learning crises challenge in Nigeria's Education System.

The generally mass learning failure in Nigeria's schools system as evident by mass failure has occasioned what has now become referred to as "domestication of illiteracy" in our educational system. Since the 1980s, research has pointed to the facts that more than half of teachers in Nigerian public schools can neither read efficiently nor teach reading meaningfully (FME, 2002; 2003; 2004). The most embarrassing to date has been situations in which 50% of primary school teachers failed achievement tests in the core subjects meant for their pupils (FME, 2007). This learning and learning crises situation has obviously led to domestication of illiteracy in our schools systems.

Owing to unchecked learning crises for over some two decades, there has also now arisen a deepened phenomenon of miss-education in Nigerian schools and educational institutions. With teachers poorly equipped for the profession of educating learners, the consequence does not just stop at poor standards; the tendencies are for the learners to be miss-educated. A study of teacher in-service capacity gaps by UNICEF (Nigeria) in 2009 indicated that most graduates of teacher training and retraining programmes were deficient in mastery of knowledge content of teaching subjects (FME & UNICEF Nigeria, 2009). A graduate of Nigerian University at the NYSC Camp was asked to comment on his experience and he wrote: *I thank Gods for make a corpse. I am now a corpse. Seriously am serous. Are you impressed?* He was referring to being a youth corps member. This is typical miss-education. Another graduate of a Nigerian University named Ekiti, Ilorin and Abeokuta as African countries.

The fact that Nigerian Education System has been dysfunctional since independence has not been in doubt. The dysfunctionality of the educational outputs has since been entrenched with the learning crises situation (FME, 2007). Indeed, many students now seek for admission, especially into tertiary institutions not necessarily to learn and acquire the expected experience, but to simply obtain the certificate. This is responsible for the alarming rates of unemployment and unemployable school leavers across the country.

Owing to sustained learning and learning culture failure in Nigeria, the country has sadly missed learning and education targets to which she was committed at the global arena. Nigeria missed both the EFA and MDGs 2015 Targets on Quality and Functional Basic Education for All. The country now has to contend with over 50 million “illiterates” and over 23 million out of school children. If we are not to again miss the Education Goal Target of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need a Functional Learning and Learning Culture Implementation Framework and Strategy as a component of our overall National Framework of Action.

Critical Psycho-Educational Interventions for Addressing Learning and Learning Culture Crises

Brown (2007); Mennuti & Christner, (2012); and Christner, Kamon & Mennuti, (2012) identified five critical psycho-educational intervention strategies for addressing learning and learning culture crises in any Education System.

Knowledge, Art, Science, Skills and Technique (KASST) Model

Basically, the KASST Model is the functional learning and learning culture approach to mitigating learning failure and learning culture crises. It entails ensuring that proactive measures are taken to safeguard and ensure that teaching and learning are Knowledge-Driven; Artistic and Scientific in Pedagogue; and Skills and Techniques Embracing to ensure the effectiveness of learning by every learner.

The Blended KASST Model requires that each component of the Knowledge, Art, Science, Skills and Techniques are employed together in all activities meant for learning in schools and homes. In recent times, the Blended KASST Model has been referred to as the Active Teaching and Learning Model. In other words, both teacher and learners are interactive and active throughout learning activities and sessions.

The Psycho-Educational Groups Therapy Approach is based on learning assessment and diagnosis outcome as basis for categorizing learners for grouping into classes with defined and most suitable pedagogical techniques to facilitate learning. Potential students are for example assessed for their educational skills for placement into learning ability groups to ensure the use of the most appropriate teaching techniques to guarantee effective learning.

School-Based Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy Approach focuses on making teaching and learning align to the cognitive and behavioural processes entailed for accomplishing learning goals. Emphasis in teaching and learning is, therefore, based on penetrating the cognitive and behavioural processes required for accomplishing learning tasks by learners. All teachers in schools which employ the School-Based Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy Approach for mitigating learning crises must, therefore, be trained to master the relevant Cognitive-Behavioural Learning-teaching techniques to be used in all classes.

School-Based Mental Health Facilitation is also used in the context of ensuring whole school academic skills counselling and remediation for mitigating learning failure and crises. The approach requires structured mental health intervention programmes in which the learning capacities of all learners are

continually appraised in the school for adopting teaching and learning strategies which will enable them achieve academic success.

The Utility Value of the Use of Psycho-Educational Interventions for Facilitating Sustainable Educational Development in Nigeria

Nigeria's commitment to the realization of the EFA and MDGs in terms of sustainable universal basic education and quality functional education up to secondary level has been anything but laudable. Part of the missing links is the phenomenon of learning failure and learning culture crises among other factors. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is here again and has been jumpstarted globally with one of the focus on a vision for all nations to use education as the platform for driving sustainable universal development. The SDG 4 specifically is about ensuring *inclusive and equitable quality education for promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all* (United Nations –UN, 2015). The SDGs to which Nigeria is already a signatory aims at Sustainable Educational Development which connotes an Educational System with learning settings which are developed on the basis of appropriate and commensurate resource inputs for competitively measurable learning outputs and functional learning outcomes. The SDGs 4 on Inclusive quality education can hardly be achieved within an educational climate of learning failure and learning culture crises as obtains in contemporary Nigeria. With appropriate Psycho-Educational Interventions in an education resource constrained system focused on mitigating learning failure and learning culture crises, tendencies will be for the achievement of desirable impacts of engendering effective and functional learning and learning culture in our schools and society.

Some of the impacts realizable through the focusing of the Nigerian drive for the realization of the SDGs 4 on Psycho-Educational Interventions based on mitigating the prevalence of the learning crises in the Education System include improvement of the learning capacities of learners in educational settings; institutionalization of assessment-based learning culture in the school system; sustained enhanced learning achievement at all levels; engenderment of quality functional education; and fostering of renewed literacy and learning cultures in the larger society.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Given the situation of varieties of incidences and prevalence of learning crises and the learning culture crises in Nigeria's Education System, it has become imperative to initiate and put in place a National Schools Psychological Climate Policy for the Ministries of Education and the Local Government Education Authorities to use as guide for facilitating a positive learning culture in schools. The proposed policy may help to institutionalize a learning culture which is almost absent

in Nigerian schools today. Closely related to the proposed policy is the need for a Schools Learning Culture Framework for use in Nigerian educational settings and even homes. The Nigerian National Council for Educational Psychologists (NCEP) is in a good position to initiate and develop such a Framework in the form of a Manual to be used in schools to proactively guide active teaching and learning. Within the proposed Framework and Manual, an Evidence-Based Learning Assessment System can be further developed to deepen the institutionalization of a proactive learning culture in Nigerian schools. To achieve all recommended steps, the Nigerian Council of Educational Psychologists should initiate a policy research to lead to the process of achieving a Nigerian Positive Learning Climate and Learning Culture in our Educational System and schools.

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