

Character of Classroom Media as a Catalyst for Effective Teaching

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Abstract: Empirical evidence points to the fact that students who perform well interact more with educational media in their environments. Provision of both conventional and traditional media facilitates balanced learning and therefore better school achievement. Over emphasis on one form of media and general neglect to other forms of media in the classroom leads to topsided learning media in the classroom forms an integral part of the learning process. Multisensory approach in teaching and learning therefore ensures that individual differences that exist in the learning in the learning environment are considered and catered for. It's against this background that this paper set out to provide an analysis of the salient features of classroom media. Character of classroom media play a pivot role in the overall success of instruction. The paper interrogates the type of classroom media with specific experiences drawn from the Kenya education system. It therefore examines the legal foundation that buttress the selection, the distribution and use of media in schools. The paper identifies cost effectiveness, accessibility, relevance as the main characteristics that defines suitable media for use in the classroom. The paper equally examines the major experienced impediments for the selected media to acquire the character as envisaged by the classroom teacher. Such obstacles include but not limited to mismatch in knowledge and skill, infrastructural inadequacies, frequent policy shifts in media production, distribution and use in schools. The paper therefore concludes that no one media is special in all learning environments. Reflection is key in selection and use of media to take care of diverse environmental conditions for effective learning. More importantly, media selected ought to reflect the fast changing technological for learners to acquire right knowledge skills to remain relevant and have a competitive niche locally and on global labour market.

Keywords: Instructional media; media character; classroom environment; effective teaching.

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Introduction

Empirical research findings in child learning suggests that the child's happiest moment is when he or she starts attending school. To sustain the momentum, students should therefore experience innovative technology supported learning environments and school as a micro society should be home away from home for the learners to achieve quality education. World Bank report (1999) confirms that Quality education requires efficient systems that would provide supportive learning environment, motivated staff with mastery of the subject matter

and adequate access to resource. UNESCO (2005) on the other hand provides empirical evidence on the determinants of educational performance which overwhelmingly shows that at given levels of expenditures an increase in the amount of resources used lead to an increase in educational performance. The use of computers in schools unfortunately seems to be guided more by school administrators rather than technical and professional input of teachers.

Teachers use of ICTs in classrooms is rare and mainly attributed to resistance due to lack of knowledge or because their participation at planning is neglected. This is a major undoing in most classrooms developing countries and a common feature in Kenya that critically undermines instructional character of classroom resources leading to mismatch between resources acquired and teachers motivation to use media. Aggarwal (1995) and Pelgrim (2001) says that technological escalation has bestowed upon education proliferation of equipment and materials which can assist in the reorganization and redefinition of educational experiences. They further quip that media support multiplicity of cognitive styles and learning behaviour unlike situations where content is presented to learners without the use of any form of learning aid.

The modern form of technology can be used to translate virtually any content into another media making it more interesting and accessible to all kinds of learners. Otunga, Odeo and Barasa (2011) attest to the fact that education technology breeds numerous benefits to classroom learning experiences. Some advantages include; that the learner reconstructs meaning during instruction not only to benefit knowledge wise but also to be able to relate this to real life situations approximately. In the past, most teaching depended almost entirely on verbal communication between teacher and student from printed materials.

Today's students are learning facts, skills and attitudes from pictures, television, recorded words, programmed lessons and other media. Once technology enters the school building, dramatic renovations usually begin. Sometimes educators ask the question: how can technology help the learner? Technology is catalyst for educational change (Zhao and Frank, 2003). Its absence would make a significance difference to the educational process. It's against this background that the definition of character of instructional media is derived.

Types of Classroom Media

Instructional media and resources exist in two forms: Human resources and non-human resources. The non-human resources, comprise of teaching materials, which are considered in two major categories; the print and the non-print materials (Pollard 2002, Otunga, 2010). This is also categorical as people, buildings and equipment. The teacher as a resource requires professional support and awareness of educational possibilities through adequate pre and in-service preparation but significantly, school quality can only improve through changes in teacher behaviour. The rising number of students in every school placed a heavy burden on limited teaching staff. But what is important is the moral component of the teacher. Passion driven teacher turns the media into a relevant catalyst for learning. The teacher therefore remains the single most important resource in the instructional process. An innovative teacher catalyses learning to the level and reach of the learner in the classroom.

Classroom media can be grouped as traditional media or new generation instructional media. Traditional media include. The chalkboard and human resources. New generation media comprise of electronic media such as projectors, computers, TV, radio. This can further be sub- divided into various categories as; Visual media, Audio visual media and Audio media. Media can also be classified as non-projected media or projected media.

Self-instructional Learning materials play a central role in the overall Instructional process, in this case the real classroom teacher assumes a counseling or facilitation role in the Instructional process. The learner is therefore exposed to multisensory framework for efficient and effective learning.

A combination of media under print, audiovisual and computer based materials is used to achieve a range of objectives in learning (Omaiyo, 2015). The effectiveness of text books as vehicles for instruction can be increased through use of a suitable study guides which structure the learning process. The process of vetting and selection of course books in Kenya however under the new education program; the competence based curriculum has witnessed a number of hiccups. The question of quality has cropped up, for example poor print, wrong examples and illustrations and other glaring omissions. Careful selection process is the sure way to providing quality instruction in the classroom. A child miseducated is a child lost. And for generations, the impact can be felt. Instructional resources design and acquisition process require meticulous and professional precision touch to ensure right concepts are taught to children in schools.

Policy considerations in Kenya

Since independence a number of commissions have been set up to reenergize the education sector in Kenya. They include: the Kenya Education Commission of 1964 (The Ominde Commission), The National Committee on education objectives and policies of 1976 (Gachathi Report), the presidential working party on the second university in Kenya of 1981 (Mackay Commission Report), the working party on education and Training for the next decade and beyond of 1998 (The Kamunge Report); The Commission of Inquiry into the education system in Kenya of 1999 (Koech Report) and the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005. In the vision 2030, education is considered as a social pillar and its economic aspects touch on service delivery and value addition (Rok, 2005, 2010).

To accomplish the vision of the above policies, the government has introduced a complex, integrated process involving people, devices and organizations for analyzing problems and devising, implementing and evaluating solutions to those problems through education technology. In this, the solutions to problems take the form of all the learning resources that are designed and utilized to bring about learning.

Policy formulation is the right procedure for a guided process. However, policy formulation that is not supported by budgetary allocation has continued to be the major undoing to achieving credible resource supported teaching and learning in Kenyan schools. Policy formulation that is not supported by research has also proved to be problematic at implementation. Political patronage and goodwill largely play a significant role in the realization of the actual character of classroom media.

This brings to the fore the challenge of inequalities in the distribution and use of media across the country. Schools located in areas favourable to the ruling regime tend to enjoy the steady supply and the reverse is also evident. Policy formulation and character of classroom media are therefore inherently intertwined in most developing countries.

Kenya in particular, to attain the sustainable development goals by 2030, it has made a long term commitment to increase provision of teaching and learning resources in educational institutions. How far this is to be achieved is left to the imagination of the instructional Technologists.

Key features of classroom media

The following features provide the character and nature of classroom media. Their presence or absence communicates immensely on the inherent dispositions of learning media used in the classroom. They provide the true nature and characteristics of good media to be selected and used in schools.

Cost effectiveness

The media should be affordable to enable the school acquire it for use. If it's too costly, the teacher may avoid selecting it for use. A good teacher can still improvise. This therefore requires that the teacher has the passion for the subject to go an extra mile. Low costs sometimes can also be a danger to quality as witnessed in Kenya at the roll out of competence based curriculum. Some unscrupulous businessmen went into publishing to cash in on ready market hence flooding the market with cheap and low quality materials and equipment.

Accessibility

A good instructional media should be readily available when required. Such media should be functionally sound in both rural and urban curriculum. A good product must maintain market presence when required and in the standard form prescribed by the National Bureau of Standards.

Relevance

Media resources selected should be relevant to the needs of the learner. It should be appropriate for the age, emotional development, ability level and social development of the learner. Such resources should not conflict with the students' cultural and religious background or go against societal norms and values. More importantly it should be relevant to the lesson objectives. Teachers should therefore be reflective in the selection and use.

Unfortunately, some teachers pick on media as prescribed by the syllabus without considering the locale factors. This of course brings to the fore the question of teacher training and grounding in pedagogy. Good teaching will require the teacher to use examples and local materials from within the environmental to make learning relevant and realistic.

Durability and quality

Selected learning resources should meet the standards of quality. For textbooks and journals, the teacher should examine the quality of the content and the binding. For electronic media, the teacher should select branded equipment for quality assurance. It has however been reported through empirical research that due to security situations in some regions, schools opt to buy cheaper and low quality materials with the view that when stolen they could easily replace. A case in point is the Kenyan government lap top projects between 2013 and 2017.

Versatility

The media should be used across the curriculum or be used to teach a variety of subjects and concepts. In the same breadth, a teacher must be proactive to teach all topics with ease to avoid topsided syllabus coverage. A media that is used by different teachers and subjects is more cost effective and therefore brings in the principle of Versatility.

Size of the media

Visual aids should be large enough to enable learners to view them without any difficulties. Graphics such as charts and posters are useful if they are viewed easily from all corners of the classroom.

The aesthetics of the media will further arouse greater learner interest to learn. Teachers should also use learning resource centres established in the schools to develop relevant media to increase learner motivation. A highly motivated learner in the learning process increases participation and reduces incidences of trauncy.

Obstacles to successful use of media and resources

Mismatch in knowledge and skill

Many teachers have inadequate expert knowledge in the use of modern instructional media (Simiyu, 2013). The inability to operate such resources makes it hard to plan to use such media despite the fact that they make learning more effective and efficient. Emancipation in university education is the main reason large number of students are admitted. Large classes encourage super / visual training approaches for teachers. This is arguably a major impediment to effective teaching. The basic education policy of hundred percent transition should not be used to under prepare teachers in Universities and Colleges. Class sizes ought to be respected as per established policy for effecting learning and easy access to media ad resources.

Infrastructural inadequacies

Many schools in developing countries lack adequate classrooms and security to enable them acquire and utilize mediated instructional resources. Dilapited classrooms may equally not support modern instructional resources. In Kenya for example, the implementation of free Primary education and free day Secondary school education has not done much to improve the Infrastructure in schools.

Unclear policy on production, distribution and maintenance

There is relative confusion on distribution of educational media and maintenance in most countries. In Kenya, the distribution has been entrusted on Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD) through the recent reforms as a result of the implementation of the Basic Education Act 2013. Serious discrepancies have been reported and addressed although textbook distribution in schools remain shrouded with suspicion, confusion and lazed with corruption.

Most schools lack electronic media and computer assisted instruction is restricted to students who select the subject. Although the government offers support to schools in establishing computer laboratories, the maintenance is left to the schools. The production of education media in Kenya has also been liberalized. Due to uncoordinated monitoring mechanisms, businessmen have taken advantage and flooded the shops with substandard materials.

Robertson (1997) outlines a number of challenges of using technology in instruction which include: initial costs of instruction increased at the initial stages of buying and installing new technology, including training for personnel to use technology in classroom and for maintenance of the equipment. A significant challenge in most developing countries is the reluctance of many teachers to embrace technology utilization. They also feel the integration of technology is burdensome or frightening. Many teachers still hold the traditional view that a teacher doesn't need media to effectively teach. This remains a paradox that borders an attitudinal configurations. Evidently however, many developing countries still lack the infrastructural framework to institutionalize modern media into schools. This can only be realized if other unfortunate maladies are cured such as corruption and foreign aid dependence syndrome. The prominence of Learning resource centres in Teacher Training colleges and at Educational zonal levels in each Country have significantly diminished.

Staff have been reshuffled or the position of Teacher Advisory Centre (TAC) Tutor been restructured and redesignated by the Teachers' Service Commission and effectively undermining resource based learning in schools.

It is also further claimed to diminish the importance of the teacher. On that media use was likely to replace the classroom teachers. However a lot of work by way of pre-telecast, during and post telecast remains to be done by the teachers. Many gaps are to be filled up by the teachers.

The teacher still occupies the place of importance in the instructional process. In other words, for the success of media use in the classroom, the competence and experience of the teacher is a must. But what is making the classroom teacher feel unsettled? This is the question to be addressed by educationists in the process of improving media education. The government in realization of the role of education in national development should employ media specialists. The technical know how in this regard, is critically lacking in schools. The current reforms in education in Kenya have been silent on strengthening the technical component of media use in schools although it is well documented in Policy.

Learning resource centres would be centres of incubation of new materials and equipment for use in schools. Lack of technical support especially in the use of electronic media and worse still, schools engaging in purchase of media but remain locked in offices since nobody is ready to utilize them remain the two most agonizing hindrance to growth and development of media use in schools.

Conclusion

The future and character of media use is not about one specific media in education. Modern media are highly versatile in their overall evolution. Media in the classroom should reflect the fast changing technological global village framework. Internet infrastructure in particular is viewed as the single most important baseline for effective media use in the classroom today. A paradigm shift is inevitable for media use and overall classroom learning as cloud technology will essentially remove barriers for ease of accessing knowledge without the confine of the Physical Classroom.

The character of classroom media is therefore defined by the quality and readiness of the classroom teacher to embrace and champion the use of a variety of media and resources. More importantly the Governments role in promoting media use remain central, discredited and legally binding. Quality education is therefore a reflection of the level of integration of modern technology in the instructional process. This eventually contributes to the level of development as education acts as an enabler to the overall national development.

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