Bridging the Gap between Behaviourist Theories of Learning and Primary Education Practice

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Abstract
Erecting a solid architectural edifice that will stand the test of time and effectively serve its intended purpose involves two equally important stages; the one is developing a carefully designed and thoroughly examined building plan that will serve as blueprint and, the other is, embarking on actual construction works strictly tailored to specifications made in the template. Durable edifices, hence, result from well-planned and effectively guided construction works and, as a typical process of 'building lives', so do effective primary education systems. Two very vital steps - determining appropriate theories and, acting strictly in line with the stipulations of the same, are of utmost importance. This paper, therefore, considers educational theories as the inevitable matrix that shapes educational practices. It identifies feminization of teaching as an extra-theoretical educational practice and suggests solutions for same. The paper concludes that, like any building project without preconceived architectural plan, any educational enterprise that has no sound theoretical basis leaves everything virtually to chance and gives absolutely no clues as to what the end product will be or look like.

Keywords: education, theory, practice, and educational theory.

Introduction

Educating primary school pupils is, in many ways, like commencing a colossal building project. Both require that certain vital decisions and preparations be made from the earliest stage. The builder must know exactly what he wants the building to be like and must be aware of what it will take, as well as how, to achieve that. Nobody begins to build a house, for instance, without first determining the number of rooms it will comprise, where the living room, sitting room, kitchen, and the rest would be located and whether it will be a story building or a bungalow. These issues must be settled from the onset. The reason for this is simple: the kind of preparations and provisions that must be made at the planning stage depend largely on what sort of building is to be erected and what purpose it is intended to serve.

As builders of moral character, intellectual skills, and physical abilities, educationists have need of useful operational guide, if they must succeed. Education, as a purposeful venture, should be able to predict or predetermine what those who are committed to it would

eventually become or be able to do at the end of the whole exercise. Educational practices should be based on thoroughly verified principles, to guarantee that learners will ultimately turn out with definite, premeditated intellectual capacities, behavioural patterns, and physical traits. This is what makes educational theories extremely important in every educational enterprise.

The predominant argument in this paper is that a qualitative educational system would be difficult, if not impossible, to build without good and appropriate educational theories as foundation. In fact, educational practices that adhere to no specific theories are pictured here as spontaneous construction works that were neither considered nor provided for in the building plan and which could, no doubt, be hazardous to the entire project. These writers seek to promote the harmonization of learning theories and practice in order to ensure that learners' participation in educational processes will result in their becoming the exact product the educational system actually designed and desires them to be.

Sociological Perspective of Education
It is appropriate to begin by explaining what the term 'education' is. But, for want of space, these writers will highlight only the sociological dimension which is the aspect that tallies with the set of theories they are considering in this paper.
Sociologists all agree that education is an agent of the society by which its members are initiated into her established, peculiar ways of life. They all believe that every society's whole way of life or culture – the collection of ideas, values, habits, skills, and beliefs of its members are learned and shared. The conscientious efforts each society makes to ensure that its younger generation learns or acquires these shared values and habits it would need to function effectively as members is what they term 'education' (Okenwa, 2018). Frankena captures this succinctly in Amaele (2010) by stating that education is the process of the acculturation and socialization of the younger by the older members of any society, which enables the former to acquire or develop social capabilities required of them to function effectively in the community.

Theory and Practice Expatiated
The English word 'theory' is a derivative of the Greek 'theoria'. The ancient Greek meaning of theory is literally rendered as "looking at, viewing, or beholding" (Wikipedia, n.d). In modern usage, though, the term has taken new shades of meaning and this makes it difficult for a single definition to suffice its explanation in this paper. Nevertheless, the term may, on technical grounds, be reduced to or associated with, reflective or speculative apprehension of natural things; or as a thoughtful and studied explanation of the way nature generally works. On that note, Akumah (2008:15) defines theory as "the science of describing and explaining the nature of things as well as predicting future occurrences." He further explained that "theory is human construction and abstractions developed from past and present praxis which in turn opens the way for a new praxis" (2008:26).

Theory has also been described as a statement of general principles adequately supported by data offered as an explanation of phenomena. More specifically, Jaja and Zeb-Obipi (2005: 18) define theory as "a reasoned supposition put forward to explain facts or events."
Similarly, the English word 'practice' originated from 'praxis', the Greek term for 'doing'; it is used in contrast to theory which, ordinarily, does not involve any form of doing other than itself (Wikipedia, n.d). The fact that practice is a contrast of theory is more pronounced in Hornby (2010) as operation or the exact way of doing something, in contrast to theory. It is therefore clear that while theory refers to a body of verified knowledge or facts, practice

refers to operation or performance. In view of the foregoing, Wikipedia (n.d) points out that to theorize is to develop or generate a body of knowledge and these writers retort that to practice is to take actions, perform tasks, or do an activity in a carefully studied and well apprehended manner. One simple illustration of the difference between theory and practice is taken from the discipline of medicine. While medical theory endeavours to apprehend the nature and causes sickness and health, medical practice attempts to cure people. Though these things are somewhat related, they really can be independent of each other since it is possible for someone to carry out a medical research without getting anyone cured, just as it is possible for someone to cure people through medical practice without explaining how the cure came about (Wikipedia, n.d). In another example, Akumah (2008:14) summarizes the difference between theory and practice by stating that "theory is the intellectual knowledge while practice is the application of the knowledge to the solution of practical problems … Theory is the foundation and practice is the structure built on it."

Social Learning Theory

Theories of learning basically attempt to explain what learning is all about and to describe what happens when it takes place. Though they agree that learning is particularly difficult to be directly studied, most learning theorists agree that learning has to do with an observable change in behaviour which indicates a constant improvement in performance or potential. Among the many learning theories in vogue, this paper will consider only one, due to space constraint.

The Social Learning Theory (also known as Observational or Imitation Theory) is the belief that children learn as they interact with, observe and imitate others in their environment, especially adults (Aleyidemo, n.d). The origin of this theory has been traced to Clark Hull who, way back in the 1930s, in seminar lectures at Yale University related learning theory to psychoanalysis. Albert Bandura has, however, done much work to popularize the theory; he effected a major change by introducing a cognitive dimension to it in the 1970s, emphasizing that behaviours acquired verbally or visually from another individual could literally be duplicated (Okenwa, 2018).

Social learning theorists all share the idea that personality is learned. They posit that children acquire their gender identities and gender-role preferences in basically two ways: direct tuition and observational learning. Direct tuition involves the process of "teaching young children how to behave by reinforcing 'appropriate' behaviours and by punishing or otherwise discouraging inappropriate conduct", while observational learning, on the other hand, occurs as "children adopt the attitudes and behaviours of a variety of same-sex models" (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007: 531).

The import of the Social Learning Theory is that since primary school pupils constitute of boys and girls who would become adult men and women in the future; they need to relate or interact with both male and female teachers who would vividly portray various adult character and behavioural traits they ought to acquire.

An Incongruent Primary Education Practice

The practice of hiring more and more female teachers at the expense of their male counterparts is fast becoming a norm. The result of this is that there is a wide and alarming disparity between the proportions of men and women who teach in public primary schools today. This anomaly has been identified as a global phenomenon; from North America to Europe, Asia to Australia, South America to Africa and the Middle East, elementary schools are turning to a 'no man's land'.

In the United States of America, for instance, male teachers consisted of less than a quarter of all teachers in 2006, as reported by the National Education Association (NEA). This report is confirmed by an announcement by the NEA President that the country is witnessing significant shortage of male teachers which is particularly acute at the primary level, where only a paltry nine per cent of the teachers are males (Snyder in Okenwa, 2018).

A news headline from the Korean Times which claims that the numbers of male public primary and secondary school teachers are getting fewer by the year tells a representative story of the situation in Asia. In that story, Suh-young (2012) reveal that the percentage of female teachers at primary, middle and high schools has risen tremendously within the past ten years. At the primary level, in particular, female teachers exceeded 80% in metropolitan cities including Seoul (80%), Daejeon (84.4%), and Busan (80.4%).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, in another instance, indicate that only 21% of teachers in public primary schools are males (Nelson, 2011). Still on the Australian axis, reports from New Zealand disclose that the proportion of male primary school teachers dropped from 24.8% in 2004 to 16.5% in 2013, according to Crayton-Brown (2015).

In Africa, not much is currently being said or done about this colossal problem, though there are serious indications that the continent is not spared of the menace. In Nigeria, for instance, a just concluded study reveals that the Rivers State's public primary school system is feminized, with female teachers constituting of 63.3% of the teaching crew. The study predicts that the situation will worsen in the years ahead, as far fewer men than women are pursuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in the state (Okenwa in Osaat & Okenwa, 2018). Another study conducted in Aba-North Local Government Area of Abia State reveals that, of the three hundred and ninety-six (396) teachers in the twenty-nine public primary schools in the locality, only nineteen (19) are males; an indication that male teachers constitute only 4.2%.This implies that each male teacher in Aba-North Area of Abia State, Nigeria has no less than 21 female counterparts to put up with and this is quite outrageous (Okenwa, 2012). A similar report from Uyo, the capital city of neighbouring Akwa Ibom State, reveals that male teachers make up only 13.3% of the public primary school work-force there (Uyo Metropolis), while the rest (86.7%) are females (Okoro & Uwah, 2013). These three cases indicate that the gender-gap among public primary school teachers is real, at least, in some parts of Nigeria.

There is also a report by Africa Review in Osaat and Okenwa (2018) that 82% of public primary schools teachers in Congo Brazzaville are women who are now being preferred to their male counterparts.

Bridging the Gap
To 'bridge a gap' is an idiomatic expression for correcting or eradicating the difference between two things. In this case, our concern is to synchronize theory with practice in the field of education and we are focusing on behavioural theories of learning and the feminization of teaching in primary schools. This paper identifies two major gaps between the two as follows: 'information gap' and 'policy gap'.

The Information Gap

This first gap arises as a result of the fact that a lot of people are either completely uninformed or, at best, misinformed. Those who promote or advocate for the feminization of teaching are folks with the stereotypical view that teaching, at primary school level particularly, is women's work (Rich in Osaat & Okenwa, 2018). There is no doubt that men generally find it difficult to cope with this erroneous position. Many young men who

contemplate making primary school teaching a career worry about a lot of challenges they would face as minority, while those who are already in the field confess that they are grappling with many of it. Describing the feeling as being in a feminine territory, Bradley in Okenwa (2018) told MenTeach that as a male primary school teacher, he has always been in the minority. But, the question is: is teaching typically women's work? Is there any ancient historical proof or theoretical support for this? A frank answer to these questions, based on a close look at the three most popular systems of education in Africa for instance, is a capital NO!

The great historian of education, Fafunwa (1974), delineates the basic education stage of the traditional African education system into nursery and primary settings. Picturing a nursery setting in which mothers had an upper hand, Fafunwa (1974:3) writes:

> At this initial stage, the child is more intimately involved with his mother than his father. This closeness of the child to his mother from birth to the age of five or six is universal because it is the mother, not the family who rears the child at this early stage of his development.

But, commenting further about what happens when the child reaches primary education age (from age six), he notes that "as the child grows older he becomes even more curious about things around him; he gradually realizes that there are other worlds outside his mother's own. He notices others around him and watches their activities" (Fafunwa, 1974:5). During this period, "the full training is a cooperative effort in which members of each of the more inclusive groups must play a part" (Fafunwa, 1974:8). For the next ten years or thereabout, boys are rigorously trained by their fathers in farm work, while girls undergo home training under their mothers' supervision in the areas of child-care, food preparation, clothe-making, washing of utensils, home-making, etc. (Fafunwa, 1974).

Speaking about Islamic or Qu'ranic education, historians assert that at the primary level (*Makaranta Allo*) pupils learn to read and write Arabic texts on wooden slates called *Allo*. The Islamic primary school teachers popularly known as the *Umma* are mostly men, who play multiple roles as custodians, educators, and disciplinarians (Fafunwa, 1974). In the same vein, Kalu (1974) points out that at the inception of Western education in Nigeria, schools were established by Christian missions / voluntary agencies and, unsurprisingly, were staffed mostly by clerics. Then, there were quite a good number of male teachers since men were more in number among the clergy. To check the feminization of teaching currently going on in numerous primary schools across the globe, education authorities and administrators need to be told the simple and unmistakable truth that men do have a unique role to play in educating pupils.

The Policy Gap
This second gap stems from unhealthy, discriminatory policies against men who are interested in teaching in primary schools. There have been instances of bias treatment against male applicants for primary school teaching jobs in different places. Sometime ago, a case was reported in Poway, California which took a whole year of thorough investigation to establish that the district officials deliberately turned down a male applicant for a female counterpart who was less qualified (Habor in Okenwa, 2018). Recently, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Provincial Government in Pakistan approved the Elementary and Secondary Education Department's proposal that only women will henceforth be employed

as public primary school teachers in that province (Ullah in Osaat & Okenwa, 2018).

Conclusion

The stereotype that the primary school teaching job is uniquely a feminine field is a fallacy not supported by any antecedents anywhere. Evidences abound, from the Traditional, Islamic, and Western systems of education in Africa, that primary education has always been the mutual responsibility of adult male and female members of the society. In fact, men have always been fully and actively involved in teaching children for as long as the history of primary education goes.

There is an urgent need to correct the error of equating the primary school with early childhood care institutions that are basically established for care-giving. Osaat and Okenwa (2018) have clarified that "the primary school differs from early childhood care centers in the sense that it begins at the very point (age six) when children generally grapple with gender-typing challenges and, therefore, need same-sex models." It is, therefore, logically on the mark to infer that no gender, in isolation of the other, has all that it takes too effectively and adequately carter for the whole educational needs of pupils – boys and girls.

Recommendations

In view of the fact that behaviourist theories of learning opine that pupils require same-sex adults for effective grooming, socialization, and modeling, it is recommended that:

1. Government should take an affirmative action that will guarantee a fixed quota of primary school staff to be filled by men, say 40%;

2. Government should roll out sufficient incentives such as scholarships, to motivate more young men to study education courses at university and college levels to increase the number of potential primary school teachers in Nigeria;

3. government should improve the status of primary teachers by an upward review of their salaries as well as eradicate the long-standing tradition of not paying teachers' salaries as at when due, which is one of the factors that make the job unattractive to men.

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