QUALITY ACADEMIC COACHING AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN TECHNICAL COLLEGES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

Quality Academic Coaching and Teachers' Professional Competence in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State is essential to provide the high quality education that yields adequate level of students' success. The study examined the relationship between quality academic coaching and teachers' competence in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State. This study adopted the correlational research design. A sample size of 66 technical teachers was selected with a simple random sampling technique. A questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between cognitive academic coaching and professional development. It further revealed that there was a significant relationship between classroom management coaching and professional development of technical teachers in Government Technical College in Akwa Ibom State.

KEYWORDS: Quality education, Academic coaching, Professional competency, Mentoring, Classroom management.

INTRODUCTION

One of the cardinal requirements of Technical Education is the acquisition of both manipulative and intellectual skills which enables an individual to become self-reliant and a useful member of the society. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) defined Technical and Vocational Education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving an addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Okoro (1993) and Kazeem (2006) opined that Technical Education is that aspect of education which utilizes scientific knowledge in the acquisition of practical and applied skills for solving technical problems. In addition, the goals of technical and vocational education include:

1. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels,
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development and give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (FRN, 2013).

To fully achieve the fore-stated goals, quality academic coaching is necessary to keep the technical teachers abreast with recent development in science and technology. The importance of quality teacher training with emphasis placed on pedagogical skills and best practice strategies is undeniable. Knight (2004) suggests that academic coaching serves as an "on the spot everyday professional development" that encourages teachers to utilize research based instructional strategies. Knight's work on academic coaching has been instrumental in developing fundamentally sound practices and principles used in this method of professional development.

Knight (2006) again outlines eight factors that can increase the likelihood that academic coaching can serve schools as effective tools of continuing professional development. These factors include;

(1) Spending sufficient time with teachers as first factor. To improve academic success at a given school, coaches have to spend most of their time working with teachers on instructions.
(2) Coaches must educate teachers using proven research-based techniques and scientifically proven practices.
(3) Coaches must take part in furthering their own knowledge through ongoing professional development to stay current and informed.
(4) They must protect their coaching relationship by building a profound trust with other teachers to enable a positive relationship to be formed.
(5) A collegial relationship must be formed with the leadership of the school.
(6) The principal is still the captain (head) of instructional leadership at the ship (school).
(7) The instructional coach is the first officer (staff) of the ship (school).
(8) The hiring of the right people to function as academic coaches. This is the most critical of Knight's (2006) eight factors. Success is not likely when hiring the wrong coaches. When the best available coaches are hired, the other seven factors will fall in line.

When all of Knight's (2006) factors are considered, not only are the coaches cost-effective, but they are also proven to be more substantial in their impact than other types of staff development training. Roberts (2010) also support Knights' emphasis on hiring the most effective coaches saying, "The leadership in this area (coaching) needs to be someone who can develop a positive relationship by which they can train adult teachers."

The literature on academic coaching is replete with studies on effective coaching and the means necessary to provide effective, high-quality coaching. Ongoing professional development provided through coaching is described by Killion in Knight (2009) as crucial to the success of reform efforts. Killion outlines ten roles that coaches play in schools: Data coach, Resource person, Mentor, Curriculum specialist, Instructional specialist, Classroom supporter, Learning facilitator, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner. Killion explains further that these roles are subjective because they rely on employment location. That means coaches may serve in only a portion of these roles, or all of them. Those decisions are usually made on a system-by-system or school-by-school basis. Killion's findings fundamentally reflect the findings in this study.

It is disheartening that technical teachers lag behind in the recent development in science and technology, mostly in the field of electronics and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Some of them lack the knowledge of using computer in instruction, how to search for facts on the internet, and other computer applications. Sprick, Knight, Reinke and McKale (2006). Different operations in modern workshops need digital and computerized machineries. Most technical teachers are not conversant with how to handle modern equipments to train students on the knowledge and skills needed to become economically self-reliant. Hence academic coaching and professional training of teachers becomes highly necessary. Teachers cannot be properly prepared without ongoing professional development.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) conducted a study that looked primarily at improving teachers' learning, teachers' practice, students' learning and the professional development known as coaching. They suggested essential features for effective coaching as follows:

1. It must be grounded in participant driven inquiry, reflection and experimentation.
2. It must be collaborative and focused on communities of teachers rather than individuals.
3. It must be sustained, ongoing, intensive and based on modeling, coaching and collective problem-solving methods.
4. It must be conducted to teachers' work with students.

5. It must engage teachers in the tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection.
6. It must be connected to aspects of school change.

Neufeld and Roper (2003), in their study, concluded that the following coaching outcomes should be expected:

1. Better, school-based professional development that is focused on teachers' and students' need.
2. Teachers' learning that is transferred directly to the classroom because coaches help to implement the learning.
3. A collegiality (relationship between colleagues) among teachers and staff and the willingness to share learning; practical techniques and responsibility with each other for the students' benefit.
4. The principal-led instructional improvement.
5. Improved school culture with high-quality instructional focus.

Shidler (2009) in its implication of the study indicated that there are four components to academic coaching:

1. Instructing for specific content,
2. Modeling techniques and instructional practices
3. Observing teachers' practices and
4. Consulting for reflection. The author also noted that professional learning in the classroom setting is based on collaboration, mentoring, coaching and adequate professional development. A multitude of sources exist which support the notion that appropriate professional development leads to better teachers and better students' achievement (Ross, 1992).

Some academic coaching models, such as cognitive coaching, mentoring and classroom management coaching, focus primarily on directing and aiding teachers, whereas literacy coaching includes the student element where coaches are directly involved in aiding students.

Cognitive Coaching: Cognitive coaching, having been developed and researched by Costa and Garmston (1985), is one form of coaching that builds on and enhances the cognitive processes of teachers. Research by Costa and Garmston has shown that implementations of cognitive coaching has been linked to increased students' achievement and improved teachers' cognition and collaboration. Constructivism and reflective thinking are important characteristics of this model. Teachers are taught through this method to become independent thinkers, to reflect on their teaching, to lead others in improving instruction and to develop independent thinking and learning among teachers and students (Costa and Garmston, 1985). Sometimes referred to as collegial coaching, the practice is not geared towards new innovation in instruction, but used more as a means of improvement of existing practices (Showers and Joyce, 1996).

Mentoring: Another form of coaching is the practice of mentoring. Mentoring is a process that focuses mostly on new teachers. The expectation as stated by Furlong (1997) is that an effective mentoring experience leads to a beginning of teachers' increased satisfaction and competence in teaching. Consequently, professional growth of mentored teachers out-passes non-mentored teachers. Whereas coaching is an ongoing process, mentoring was originally designed to enable new teachers, or even pre-service teachers to make a more comfortable transition into teaching and help them to adapt to the challenges that education presents.

Mentoring has been a popular form of teacher improvement and retention for sometime now, but also has subtle differences from the other forms of coaching. In essence, while mentoring might help new teachers transition, the nature of mentoring does not allow for additional reforms to be implemented. Onchwari and Keengwe, (2008) published a case study of the mentor-coach initiative. In this case study, they indicated that mentoring in teachers training

was especially useful for supporting teachers in keeping with constant demands of new educational reforms that require teachers to adopt new practices. Mentoring is an active process where the mentor and the mentee are actively involved in ongoing dialogue and reflection, as well as instructions, that translate into improved student performance.

Classroom Management Coaching: Research shows that veteran teachers are often resistant to the presence of a person whom they perceive as threatening in their classrooms and view the coaches as more of a hindrance than a benefit (Dole and Donaldson, 2006; Knight, 2006). It is evident that veteran teachers believe that their way is the right way to teach. However, even within the realm of classroom management, there is a need for improvement among all levels of teachers' experience. When classroom management is poor and the students are not completely focused on instruction, student learning can be lost (Sprick, Knight, Rernke and Mckale, 2006). Learning, research-based practices for classroom instruction and teaching are not all that teachers stand to gain from coaches. In a school or classroom where behaviour is out of control, academic coaches are often asked to lend a hand to improve the situation.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching as a professional practice is evolutionary. Teaching has traditionally been conducted with little or no adult intervention, but out dated and ineffective teaching methods has not generated academic success for the majority f students (Klinger, 2004). The recent technological development in the world is far beyond the knowledge and skills of the teachers in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State. The need for their professional development programmes becomes imperative. This can be easily achieved through quality academic coaching in order to update the professional standard of technical teachers and will eventually improve the students' achievement. It is on the foregoing circumstances that the study was undertaken to examine the relationship between quality academic coaching and teachers' professional competence of technical teachers in Akwa Ibom State Technical Colleges.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between quality academic coaching and teachers' professional competence in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives of the study are:

i. To determine the relationship between quality cognitive coaching and teachers' professional competence in Technical Colleges.
ii. To determine the relationship between quality classroom management coaching and teachers' professional competence in Technical Colleges.

Null Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

i. There is no significant relationship between quality cognitive coaching and teachers' professional competence in Technical Colleges.
ii. There is no significant relationship between quality classroom management coaching and teachers professional competence in Technical Colleges.

Research Method

Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 131 technical teachers in all Government Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State. A total sample size of 66 technical teachers (50 percent of the population) was selected for study through a simple random sampling technique. The researcher developed an instrument entitled

"Quality Academic Coaching and Teachers' Professional Competence Questionnaire" This (QACTPCQ) was used to collect data for the study. It consisted of sections A and B. Section A gathered information on the demographic data of the students; while section B comprised of 21 questions; seven each for quality cognitive coaching, classroom management coaching and teachers' professional competence.

The instrument for the study was validated by two experts of technical education and one expert of educational evaluation from the University of Uyo, Uyo. The instrument was administered on 30 technical teachers who were not part of the sample of the study. Cronbach Alpha formula was used to determine the reliability index of the instrument which stood at 0.87. This indicated the suitability of the instrument for research work. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for data analysis to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Decision rule, if the calculated 'r' is greater than the critical 'r' at 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected but if the calculated 'r' is less than the critical 'r', the null hypothesis is upheld.

RESULTS

The results of data analysis are as follows:

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between quality cognitive coaching and teachers' professional competence in technical colleges.

Table 1: Correlational Analysis between Quality Cognitive Coaching and Teachers' Professional Competence in Technical Colleges

N = 66

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	rcal	rcri
Quality cognitive coaching (X)	1318	28734	27949	0.831*	0.254
Teachers' professional competence (Y)	1298	27994			

* Significant at 0.05 alpha level df = 64

Data analysis in Table 1 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.831 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.254 at degrees of freedom of 64 and 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between cognitive academic coaching and teachers' professional competence of technical teachers in Government Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between classroom management coaching and teachers' professional competence in technical colleges.

Table 2: Correlational Analysis between Classroom Management Coaching and Teachers' Professional Competence in Technical Colleges

N = 66

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	rcal	rcri
Classroom management coaching (X)	1301	28543	27909	0.869*	0.254
Teachers' professional competence (Y)	1298	27994			

* Significant at 0.05 alpha level df = 64

Data Analysis in Table 2 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.869 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.254 at degree of freedom of 64 and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between classroom management coaching and teachers' professional competence in technical colleges in Government Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between cognitive academic coaching and teachers' professional competence in technical colleges. The findings go in line with that of Costa and Garmston (1985) who noted that cognitive coaching builds and increases the cognitive process of teachers. Besides, cognitive coaching has been linked to increased students' achievement and improved teachers' cognitive and collaboration. In support of the findings, Showers and Joyce (1996) stressed that cognitive coaching serves as a means of improvement of existing practices.

The results of the data analysis also indicated that there is a significant relationship between classroom management coaching and teachers' professional competence in technical colleges. In support of the findings of the study, Dole and Donaldson (2006) stressed the need for improvement among all levels of teacher experience in classroom management. They contended that when classroom management is poor and the students are not completely focused on the instruction, students learning can be lost.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study and discussion made, it is concluded that quality academic coaching such as cognitive and classroom management coaching relate significantly to the teachers' professional competence in technical colleges. Also, quality academic coaching could help to keep the technical teachers abreast of the recent development in technology which will eventually improve students' achievements in Government Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

To provide high quality of education that yields adequate level of success in Akwa Ibom State Technical Colleges, the following recommendations were made for implementation:

1. Seminars, workshops and conferences should be organized for technical teachers to update their technical knowledge, skills and classroom management.
2. Teachers should be trained by experts on how to handle modern machineries and equipments.
3. Technical teachers should be involved in the installation and test-running of new machineries and equipments in their various schools.
4. A regression analysis could be conducted that seeks to identify the influence of other factors, in addition to quality academic coaching. This would be an important step towards understanding the teacher-academic coaching relationship.

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