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## Improving Students' Academic Performance in Nigerian Schools: the Role of Teachers

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**Abstract:** *The thrust of the study was to examine the extent to which the involvement of teachers in the outcome of academic performance of students in schools could be held accountable for virile students' performance in all subjects, generally in Nigerian schools. While lamenting on the shameful articulation of students' academic performance in public examinations; it was obviously discussed that students' academic performance without sustained consideration on teachers' involvement in the teaching and learning processes may not lead to meaningful improvement. It was observed that teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) are very important for the teachers to be effective and to be able to improve students' academic learning. As part of the recommendations it was suggested that short and long term in-service training from developed countries is needed for teachers of all categories in Nigeria.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Performance is defined as an observable or measurable behavior of a person or an animal in a particular situation usually experimental situation [39]. This therefore means that performance measures the behaviors or an aspect of a feat that can be observed at a specific period. [1] stated that students' performance is very important because, it appears to be the major criterion by which the effectiveness and success of any educational institution could be judged.

Considerable research evidence abound, [13];[29];[19];[35],[40];[30];[3] and [11] to show that poor academic performance at the secondary level of education is a product of the teacher, school and home environment and so on. While the students have their own portion of the blame, a substantial part of it lies at the doorsteps of the nation's policy makers or leaders, who over the years treated the sector with levity. This shameful mass failure of students in Nigeria regrettably is a reflection of the precipice on which the nation has found itself.

Thus, poor students' academic performance in the country has in the recent time being traced to lack of proficiency in English language. This [32] and [6] had earlier separately inferred to when they averred that English language's proficiency influenced students' academic performance in vocational and science education, respectively. Yet, [33] in an analysis of course content in General English 11 revealed that students' performance in General English is in a big mess in the country today. To this effect, [7] suggested that to improve students' performance generally, the teaching and learning of English language must also be improved.

That aside, though many virile factors have been identified to be cogent factors to improved students' academic performance in the country, yet, the main thrust of this paper will focus only on students' academic performance in Nigeria with the roles of the teachers in enhancing students' academic performance in Nigeria. Thus, Teachers have particularly not only been blamed for creating low levels of academic achievement, but they have been held for sabotaging a multitude of reforms designed to reverse the situation. To this end, to improve students' academic performance in Nigeria, teachers' roles must be exemplified as a measure for the yearning towards better academic performance in the nearest possible future.

### 2. PERCEPTION OF POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG THE NIGERIAN STUDENTS

Students' academic performance is one of the current educational problems of public interest based on poor level of student's academic performance especially in public examination and at schools and

various higher institutions [24]. This [21] gave credence to when they averred that the problem of underachievement among school children has persisted in many subjects areas. This [7] also resonated that the academic performance of students both at secondary school and postsecondary school is worrisome.

The issue of poor academic performance at the secondary level of education in Nigeria has been widely documented. For instance, [25] study on this issue revealed that all these secondary school candidates that registered for the West African School Certificate Examination in 1960 only 32.36% passed at the five credit level and in the subsequent years the percentage passed at five credit level dropped to 27.63% in 1968, and only 19.3% in 1974. This is an indication that the major problem facing the educational system in Nigeria is the abysmal failure of students in public examinations, particularly at the secondary level of education [43].

Evidence at record office, October 1993, in the Kwara State Ministry of Education also revealed that of all secondary school candidates that took the West African School Certificate Examination in 1982, only 41.7% passed at five credit level and in the subsequent years, 32.59% passed in 1983; 38.70% passed in 1984, 37.45% passed in 1985, 40.4% passed in 1986, 34.76% passed in 1987 and 37.7% passed in 1988. It appears right to claim, therefore, that there is a general trend of poor academic performance both at the national and Kwara State Secondary education levels.

[8] while commenting (on the issue of mass failure in 2009 November/December NECO examinations) in the Nigerian Tribune of April 5, 2010 by Tope Ademola, a Public Affairs commentator, said that there could not have been a worse period for the Nigerian educational system than the disclosure that 98 per cent of students who sat for the November /December 2009 examination of the National Examination Council (NECO) failed. According to the report, only 4,223 out of the 236,613 candidates who sat for the examination had credits in five subjects, including English and Mathematics.

It is pathetic therefore to infer at this juncture that with political and social upsurge, economic instability and the implication of irresponsible government and inability in the recent years in the country, to adequately supply needed funds, qualified teachers for the right subjects, infrastructures to cope with the increase of students' enrolments in schools, suitable curriculum, etc. has led to the decrease in qualitative standard of learning; the outcome which is poor academic performance almost in all levels of the country educational stage have created a vortex of 'sicky' national concern.

Teacher is a very important resource in any educational system. According to [14], the most important educational resource is teacher. Good buildings, good environment and equipment, special services and others can provide favourable learning but the learning experiences must be directed by competent teachers [34]. The success of any teaching and learning process which influences students' academic performance depends on how effective and efficient the teachers are [38]. Teachers' influence is always felt in every aspect of the society. No nation ever rises above the quality of its teacher illustrates the pivotal position teacher occupies in the society [31]. The quality of a teacher has a positive correlation with student achievement in school [16]. [17] said teachers touch the lives of children with varying ability levels, including those with significant disadvantages.

The low academic performance of students in Nigeria could be attributed to low quality of teachers [34]. In a related issue [12] believed with other scholars that students' achievement is determined by a high quality teacher. [20] agreed that teacher has positive effects on students learning. [2] argued that the quality of education and performance of students depends on the teachers.

In view of the importance of the teacher in our educational system this paper will therefore consider teachers' self-efficacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as two educational constructs that are germane to teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness is very important to improve students' academic performance in Nigeria.

### **3. TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY**

Teacher self-efficacy is the beliefs a teacher has about his own perceived capability in undertaking certain teaching tasks. [26] said is the beliefs a teacher has about his or her ability to accomplish a specific teaching task. [9] a man generally believed to be the first to use this construct defined self-efficacy as the set of beliefs a person holds regarding his or her own capabilities to produce desired outcomes and influence events that affect his or her life. Teachers' self-efficacy is the set of beliefs a

teacher holds regarding his or her own abilities and competences to teach and influence student behaviour and achievement regardless of outside influences or obstacle [41].

Teachers in Nigeria should have a high self-efficacy by believing that all students are teachable irrespective of their background. [37]was of the view that teachers with a high level of teacher self-efficacy have been revealed to be more resilient in their teaching and may persist in difficult time to assist all students reach their academic potential. Self –efficacy will always affects teachers' level of efforts and persistence when learning difficult tasks[26]. According to [10], teacher who has no trust his or her efficacy will try to avoid dealing with academic problems and instead turn his or her effort inward to relieve his or her emotional distress. Teacher must have trust in his or her ability teach any aspect of the subject curriculum for students to understand.

#### 4. PCK

PCK is an educational construct that any effective teacher must adequately possessed to improve students' academic performance. [23]underscored this construct as a characteristic of teacher knowledge of how subject matter should be taught. These author further said PCK embodied a unique form of teacher professional knowledge. PCK is unique and for professional teachers because it guides the teachers' actions when dealing with subject matter in the classroom [45]. It is a specific and unique body of knowledge a teacher required to successfully perform teaching within complex and varied context [36].[27]said PCK is ability to combine knowledge of a specific discipline along with teaching of that discipline. He further stressed the need for the teacher to be able to blend content knowledge with the pedagogical. If academic performance of students will improve there is the need for the teachers to be sound both in content and pedagogical knowledge which is PCK.

PCK helps the teachers' knowledge of the curriculum, the knowledge of learning difficulties of students, student's misconceptions, the knowledge of instructional strategies and activities [15];[44]. PCK is an important resource for teachers engaging in formative assessment[18].

#### 5. TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Teacher's effectiveness depends on many factors which might be difficult to measure however an effective teacher could be known by the following according to [42]:

- Instructional effectiveness
- Uses of assessment for student learning
- Positive learning environment and
- Personal quality of the teacher

Being able to use different method of teaching in a lesson and know when to change from one method to another is a good characteristic of an effective teacher. Assessment is a key element in student learning and teacher must be able to use this assessment very well [4]. If a teacher play his or her role very well as the manager of his or her class he or she will be able to know the right time to assess the students and the right type of assessment to be giving. Learning environment is very important and effective teach should know this and be able to control his or her environment through good classroom management. Creating classroom environments that promote positive cultures with healthy interactions can motivate students to channel their energies and desires to reach their goals [28].

An effective teacher will be a teacher with high self-efficacy and adequate pedagogical content knowledge this is the situation of teachers in Finnish educational system. According to [22], the content knowledge for pedagogy should be sufficiently broad so that teachers are able to guide the development of their pupils as extensively as possible.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

From this review it is obvious that students' academic performance in Nigerian schools is not encouraging from decades ago and teachers have lots of roles to play to improve it. The paper highlighted position teacher occupies as important resourc in Nigerian educational system. Two important educational constructs, teachers' self-efficacy and PCK was seen as very important to the effectiveness of any classroom teacher. Both constructs are very important because through these teachers are more resilient in their teaching and persist in difficult time to assist all students reach their academic potential. Also helps teachers' knowledge of the curriculum, the knowledge of studentslearningdifficulties, student's misconceptions and many more.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of what has been discussed above, the following will help improve the quality of our teachers and thereby help to improve students' academic performance in Nigerian schools:

- Teachers should have confidence in their ability to teach any topic within their specialized field and should not see any student as unteachable no matter the circumstance of that student.
- Our teacher training institutions should lean from Finland teacher education of how pedagogy is central to teacher training. In view of this there should be a better way of accessing pre-service teachers apart from the teaching practice exercise.
- Nigerian teachers should be given both short and long term in-service training in country like Finland who has a world record of teacher excellence through training and dedication of their teachers.
- Workshop, conferences and seminars should always be organized teachers of all categories on the importance of teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

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