**Teacher Coaching in Nigeria: A Strategy for Enhancing Teachers’ Instructional Skills and Students’ Language Skills in**

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**Abstract**

In Nigeria, students’ poor academic performance has been recorded at the three levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) of education. The problem is severe particularly in public schools. Studies have shown that teacher coaching has improved teachers’ instructional performance which in turn enhanced the student’ learning outcomes in many countries. However, there is a lack of teacher coaching in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper reviews some previous studies which revealed the importance and effectiveness of teacher coaching. It also reviews the essential requirements such as knowledge and skills for teacher coaching, responsibility for coaches, and coaching process, evaluation and other supports needed for effective teacher coaching. Finally, the paper makes some recommendations on how to implement teacher coaching, particularly in Northern Nigeria in order to improve the students’ learning output.

**Keywords: language skills,** Nigeria, students, teacher-coaching

**Introduction**

In many parts of the world, the Millennium Development Goal of universal quality education especially at the primary level has been achieved in most developed countries. However, the reverse is the case in the Nigerian context. Students’ low performance of performance in all the language skills, particularly reading and writing, at all the levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) has been recorded by various studies. It is observed that many students from all these level leave schools without acquiring the essential skills. For instance, numerous researchers have observed that many Nigerian tertiary students cannot produce good writing in English (Ngadda & Nwoke, 2014). They commit errors like in grammar, punctuations, spelling and tense which are mostly inherited from their primary and secondary schools (Bodunde & Sotiloye, 2013; Theodore, 2013). This has been evident from the WAEC results of some secondary schools in Nigeria where students (larger percentage) fail the English language exam (Odochi Silver & Ephraim, 2012). This hinders them from being productive citizens.

Numerous factors have been identified as responsible for the students’ poor performance such as mother tongue influences, learning environment, poor methods of teaching, lack of good teaching, poor language, the nature of teacher-student interaction were identified as obstacles to the students’ performance in the English language. One factor which has not been properly addressed is outdated and inappropriate teaching method adopted by many teachers. This is mostly due to the lack of sufficient professional training for both pre- and in-service teachers in the country. From our experiences of teaching in Nigeria, we have observed that many teachers in both private and public schools, and from primary to tertiary levels spend many years teaching without the required skills or knowledge any training.

Thus, in order to improve the students’ performance, the study suggests that teachers need to be trained on the effective teaching methods in order to improve the students’ performance. Many studies have discovered the effectiveness of teacher-coaching in improving teachers’ instructional performance which in turn develop students’ literacy. It was observed that local culture and context were powerful factors affecting teachers’ responses to coaching. However, there are limited studies conducted to investigate the coaching of instructors, particularly in reading, its effectiveness, models and attributes as well as its relation to teaching and students’ achievement.

Therefore, the paper reviews empirical evidence that shows the effectiveness of teacher coaching in order to be implemented in Nigeria, particularly in its Northern part. It also unveils the best and effective methods of coaching teachers. To achieve this aim, the paper is divided into the following sections.

**Empirical Studies**

Various studies have been conducted on teacher coaching and have proven its effectiveness in enhancing teachers’ instructional delivery and students’ performance (Bean, Belcastro, Draper, Jackson, Jenkins, & Vandermolen, 2008; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2008; L’Allier, & Elish-Piper, 2006; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain & Lamitina, 2010). For instance, a study conducted by Piper and Zuilkowski (2015) explored teacher coaching in public and non-formal schools in Kenya and to provide the most effective ratios of coaches to teachers in Kenyan schools and discuss how the varying ratios affect the length and quality of coach-teacher interactions. Findings of the study reveal that the school-to-coach ratios 10:1 and 15:1 for the nonformal and public schools respectively. It is also discovered that for both public school tutors and non-formal instructional coaches, those with more teachers did observe more classrooms overall, but made fewer visits per teacher.

Another study by Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain and Lamitina, (2010) explored the relationships between coaching in reading instruction and instruction and the performance of primary grade students in high-poverty schools which are mostly African American in Georgia. The study also investigated specific aspects of coaching that are associated with higher levels of implementation of specific aspects of teaching. Findings of the study show that collaboration with teachers had a significant relationship with the teachers’ small-group work, class management, and effective instruction in third grade. These studies are related to the Nigerian context, which shows that teacher coaching can be effectively implemented in Nigeria.

**What is Teacher Coaching?**

The term Teacher Coaching is defined by various scholars and practitioners. For instance, it is defined as a professional development process with the target of supporting teachers to acquire essential knowledge and skills for effective instruction and improved students’ performance. Coaching provides the additional support needed for teachers to implement various programs or practices in their classrooms (Nowak, 2003). It is also defined as an intensive professional development for teachers which is designed to improve their classroom practices through demonstration, observation, and feedback which in turn develops students’ academic performance (Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain & Lamitina, 2010). Lofthouse, Leat and Towler (2010) describe teachers coaching as a structured, sustained process between two or more professionals to enable them to embed new knowledge and skills from specialist sources in day-to-day practice which it often supports experimentation of new classroom strategies.

Teacher coaching is also defined based on the specific knowledge or skills required for teachers. For instance, the International Reading Association (2004) which aims to improve knowledge and skills for reaching teachers in order to provide a remedy to students’ poor reading achievement. It defines reading coaching as a process of supporting reading teachers with professional development in order to implement their lesson and improve the students’ literacy achievement.

From the definitions above, it could be understood that Coaches are professional teachers with specific expertise who can assist individual and groups of teachers to gain the knowledge and skills which would help them to improve instruction and students’ learning output. They are not considered supervisors as they do not have evaluative responsibilities. Depending on their specific context, Teacher Coaches may have different titles, like literacy coaches, reading specialists, reading coaches, or instructional coaches. In some cases, they even have titles such as *literacy facilitators, resource teachers, teacher leaders, mentors* which do not include the word coach (Lofthouse, Leat & Towler, 2010). As indicated previously, there is a need for language coaches in Nigeria. Specifically, experts are required to coach teachers of all the four skills of language, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the Nigerian educational institution (primary, secondary and tertiary levels).

**Requirements for Coaching**

To effectively coach teachers to improve instructions and students’ performance, coaches need to acquire some essential knowledge and skills. Previous studies (International Reading Association, 2004; L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010) have identified the knowledge and skills as synthesized the below. These would help coaches to provide answers to some of the daunting questions and overcome some challenges they may likely face in the coaching process.

Firstly, coaches need a specialized knowledge and training to enable them to coach teachers effectively. Though teaching experience helps coaches in discharging their roles, it might not enough. They need to be trained professionally such as diplomas, degree or even a master’s degree. This would allow them to have an adequate preparation and knowledge through an articulated set of courses that would give a broad and in-depth understanding of literacy (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010). They need to be conversant with the subject content, teachers’ experiences, level of students and context, such as the cultural background, educational policy. These factors are particularly important because of the diverse nature of the Nigerian context.

The coaches should spend a considerable amount of time (at least 50% of their time) with teachers in a positive context instead of other activities like organization and preparation or administration of assessments. Spending the substantial amount of time allow coaches to engage with teachers, observe and model them, and conduct group discussions and conferences with teachers. (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

As for the skills, coaches need to be able to build rapport and establish collaborative relationships with teachers. To be able to coach effectively, coaches need to build rapport and trust with teachers and maintain confidentiality. They should also respect the teachers. These would make the teachers see the coaches as facilitators of their learning rather than evaluators. An effective communication between the coaches and the teachers must be also established. Coaches need to focus on specific activities in order to support the students’ learning abilities. To effectively coach, there is a need for the coaches to have a clear plan for their activities. They should also grab any opportunity that comes to their ways to talk and have interaction with teachers. Coaches should be teachers and literary leaders themselves in their schools. They should be able to set goals and directions in their schools, develop teachers and students through collaborative work, and redesign the organization in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the set goals.

To successfully implement coaching, coaches should be able to build a relationship with the teachers which include identifying the need for the activity and setting goals. This includes the specific skills or strategies teachers are expected to acquire from the coaching process. The coaches should also identify areas of need and focus and re-planning. They should also hold the team and individual meetings with the teachers to get and give feedback. Coaches should as well analyze and evaluate students’ work. Coaches themselves co-teach some lessons, visit classrooms and provide feedback for teachers. They are also required to watch and analyze videotape lessons of teachers for feedback and evaluation. Finally, despite the training and the qualification, effective coaching evolves over time. Therefore, coaching, especially the novice, must be patient and mindful of the goals of coaching while providing time for new literacy coaches to lay the foundation for their coaching work. The Figure below summarizes the knowledge and skills required for effective coaching as well as the coaching process.



**Figure1: Teacher Coaching**

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The aim of this paper is to identify the essential requirements for effective teacher coaching such as knowledge, skills and stages of coaching. It also reviews some previous studies which revealed the importance and effectiveness of teacher coaching. Finally, the paper makes the following recommendations on implementing effective coaching in order to improve teachers’ instructional performance and students’ language skills.

To effectively implement teacher coaching in Nigeria, this paper makes some recommendations for policymakers, coaches, school administrators, and classroom teachers. First, policymakers make sure that the coaches have the required knowledge and skills for coaching. They should be language teachers themselves. The government should establish Teachers' Advisory Centers that would be responsible for supporting and training teachers in Nigeria as obtained in Kenya. In addition, the government should also ensure adequate funding for coaching. The coaches should ensure that all steps of coached are strictly followed.

To implement teacher coaching in Nigerian, there is a need to consider the ratio of coaches to teachers needed in the rural and urban areas of the country. There is a need to measure students’ achievement which is, in turn, guides the assessment of the effectiveness of the coaching and coaching strategies. To successfully coach teachers, there is a need for the coaches to build rapport with the teachers, build their confidence, make them feel safe from all sorts of ridicule, evaluation and their flaws kept confidentially.

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