

Building Capacity for Student-Teachers through the Development of Affective Traits and Dispositions

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Abstract

Building capacity for student- teachers in the area of affective traits and dispositions has become increasingly important for effective teaching and learning in the 21st Century. This important area of teacher training has been neglected over the years. Affective variables, most educators concede, are important. Students' attitudes towards learning, for example, play a major role in how much learning those students subsequently pursue. The values students have regarding truthfulness, honesty, humility, co-operation and integrity shape their daily conduct. And students' self-esteem influences almost everything they do. There is little doubt, therefore that the affective status of students should concern all educators. The paper discusses this important element in teacher training and development which is crucial for effective teaching/learning. To develop professional teachers who can play the crucial role in the sustainable development of society, the paper advocates for the inclusion of a relevant course for imparting requisite affective traits and dispositions to student- teachers for a more inclusive and effective learning.

Keywords: capacity building, student-teachers, education, development, affective traits.

INTRODUCTION

Affective variables, most educators agree are important for learning. Students' attitudes towards learning usually play a major role in how much learning those students subsequently pursue. The values and ideals students have regarding truthfulness, honesty and integrity shape their daily conduct. And students' self-esteem influences almost everything they do. There is little doubt, therefore that the affective status of students should concern all educators. According to Rimland (2013) affective domain deals with attitudes, values and emotions. It is often referred to as the "valuing" domain. *The Chronicle of Higher Education (2005)* defined dispositions as values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviours towards students' families, colleagues and communities. These dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, faith, enthusiasm, responsibility and social justice. Other affective traits as listed in the Continuous Assessment booklet of the basic and secondary schools in Nigeria are punctuality, humility, perseverance, co-operation, tolerance and so on. However, these affective traits, even though listed are neither taught nor assessed in the education system.

Popham (2009) asserted that fewer classroom teachers actually assess the affective status of their

students. He argued that affective status of school students is in every bit as important as the cognitive domain. Pierre and Oughton (2007) have also observed that the affective domain is the gateway to learning. However, they wonder why over the years, the cognitive and psychomotor domains have taken precedence in classroom instruction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the Nigerian educational system, little is done in the teaching and assessment of the affective characteristics of both trainee teachers and students. The situation has led to an unbalanced development of teachers and students alike. Research in the areas of teaching and learning have established clear linkages between affective traits/ dispositions and learning (Fraser, 1994; Ormrod, 1999; McMillan, 2004; Popham, 2009 and Agih & Jonah-Eteli, 2011). Students are more proficient at problem solving when they enjoy what they are doing. Also, students who are in a good mood and emotionally involved are more likely to pay attention to information, remember it, rehearse it meaningfully, and apply it. Teachers know that students who are confident about their ability to learn, who like the school subjects they study, who have a positive attitude towards learning, who respect others, and who show concern for others are much more likely to be motivated and involved in learning (McMillan, 2004). However, what is

interesting about students' affective dispositions is that, despite research evidence which shows positive relationship between the two, there is very little, if any, a systematic assessment of the affective domain in the classroom. In truth, few classroom teachers give explicit attention to influencing their students' attitudes and values. This paper therefore presents a theoretical perspective on the need to teach and assess the affective traits and dispositions of trainee teachers for effective service delivery in the system.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper will be very relevant to all stakeholders in the education industry such as teachers, pupils/students, curriculum planners and the ministry of education. The recommendations of this paper, if implemented will help to build capacity for trainee teachers and students by way of enhancing effective teaching/ learning. More so, since education is an index of measuring development, the submissions of this paper will in the long run promote sustainable development in the education sector and national development in general. Finally, the study will also be useful to stimulate quality education which has the advantage of alleviating poverty.

The Domains of Learning

Bloom (1956/1976) introduced the taxonomy of instructional objectives in three domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) and emphasized the importance of the affective in the learning process. Woolfork (1998) expanded on the relationship among the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains. Alexander (2003) reiterated the strong ties between cognitive / affective attributes of learners and how these attributes impact the acquisition and comprehension of knowledge and information. Further categorization of the three domains of learning is as follows:

1. Cognitive domain- relating to or involving intellectual activity
2. Affective domain- relating to or influencing emotions, feelings and attitudes.
3. Psychomotor domain- relating to motor action proceeding from mental activity

The domains of learning as shown are interdependent. This is more evident between the cognitive and affective domains. For this reason, according to Olatunji (2013), focusing on cognitive constructs to the exclusion of affective construct can only unavoidably lead to an incomplete educational experience for learners. And in his opinion, this has been the situation for some time. The implication of this, among other things is that we have students with advanced knowledge of their specific fields and with great abilities but with little or no regard for their professions or the ethical standards that govern them.

Educators can only foster the desired positive change in learners' dispositions, attitudes, values and ethical perspectives by obtaining necessary information through a diligent and consistent assessment of the affective domain. Incidentally, this is the domain that has been mostly neglected over the years (Olatunji, 2013).

Taxonomy of Affective Traits and Dispositions

Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964) categorized the five levels of affective domain as, "receiving, responding, valuing, organization and characterization" respectively. The receiving level is characterized as the learner becomes aware of the topic, stimuli, event or issue and is willing and ready to learn about it. This is achieved by attending relevant classes and concentration. The second level, "responding" ranges from compliance by voluntary response to having a sense of satisfaction in doing what is required through class participation and obedience to class rules and regulations. The third level, "valuing" is where learners voluntarily manifest behaviours that are consistent with certain beliefs- kindness, punctuality, obedience, respect and others. Students also demonstrate this trait when they consistently allocate time to meet academic obligations, when they practice safety habits while learning and so on. The fourth level, "organization" is shown when learners organize new information or experiences into existing value system. The last level, "characterization" is when students have fully internalized a set of values resulting in new and consistent attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Affective learning inculcates the values and virtues of honesty, enthusiasm, faith, discipline patience, perseverance, tolerance, etc. to the learners. Accordingly, affective educational outcomes that focus on individual attitudes, feelings and positive dispositions must be acknowledged and integrated into the curriculum of education institutions. Evidence that such outcomes are lacking, but required, in education can be found in the soft skill shortage among employees in the workplace (Clark, 2005). According to him, soft skills are important to productivity, employee satisfaction, a healthy workplace, and ultimately, economic success for society. These skills include self-awareness, analytical thinking, leadership skills, team-building, flexibility, acceptance of diversity, the ability to communicate effectively, creativity, problem-solving skills, listening skills, diplomacy and change-readiness.

Enormous shortage of these skills has been observed to be prevalent in Nigeria within the public and private sectors. This is traceable to the near neglect in developing the affective domain of students in the education system.

Rationale for the Development of Affective Traits and Dispositions in Students

According to Stiggins (2005: 199-200), “motivation and desire represents the very foundation of learning. If students do not want to learn, there will be no learning. Desire and motivation are not academic achievement characteristics, they are affective characteristics”. If this is true, then the only avenue of working on learners’ desire and motivation has long been neglected in the educational system. Nolting (2007) pointed out that performance in Mathematics has almost as much to do with students’ attitudes and beliefs as it has to do with their mathematics knowledge. Mathematics and the sciences have for many years been seen as dreaded areas by many students and the situation is still the same. More often than not, the blame is on the “innocent” students while not many are ready to admit the fact that the curriculum is lopsided and the students’ negative attitude could also be due to this (Olatunji, 2013).

Popham (2011) argued that the reason why such affective variables like students’ attitudes, interest and values are important is because they typically influence future behaviour. Griffith and Nguyen (2006) precisely liken the cognitive domain when focused upon alone in the curriculum at the expense of the affective domain to a skeleton without the skin. Regrettably, that is what the education curriculum has been over the years.

Similarly, Agih and Jonah-Eteli (2011) had argued that the moral health and social progress of society will improve if the affective domain of school children is properly assessed. Accordingly, they advocated for the development of the affective domain of primary and secondary school students through adequate assessment of affective instruction. The prevalent cases of youth restiveness, cultism in schools, “boko haram” in the North East of Nigeria are all indications of poor handling of affective traits and dispositions in the school system. They further remarked that if governments and other relevant agencies spend more in developing the affective characteristics of children while in school, the benefit will be spending less in buying guns and security in the future.

Olatunji (2013) observed that education is meant to equip the learner for citizenship and citizenship precludes an individual who is not just able to read, write, carry out mathematical operations, think critically, be an effective employee or employer, but also possess a general sense of social responsibility. However, looking at the products of the educational system, it is difficult to say whether the citizenship goal of the system has been achieved. This may be so because the only viable means of achieving this- the teaching and assessment of affective characteristics is

not receiving the necessary attention it deserves in the system.

The affective domain is important to examine because Rimland (2013) asserted that proper assessment of the affective domain is as vital to increasing learning as assessment of the cognitive domain. She further reiterated that, “in fact, assessment of the affective domain may at times be more important than the cognitive; because it can help an instructor intervene with students who tend to ‘give up on themselves’ in the classroom”. This seems especially true when dealing with students who may have one type of anxiety or the other with respect to learning. Certain anxieties in learning have been observed to have threatened students’ ability to study and complete tasks successfully.

Other benefits include:

- ❖ Affective traits are essential for providing students with the life skills they need (faith, justice, gratitude, co-operation, tolerance, etc) as earlier stated in parts of this text;
- ❖ They are able to spur students to aspire higher in education and in life general (motivation, perseverance, patience, etc);
- ❖ They are the foundation of succeeding societies- According to Peale (1938), the world is built on moral foundations. Iheoma (1995) in Agih and Jonah-Eteli (2010) equally observed that what matters most to a nation’s well being is its spiritual and moral health. Everything else which a nation strives for depends on this: whether it is national integration, political stability, economic development or educational advancement.
- ❖ Society is usually developed by people with excellent character traits as clearly documented in history.
- ❖ If students imbibe these attributes early while in school, they are more likely to be guided by them in their work life and in other social engagements;
- ❖ They help to promote better leadership qualities in youths; and subsequently assist them to become better political, economic, religious, social, etc. leaders in the society.

Assessment of Affective Traits

McMillan (2004) identified three feasible methods of assessing affective traits and dispositions in the classroom. These methods are:

1. Teacher observation
2. Student self report and Peer ratings

He observed that because affective traits are not directly observable, they must be inferred from behaviour or what students say about themselves and others. However, there are some sophisticated psychological measures to assess many affective traits; they are not commonly used by classroom teachers. He gave three concerns to be considered

while assessing affective traits: First, since emotions and feelings can change quickly, to obtain valid information will require several assessments over a length of time; the use of different approaches to measure the affective trait in question as much as possible; and to decide whether individual or group results is what is needed.

Consequences of Neglecting the Affective Traits in Learning

The consequences of not sufficiently developing the affective traits and dispositions of students are many. These include:

- i. Lack of life skills such as faith, justice, tolerance, hope, honesty and others (these traits are crucial for the sustainable development of society);
- ii. High incidence of indiscipline which manifest in impatience, selfishness, cultism in the society/school, youth restiveness and general children delinquency;
- iii. Hinders effective teaching and learning;
- iv. Lack of good health where anxiety, depression, discouragement, absence of faith (even for the church goers), ingratitude, worry, uncontrollable anger, etc hold sway;
- v. It leads to high proportion of adults with negative and disagreeable mental attitude- these group of people usually bred disharmony and lack of creativity in the work place and wherever they are found;
- vi. A grave consequence of neglecting this trait for the youths and elderly is that, it dampens enthusiasm, curtails initiative, overthrows self control, subdues imagination, undermines the desire for co-operation, and makes people intolerant and sullen, thereby leading to failure.

THE WAY FORWARD

Research has established clear linkages between affective traits/ dispositions and learning (Fraser, 1994 Ormrod, 1999; McMillan, 2004 and Agih & Jonah-Eteli, 2011). Students are more proficient at problem solving when they enjoy what they are doing. Also, students who are in a good mood and emotionally involved are more likely to pay attention to information, remember it, rehearse it meaningfully, and apply it. This paper therefore advocates for the inclusion of relevant Courses in the curriculum of teacher education, both at the Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in the Universities. This will develop the requisite knowledge and skills needed for a more inclusive and effective learning.

Similarly, affective traits should be considered in grading students' performance. This will require a disposition and affective checklist to be included in the assessment process and submitted for

consideration as part of the admissions and general evaluation process in the education system.

In the opinion of Olatunji (2013), in restoring the balance between the affective and the cognitive domains in education, some learning and teaching activities can be used. These include problem based learning, group analysis of case studies, perspective sharing and reflection and the use of the multimedia to trigger response. These activities, if well handled and integrated by educators will go a long way in fostering the teaching and assessment of affective traits and dispositions.

Also, institutional administrators, educationists will need to work together and plan for regular workshops, conferences and seminars in the relevant areas to realize this goal. Research should be encouraged to further develop this important aspect of learning. Similarly, educational psychologists, evaluators and instructional designers should not use the affective domain only for a student's motivation to learn, but consider how to engage students in deeper learning through the use of this domain with appropriate pedagogy and evaluation methods.

Finally, more specialists should be engaged to develop the requisite capacity in teaching, measurement/ assessment and other areas of pedagogical development in teacher education. The relevant education agencies will need to provide in-service training to teachers and other means to increase the number of personnel needed to provide this aspect of education. Certain incentives for teachers should equally be considered to encourage the development of personnel in this area of affective education and affective assessment in the educational system.

CONCLUSION

To develop an intellectual understanding (cognitive), there is the need to develop emotional feeling (affective) in the phenomenon. This is typical of the overlap that exists in the teaching/ learning process. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) had defined health as made up of mental (cognitive), physical (psychomotor) and social health (affective) for anyone to be a healthy person. Thus, building capacity for student- teachers in this regard has become increasingly important for effective teaching and learning in the 21st Century. This important area of teacher training has been neglected over the years in the development of necessary affective traits and dispositions in trainee teachers.

In "Learning for an Unknown Future" Barnett (2004) argued that a being capable of thriving with uncertainty needs dispositions. Among such dispositions are carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, resilience, confidence, patience, hope, courage and

stillness. The reality of this submission can be seen in the common cases of graduates with certificates showing brilliant academic attainments, but who are found wanting in terms of acceptable character traits, and so cannot perform excellently as expected in the society. There is little doubt, therefore that the affective status of students should concern all educators. Educators should therefore be concerned that affective education is a necessary condition for effective education.

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