Strategies For Improving The Teaching And Learning Of Government As A Core-Subject In Senior Secondary Schools

Ogujawa, A. I. and Alphonsus Patrick Udoh

Department Of Educational Management University Of Portharcourt
ifygela@gmail.com
Department Of Educational Management & Policy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
udoh.alphonsus@yahoo.com 0803 777 3316

Abstract

This paper is focuses on the strategies for improving the teaching and learning of government as a core-subject in senior secondary schools. The paper stresses that the training and further training of government teachers should have been one of the key thrusts of the ministry of education in the sphere of government teachers in secondary schools, this is the fact in the contemporary education process. The teacher occupies one of the central positions in a school. The Significance of Teaching and Learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools were also identified and strategies were equally discussed. The paper concludes that the state should lay emphasis on the effective teaching and learning activities in Government in Senior Secondary Schools. Finally, this paper recommends that the three-tiers of government in Nigeria (federal, state and local) should consciously create enabling environment and motivate the professional training of Government teachers for posting to our senior secondary schools. It strongly suggests that adequate efforts should be geared towards the provision of suitable commendable instructional materials for the teachers as these assist in making learning more commendable and plays a long-term role in sustaining interest and attracting students to continue with the subject.

KEYWORDS: Strategies, Government, Teaching, Learning

Introduction
The training and further training of government teachers should have been one of the
key thrusts of the Ministry of Education work in the sphere of handling government as a core-student teacher in secondary schools. As democratic reforms have been pushed through and ever more progress made in implementing the government programmes and initiatives, the problems of training and further training for government teachers have increasingly become more necessary. This is linked to the fact that in the contemporary education process, the teacher occupies one of the central places and is, therefore, the “most important resource” in every country's education system; the changes taking place in education are opening up substantial opportunities for creativity and independence on the part of teachers but, at the same time, place a heavy responsibility on them for necessary results to be achieved. The new socio-cultural and political situation in which modern education is developing makes complex demands on the professional activity of teachers and gives rise to increasingly complicated and difficult circumstances. To cope with these, teachers need encouragement and support, which are most effective if provided in terms of supplements to basic teacher training and further training. Government schools and the teacher of government in schools bear the full brunt of both social influences and reforms. The aims and tasks, fundamental values, content and techniques underlying the study of government are all changing. The problems arising as time goes by cannot be resolved without corresponding changes in basic and further teacher training.

The modern-day teachers of government is not only a professional with a profound grasp of knowledge and child psychology, but a person entrusted with the mission of humanizing and harmonizing human relations. A government teacher must be a highly versatile, sensitive person capable of assisting a child in his/her individual development, his/her increasing self-awareness and the establishment of his/her cultural identity. At the same time, that person must be capable of working with others, communicating with the most diverse layers of the population, expressing his/her viewpoint and participating in the processes through which democratic values are asserted in our society. New forms and technologies for the basic and further training of teachers, enabling them to develop their individual potential and the necessary personal and social qualities, must, therefore, be sought.

Today, basic training cannot provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they will need all their lives. “Life-long education” is now seen as a new strategic thrust throughout the world. It confronts teachers with new challenges, as they must be capable of expressing their learning needs for each period of their professional development. The system of training and particularly of refresher training and further training must be emphasized on the whole in such a manner as to provide flexible and timely assistance to teachers in the realization of their learning needs.

**Conceptual Clarification**

*a. Teaching*

The Concept of Teaching Prior to contemporary times, anyone that facilitated learning constituted a teacher. Today however, teaching involves more than mere impartation of knowledge because according to Penn (1987), knowledge of facts and other
information is only a small part of what a teacher teaches. In addition to impartation of knowledge, a teacher is also involved in teaching learners to think logically, analytically, and creatively, and nurturing learners to the stage of being able to express themselves in speaking, writing and the development of communication skills. Furthermore, teachers train students to develop constructive, positive feelings and attitude about themselves and others, build up social and manual skills and develop strong, coordinated and flexible physical body that can withstand rigorous academic experiences. Therefore, teaching can be defined as "an act of interpersonal influence aimed at changing the ways in which other persons can or will behave" (Gage, 1963).

Similarly, Anderson and Burns (1989) described teaching as "an interpersonal interactive activity, typically involving verbal communication, which is undertaken for the purpose of helping one or more students learn or change the ways in which they can or will behave." It is a "conscious and deliberate effort aimed at changing the disposition of a particular person or persons by another person" (Gilbert, 2005).

Clearly, teaching is a human function performed by an individual (a teacher) for another person (a learner) and those professionally trained to facilitate teaching are called teachers. They involve people in experiences that produce change in behavior. Thus, one might be engaged in a process of self-instruction through programmed materials, books or films but not the act of self-teaching because an individual cannot professionally claim that he has taught himself or herself.

b. Learning

Hilgard (1956), defined learning as "the process by which an activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of the change in activity cannot be explained on the basis of nature response tendencies, maturation, or temporary states of the organism."

Kimble (1961, cited by Hergenhann & Olson 1997) also described learning as a relatively permanent change in behavioral potentiality that results from experience and cannot be attributed to temporary body states such as those induced by illness, fatigue or drugs.

From the above definitions, it is clear that learning has to do with a relatively permanent change in behavior and although this change will not last forever but it will last for some time in the learner or learners involved. And these changes are not attributable to maturation, growth, development, senescence (aging), drugs and inspiration. This implies that any acquired behavioral pattern that is not relatively permanent cannot be described as learning.

Therefore, learning is a relatively permanent change in the behavior of a person or group of persons "ascorable to a conscious interaction between the teacher and the learners or between the learners and the learning experiences intended". Interaction here imply both verbal and non-verbal communication. Learning involves training and constant practice, which leads to reinforcement. Thus, a good learner believes in rehearsals and practice, as this reinforces learning. In addition, learning is some change of enduring nature, which is expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is quite different from the kind of change that is attributable to nature.
Rather, it is gradual and progressive, and leads to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. And the learner is also expected to be actively involved in his/her attempt to learn.

c. Government

According to Hobbes, (1996), Government can be defined as the institutions and processes that make and implement authoritative decisions for a society. The government unit can be a city, state, regional, national, or international government. The decisions, which include laws, regulations, and other public policies, are authoritative in the sense that individuals and organizations are legally obligated to obey the decisions or face some kind of sanction. In the Nigeria, government includes the federal government institutions (national Assembly, the Presidency, the federal courts, and a broad range of federal bureaucracies), the 36 state governments (state legislatures, governors, state courts, and state bureaucracies), and the local governments (cities, and other special government units such as school boards).

The question is; is government necessary as a subject to study? Is it possible to live without government? Why do governments exist all over the world when people all over the world are so critical of government? These are old political questions that were first asked when people began thinking about life in organized societies. Questions about the need for government and the legitimate purposes of government are continually being asked because the answers reflect contemporary thinking about basic human values, including freedom, order, individualism, equality, economic prosperity, national security, morality and ethics, and justice. These values are central to government and politics in all countries although the values attached to them and their relative importance varies a great deal. One of the primary responsibilities of government is to create and maintain good public order. Good public order is commonly defined to include public safety (individuals are protected from crime, foreign invasions, and domestic disturbances) as well as behavior that a society considers appropriate conduct. Governments use law to create and maintain these aspects of good public order. These laws sometimes limit individual liberty in order to achieve order.

The Significance of Teaching and Learning Government as a core subject in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools

Cognizant of Nigeria's quest for the consolidation of her nascent democratic experience, the teaching and learning of Government as an academic discipline in Nigerian senior secondary schools is basically of great importance to the contemporary Nigerian society. Due to the wide scope of government syllabus, the subject matter no doubt deals with a wide range of issues, which are of great relevance to the students and the society in general. For example, the appropriate teaching and learning of Government as a subject, facilitates suitable character development in students. Proper teaching of concepts such as citizenship, democracy, fundamental human rights, rule of law and nationalism accelerates the positive molding of students attitudes and character into responsible Nigerian citizens. In fact,
the exemplary lives of freedom fighters, nationalist and world leaders are usually sources of emulation and inspiration to several students who perhaps, adopt some of them as role models and aspire to live as responsibly as such personalities. The study of Government also provides rigorous intellectual training, which prepares students for higher education in courses such as law, political science, international relations and public administration. It contains facts, theories, concepts and methodology, which aids logicality in thinking, critical thinking and rationalization. Students are therefore trained in the art of constructive, sequential and objective comprehension, analysis and presentation of facts with a near scientific prediction and conclusion. In addition, appropriate teaching and learning of the subject enhances the development of the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in students. Clear understanding of the workings of the various governmental institutions aids a better and more sympathetic appreciation of the socio-political situation of the country and this stimulates the growth of patriotic feelings and attitudes in students. Moreover, in Nigeria the Government curriculum is designed to rouse in students the love of country and an appreciation of his role as citizen by the inculcation of values of national consciousness, national unity and national integration (Idoniboye-Obu & Gilbert, 2004).

Furthermore, the teaching and learning of the subject matter of Government facilitates the inculcation of civic attitudes in Nigerian students. Learners are taught vital civic attitudes required for a free democratic, just and egalitarian state. And this also engenders in them respect for the worth and dignity of their fellow citizens and better human relationships. Such attitudes as casting of votes, justice, obedience, legality, fair play, tolerance, love for fellow Nigerian citizens, humility, respect for law and order, fundamental human rights, rule of law and payment of taxes are essential for peace, stability and advancement of the Nigerian nation-state.

Another significance of Government is that it promotes the understanding of the dynamics of the Nigerian political system. The study of the subject by students avails them a better understanding of their country's socio-political situation. It also exposes them to the sophisticated workings of their political system, thereby placing them in vantage positions to participate fully in the decision-making processes in their adult life. The teaching and learning of topics such as: organs of government, democracy, rule of law, political parties, pressure groups and the electoral process socialize learners politically and prepares them for political participation in the larger society. Moreover, sections 65, sub-section 1(a), 131(d) and 177(d) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stipulates that the basic qualification for legislative offices (Senate and House of Representatives), office of the president and governor respectively, is Senior Secondary School Certificate. By implication therefore, any graduate of Nigerian Senior Secondary School that adequately studied the subject matter of Government would have gone through some process of political socialization sufficient enough to facilitate his or her participation in the current democratic dispensation in the country.

Besides, the teaching and learning of Government expose students to international relations. By the inclusion of foreign policy and international organizations such as, United Nations Organization, Commonwealth of Nations, African Union, Economic
Community of West African States in the syllabus, students are sufficiently exposed to Nigeria’s role in such organizations and the membership benefits derivable from them. Students by the same token are taught the foreign policy objectives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria enunciated in section 19(a-e) of the Constitution. Therefore the effective study of the subject enable students to appreciate the interdependence of states in the international system, the objectives of Nigeria’s interaction with other states and the value of world peace, mutual cooperation and tolerance to the continued existence and well being of their country and the world at large.

Strategies for teaching and learning of Government in Secondary Schools

a. The teacher as mediator
Dweck (2000), in guided learning the teaching is active and interactive. If guided learning is to work well then the intervention of the teacher to bring about effective learning is crucial. Such intervention to bring about a result in learning has been called ‘mediation’. The idea of mediation, or intervening, is a very important component of the teacher’s role in fostering learning in general and guided learning in particular. The teacher can be seen to be mediating at three important points:

Typically when the session is introduced, the teacher does a number of important things which help pupils make sense of the forthcoming activity – stimulating, activating knowledge, focusing, establishing relevance or purpose (connecting), instructing, scaffolding;
- during the activity as pupils are working: supporting, intervening, guiding;
- after the activity, where the full meaning/significance of the activity can be explored:
- articulating, making meaning, connecting, exploring, drawing analogies, generalising.

b. The use of ICT to enhance learning
Learning in classrooms is mediated by tools and artefacts. These include books, film, objects, language and people. In the twenty-first century, ICT has an especially prominent, and growing, role. In March 2005, the DfES published its e-Strategy ‘Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children’s services’. This describes the use of digital and interactive technologies to achieve a more personalised approach to education and children’s services. A group of school-based projects has explored the uses of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in different subjects, and from pre-school settings to the end of secondary education. ICT is not intrinsically good or bad, but depends for its value on how it is used. Quality learning requires attention to be paid to the relationships between the use of new technologies and subject matter, the nature of the learner, and approaches to teaching and assessment.

c. Active and creative use of ICT
According to Leask, and Pachler, (1999), there is a clear link between appropriate and
Strategies For Improving The Teaching And Learning Of Government

The impact of ICT in learning and teaching cannot be underestimated. A rigorous approach to teaching skills and allowing children and young people to apply these skills in everyday contexts is essential. Learning is enriched through planned use of ICT. Children should be encouraged from an early age to understand and work with: Computers and laptops, Interactive smartboards, Digital cameras, Floor turtles, DVD’s and recording systems, The world wide web, Electronic communication, Data bases and spreadsheets, Podcasts and blogs, Video conferencing. Full and creative use of ICT should permeate all curricular areas and be seen as an essential tool in effective learning and teaching, with children and young people developing progressive skills throughout their school career.

d. Assessment
Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). According to Peacock (2005), assessment is a powerful lever to drive forward progress in learning. We need to ensure that our approaches to assessment support the new curriculum and realise the ambitions of a curriculum for excellence – supporting learning and building capacity to allow children and young people to improve and progress. Assessment for learning bridges the gap between where a learner is in their learning, and where they need to be – the desired goal. Assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching and staff should use assessment to work together with students and their parents to set future targets and next steps for learning. This can be achieved through processes such as clarifying learning intentions at the planning stage encouraging children and young people to be involved in planning for learning, sharing the learning intentions at the beginnings of lessons, focus feedback against the learning intentions, organise personal targets with children based on prior learning, effective questioning techniques, involving students in self and peer evaluation, sharing learning through the plenary, celebrating success in learning.

h. Peer and self-assessment
According to Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, (2002), students are more likely to make rapid progress in their learning if they understand what they are aiming for – the intended learning outcome – and can assess what they need to do to achieve it. Peer and self-assessment are much more than simply marking their own or each other’s work. In order to improve learning, it must be an activity that engages pupils with the quality of their work and in reflecting on how to improve it. Peer assessment provides students with valuable feedback, enabling them to learn from and support each other. It also adds a valuable dimension to learning: the opportunity to talk, discuss, explain and challenge each other enables pupils to achieve more than they can unaided. Self-assessment promotes independent learning, helping pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own progress. Students do not become self-evaluative overnight. The development of peer and self-assessment takes planning, time, patience and commitment. When students don’t understand the intended
learning outcomes they find it difficult to move beyond the superficial. By planning and using a range of techniques, and by dedicating time to allow pupils to reflect on and discuss their learning, teachers can develop students assessment skills. The process of developing peer and self-assessment needs to be tackled in stages. In the beginning the students may need to have the process modelled for them. It is useful to have examples of work that demonstrate the intended learning outcomes, produced either by previous students or by yourself.

i. **Providing feedback**
Black and Wiliam, (1998) Learners need information and guidance in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Oral and written feedback are closely interrelated and provide opportunities for teachers to identify learners’ strengths and to give clear and constructive advice on which areas need improvement. A supportive classroom ethos is essential so that pupils feel safe to take risks, for example by giving speculative responses to challenging questions. Once teaching routinely provides good oral feedback, then it is possible to provide more informative and selective written feedback.

j. **Planning**
When planning for learning, staff will focus on the learning outcomes, taking into account the needs and interests of all students. Planning will be concise and build on their prior knowledge, allowing for choice and personalisation within the curriculum. Plans will indicate key learning activities and promote a deeper understanding of the curricular areas and the links between these areas including, whole school initiatives, collaborative working, cross curricular themes, interdisciplinary projects, interdepartmental projects, cross sectoral working, and problem solving activities. These approaches will enable children and young people to develop lifelong or generic skills.

k. **Developing effective learners**
Rodd, (2002) students who are effective learners have the skills to learn on their own. They can be relied on to work independently, even for long periods. They can organise and sequence their work, solve complex problems, appreciate when they need to seek help or ask questions, read and gather information and take notes, share ideas or work in a group, appreciate the purpose of what they are doing and make connections with other work and evaluate their work and plan what to do next.

l. **Approaches to reading**
According to Pressley (2000), Pupils need to be told how they should read until they can select the appropriate approach for themselves. You may need to model the approach you think is most helpful so that students can see how it is done.

- **Scanning:** searching for a particular piece of information, e.g. a phone number.
- **Skimming:** glancing quickly through to get the gist, e.g. the sub-headings in a textbook to see whether there is anything pertinent.
Continuous reading: uninterrupted reading of extended text, often for pleasure, e.g. a novel or travel guide.

Close reading: careful study of a text, which includes pausing to look back or to think in order to examine the text in detail, e.g. studying a text to provide a summary for colleagues or selecting key reasons for events and evaluating their veracity.

m. Organising group work – including it in lessons
According to Johnson, and Johnson, (1994) Like any teaching approach, group work will be harder to introduce and manage successfully with a challenging class; but it is not impossible. If it is made to work, it can improve the learning ethos of the class considerably. In classes where behaviour is a problem, teachers tend to resort to strategies that strongly encourage individual work (e.g. seating pupils one to a desk). While these strategies may be appropriate to establish control in the short term, they may not promote an effective range of learning skills in the longer term. The key to effective group work is organisation. Even challenging students will work effectively in well-organised groups and will follow instructions, provided the instructions are straightforward and direct.

Conclusion
Since one of the cardinal aspiration of the Nigerian state is the consolidation of her nascent democratic experience, it is therefore recommended that the state should lay emphasis on the effective teaching and learning of Government as a subject in Senior Secondary Schools. This to a great extent will help in the inculcation of democratic virtues and civic attitudes in youngsters which eventually make for peace, stability, progress and national integration. However, this cannot be done without adequate availability of professionally, trained teachers to handle the subject. Professionally trained teachers are usually conversant with the plurality of methods and techniques of teaching for easy facilitation of the teaching-learning process. It can be concluded therefore that we teach government because it deals with the topics from which students may create their own political events of the past in order to address the present and future socio-political challenges.

Recommendations
1. It is also recommended that the three-tiers of government in Nigeria (federal, state and local) should consciously create enabling environments and motivate the professional training of Government teachers for posting to our senior secondary schools.
2. It is strongly suggested that adequate efforts should be geared towards the provision of suitable instructional materials for the teachers because these assist in making learning more durable and plays a long-term part in sustaining interest and attracting students to continue with the subject.
3. To encourage interest in the subject and ensuring an increase in the number of
students offering the subjects, there is need for a change in the present methodology of the teachers where emphasis is mainly on lecture method. Educational/field trips should be encouraged to bring about practical experiences.

4. Teachers should be encouraged to attend seminars/work-shops on modern methods of teaching like cooperative learning strategy, values analysis, values clarification, and action learning strategy, etc.

Reference

15. http://connect.glasgow.gov.uk/YourService/EducationServices/Plans_Performance


