

VALIDITY IN THE TEACHING – LEARNING PROCESS: A CALL FOR CURRICULUM REFORMS

BY

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Abstract

The content of what an everyday classroom teacher must learn to be effective has increased exponentially in line with the pressure of global change; as such, calls for change issues in curriculum and instruction to ensure validity as well as sustainability in the educational system cannot be over looked. The call for alignment of every day classroom instructions with the curriculum goals and objectives to guarantee valid outputs cannot also be ignored. This study employed the survey research design and qualitatively examined the issue of validity in the teaching-learning process of some tertiary institutions in South-Eastern Nigeria to ascertain the validity of instructional service delivery. A validity gap was found between the curriculum content and the instructional process. As a result, proactive curriculum reforms were recommended among other things.

Keywords: Validity, teaching, learning, curriculum, reforms

Introduction

Improving the learning outcomes of all students regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location is the key objective of education but teaching is a complex and demanding process that requires highly specialized skills and knowledge in order to be able to impact significantly on students' learning. Most research efforts on teaching and learning consistently highlight the quality of teachers as key determinant of variation in students' learning achievement. Thus, teacher quality is at the very centre of the teaching and learning process (Department of Education & Training 2003; Ferguson & Ladd 1996; Wenglinsky 2000; Darling-Hammond 2000).

Quality teaching have a strong impact on the lives and careers of young people, and most decisions taken within the school life experience influence their prospects and opportunities outside the school environment. However, for a teacher to be effective, innovative, productive, and accountable in the teaching-learning process, he or she needs a deep understanding of his or her subject area, knowledge of how students learn specific subject matter, a range of varieties of instructional strategies, as well as practices that support effective student learning. In order words, for a valid instructional experience in any school setting; compromising standards in the teaching-learning process is not a valid option.

Validity is a construct of great importance in the teaching-learning process and in its simplest form refers to the extent to which a test, an instrument, or a process measures what it is intended to measure (Hathcoat, 2013). Validity refers to the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of a thing or how well one can legitimately trust the results of a thing as interpreted for a specific purpose. Validity or the validation of a thing explicitly means validating the use of the thing in a specific context. Thus, when discussing the validity of the teaching-learning process, it is important to study the instructional setting in which the process is taking place.

In the traditional classroom, teachers stand in front of the classroom and present the information to the students. This process is seen as effective because teachers can present an immense amount of information in only a short period of time; and the students are expected to absorb the information that the teacher presents and then recall it later on a test. But constructivist research has continued to show how ineffective and inefficient this process is. Research results revealed that in classes where teachers' focus is just on imparting knowledge; students are more likely to have a superficial interest in learning that subject but when teaching focuses on students and challenge their perceptions; students exhibit deeper involvement with learning the subject (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 2004).

Teaching is a dynamic profession where new knowledge about teaching and learning emerges daily and new types of expertise is required by educators to meet the need of our multi-cultural students. As such, 21st century teachers must keep abreast of new knowledge base and use it to continually refine their conceptual and pedagogical skills. Thus, engaging teachers in high quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teachers' effectiveness (Greenwald, Hedges & Laine 1995; Guskey & Huberman 1995; Elmore & Burney 1997; Hawley & Valli 1999; Elmore 2002). More so, policy makers in education in recent years have focused a great deal of attention on accountability as a means of enhancing teachers' productivity and build a qualitative teaching work force.

Accountability in education is the idea of holding schools, districts, educators, and students responsible for results, and school accountability which is the process of evaluating school performance on the basis of student performance measures is increasingly prevalent around the world and has become the most-recent watchword in education. In more and more states and districts in the United States for instance, policymakers are moving to reward achievement and punish failure in schools in an effort to ensure that children are getting a good education and that tax dollars are not being wasted (Quality Counts 1999 & Figlio & Loeb 2011). One of the way through which such accountability move is implemented in the views of Notar, Zuelke, Wilson, and Yunker, (2004) is by looking at the extent to which students' performance in teacher-made tests can predict their potential performance in standardized tests such as national examinations.

Ideally, in the views of Notar, Zuelke, Wilson, and Yunker (2004) it is expected that there would be a strong positive correlation between a student's grade point average and the student's score on standardized test. Note that the grade point average is the mean grade score of all the formative assessment tests taken by the learner throughout the teaching-learning process and when compared with the students' achievement in standardized examinations it gives a measure of how trustworthy the teaching-learning process is. Thus, when professionals discuss whether outputs from the teaching-learning process can be trusted, they are referring to validity but judging the validity of the teaching-learning process requires some detective work.

Education professionals have proposed different frameworks for examining validity in the teaching-learning process and have different terms to describe different types of validity but the terms are not as important as understanding what makes teaching and learning valid and knowing what questions to ask to ensure validity of the process. Policy makers and educators who are judging the outputs of the teaching- learning process need to be like prosecuting attorneys. They need to take apart and analyze achievement results for possible errors against research validity and provide evidence they did not commit academic crimes. Thus, for each lesson, they should ask some certain questions to ensure instructional alignment, and such questions may include:

- in this lesson, what is quality teaching or what is a quality instruction?
- do the teaching or instructional strategies match the lesson?
- how was the lesson delivered?
- are there rival explanations for the observed learning output?

The term alignment is widely used by educators in a variety of contexts but most commonly in reference to reforms that are intended to bring greater coherence or efficiency to a curriculum, program, initiative, or education system; and in the views of Bransford et al. (2000) the growing evidence base about student learning forms a compelling case for engaging teachers in highly effective professional learning which has profound implications for what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. More so, a thorough understanding of this framework will transform how teachers carry on in the teaching and learning process since the most significance problem for teachers and teaching is that of how students learn.

Thus, creating learning environments where students are active participants as individuals and as members of collaborative groups should be the hallmark of any 21st century teacher who wants to create a valid teaching-learning environment that motivates and nurtures students' desire to learn

in a safe, healthy and supportive environment which develops compassion and mutual respect. And for instructional validity, such teaching-learning environment should cultivate cross cultural understandings and the value of diversity, encourage students to accept responsibility for their own learning and accommodates the diverse learning needs of all students, as well as display effective and efficient classroom management that includes classroom routines that promote comfort, order and appropriate student behaviors.

Furthermore, such valid teaching-learning environment should provide students equitable access to technology, space, tools and time as well as effectively allocate time for students to engage in hands-on experiences, discuss and process content and make meaningful connections. It should design lessons that allow students to participate in empowering activities in which they understand that learning is a process and mistakes are a natural part of learning. Furthermore, it should create an environment where student work is valued, appreciated, and used as a learning tool with the teachers having an understanding of the expectations for a particular standard so that when a student response is awarded a particular level of achievement (for example, a credit), it has the same characteristics regardless of who marks or grades it (Elmore, 2002; Lee, 2012; and Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, and Major, 2014).

Alignment is critical for fairness, transparency, objectivity, and accountability in any school system and should be enshrined so that the teachers can make conscious and consistent efforts in ensuring standards in instructional service delivery. Therefore, this study examined the effort made by sampled respondents in the study area to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process in their everyday classroom experience.

Research question

To what extent are the identified instructional activities carried out to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process in an everyday classroom experience in the study area?

Methods

This study used survey research design method. The area of study was the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. South-Eastern Nigeria is the region that borders Cameroon to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and serviced by five federal and five state owned universities. It is the homeland of Kwa speaking people and the dominant language of this region is Igbo. It is primarily situated in the Niger Delta region of West Africa where it meets the Atlantic Ocean to its South. It has lands on both sides of the lower Niger River although the larger chunk of the region is situated on the East of the river. The region is surrounded by a host of large rivers and plays host to five states namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo state.

The sample for this study was 364 respondents randomly selected from a population of about 7,000 academic staff in the five federal universities within the study area in line with Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determination of sample size. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire tagged: "Questionnaire Appraising Validity in the Teaching-Learning Process" (QAVTLP) that had a Split-half reliability index of 0.71. The instrument had two sub-sections- A and B. Section A sought some demographic information about individual respondent such as

gender, department/faculty, and area of specialization while Section B had 14 short structured items on instructional activities carried out in the teaching-learning process.

Data analysis was carried out using simple percentages as shown in Table 1.

Results

Table 1: Results of percentage rating of the extent to which some identified instructional activities are carried out to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process

S/N	Items To what extent do the following take place in your everyday work experience	High extent	Low extent	% High extent	% Low extent	Decision
1	All departmental lecturers are involved in the development of criteria and standards descriptors for teaching and learning as well as examinations	302	44	83	7	High extent
2	Sufficient records of all students are kept for accountability purposes	342	22	94	6	High extent
3	Standardization process in the department is collaborative and interactive	342	22	94	6	High extent
4	There is cross marking/grading with follow-up meetings for discussion and comparison of all examination papers	343	21	94	6	High extent
5	One lecturer mark/grade all responses to sections of an examination paper	24	340	7	93	Low extent
6	Holds moderation meetings with related discipline lecturers to discuss consistency or inconsistencies of marking/grading	50	314	14	86	Low extent
7	Discuss regularly with students any identified difficulties in the teaching and learning process	154	210	42	58	Moderate extent

8	Develop solutions to identified difficulties	179	185	49	51	Moderate extent
9	Test scoring is balanced and fair at all times	329	35	90	10	High extent
10	Students understand how and when they will be assessed	323	41	89	11	High extent
11	Assessment criteria and process are made explicit and transparent to teachers, students and parents	323	41	89	11	High extent
12	Students are encouraged to accepting responsibility for their own learning and accommodates the diverse learning needs of other students	349	15	95	5	High extent
13	Students have the opportunity to demonstrate their best in all teaching and learning situation	349	15	95	5	High extent
14	Review students responses and profiles of their results	168	196	46	54	Moderate extent

The results on Table 1 revealed the percentage rating of respondents on the extent to which some instructional activities are carried out to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process.

Discussion

The results on Table 1 revealed that respondent rated to happen to a high extent most items of the questionnaire aimed at appraising instructional activities carried out to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process. However, items 5 and 6 were rated to happen to a low extent. Items 7, 8, and 14 were rated to happen moderately. Thus, there are aspects of the teaching-learning process that need to be reformed to guarantee validity in the instructional process in the study area. The outcome of this research work is in agreement with the findings of the works by Greenwald, Hedges and Laine (1995), Guskey and Huberman (1995), Elmore and Burney (1997), Hawley and Valli (1999) Elmore (2002), Lee (2012), and Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, (2014) who found that there are several key things the School, and teachers can do to enhance their trustworthiness in the teaching-learning process as revealed in the research work of Some of these key thing include to ensure students understand how and when they will be assessed, ensure the assessment

criteria and process are made explicit and transparent to students (and parents), ensure students have the opportunity to demonstrate their best, ensure the scoring is balanced and fair, ensure the standardization process is collaborative and interactive, and sure that sufficient records are kept for accountability purposes.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the importance of fairness, transparency, objectivity, and accountability in any school system so as to ensure validity in the teaching-learning process of our everyday classroom experience. The results of findings strongly suggest that there are some basic pedagogical activities that should be carried by the teachers/lecturers, and the departmental heads to ensure a valid instructional process. Some of these activities include the involvement of all departmental lecturers in the development of criteria and standards descriptors for teaching and learning as well as examinations, holding moderation meetings with related discipline lecturers to discuss consistency or inconsistencies of marking/grading, and discussing regularly with students any identified difficulties in the teaching and learning process to mention a few.

Validity in the teaching-learning process means that quality teaching must cover all aspects of a valid instructional process identified in this study and more as identified by other researchers such as making assessment criteria and process explicit and transparent to teachers, students, and parents, encouraging students to accepting responsibility for their own learning and accommodating the diverse learning needs of other students. Others include giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their best in all teaching and learning situation as well as reviewing students' responses and profiles of their results.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Institutional administrators who are the teachers, head teachers, trustees, ministry staff, and governments should all be driven by internal accountability so as to ensure trustworthiness in the teaching-learning process.
2. The school system should lay more emphasizes on collaborative teaching and learning so as to adequately review and profiles teachers and students activities in the teaching – learning process.
3. Teachers, like professionals in other fields should be called upon more regularly to justify their professional decisions and actions through enshrining in the school calendar specific period for teachers to report to parents, head teachers, trustees, ministry staff, and governments formally and informally on the learning progress of their children.
4. Teachers, like other professionals should be more accountable for their professional decisions and actions by spending more time and money on instructional planning and professional development.
5. Parents and teachers should teach the school age children to take responsibility for their actions in the classroom since internal accountability is highly valued and identified as a hallmark of maturity in our society.

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