



**TEACHER COACHING IN NIGERIA;
A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS
AND STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS**

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Abstract, *In Nigeria, students' poor language skills have been documented at the three levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) of education. One of the factors contributing to the problem is the poor teaching methods adopted by many teachers in their classrooms. Many teachers have little or no professional training. They are unaware of new approaches that have been proven effective in developing students' language skills and learning outcome in general. Studies have shown that teacher coaching improves teachers' instructional performance which in turn enhances students' learning outcomes in many countries. However, there is a lack of teacher coaching program in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper reviews some previous studies which revealed the importance and effectiveness of teacher coaching in improving students' learning output. It reviews some essential factors to be considered while designing effective teacher-coaching programs such as knowledge and skills for teacher coaching, responsibility for coaches, and coaching process, evaluation and other supports. The paper makes some recommendations on how to implement teacher coaching, particularly in Northern Nigeria in order to improve the students' learning output. Finally, the paper has contributed in outlining essential requirements in designing effective teacher coaching strategies which include professional development of coaches, time allocated to teacher/coach interactions, establishment and maintenance of collaborative relationships between coaches and teachers, the constructive feedback and tools used during and between coaching sessions, the ratio of teachers to coaches (10:1) in urban and (5:1) rural areas, and regular visits that teachers receive from their coaches on a weekly and monthly basis.*

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 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 leave schools without acquiring the essential language skills. For instance, numerous researchers have observed that many Nigerian tertiary students cannot produce good writing in English (Ngadda & Nwoke, 2014). They

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DOI: 10.30575/2017/IJLRES-2019050801

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 West African Examination Council (WAEC) results of some secondary schools in Nigeria where a larger percentage students fail the English language exams (Alexander, Olanipekun & Aina, 2014)). This may hinder the students from being productive citizens.

Numerous factors have been identified as responsible for the students' poor academic performance. These include mother tongue influences, learning environment, poor methods of teaching, poor language, the nature of the teacher-student interaction. These and other factors have been 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 the English language from primary to tertiary levels in Nigeria, we have observed that a significant number of teachers in both private and public schools spend many years teaching without the required professional skills, knowledge or training. Other scholars also observe that some Nigeria teachers are of low standard, and strongly suggest in-service teacher development programs to remedy that effects and increase the academic and professional skills of teachers (Fasoyiro, 2016). Thus, in order to improve the students' performance, the study suggests that teachers need to be trained in the effective teaching methods. Many studies have discovered the effectiveness of teacher-coaching in improving teachers' instructional performance which in turn develop students' language skills (Bean, Belcastro, Draper, Jackson, Jenkins, & Vandermolen, 2008; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). It was observed that local culture and context were powerful factors affecting teachers' responses to coaching. However, there are limited studies conducted to investigate teacher-coaching in Nigeria, particularly in language, its effectiveness, models and attributes as well as its relation to teaching and students' achievement.

Therefore, the paper reviews empirical evidence that shows effectiveness of teacher-coaching and how it can be implemented in Nigeria. It also unveils the best and effective methods of coaching teachers. The paper comprises of five sections. The first section gives the introduction which identifies the problem of students' language skills,

teachers' lack of professional training and the need for teacher coaching. The second section covers the definition of teacher coaching. Section three previous some empirical studies conducted on teacher coaching. Section four outlines some requirements for teacher coaching. Finally, section five makes conclusion and recommendations for implementing effective teacher coaching in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Teacher Coaching?

The term teacher-coaching is defined by various scholars and practitioners. It is defined as a professional development process target at supporting teachers to acquire essential knowledge and skills for effective instruction in order to improve students' performance. Coaching provides 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 teacher 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) defines teacher coaching as a process which aims to improve reading teachers' knowledge and skills in order to provide a remedy to students' poor reading achievement. It describes 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 knowledge and skills which would help them to improve their classroom 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, other titles which do not include the word coach

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DOI: 10.30575/2017/IJLRES-2019050801

such as *literacy facilitators, resource teachers, teacher leaders, mentors* are used (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 in the Nigerian educational institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary levels).

METHODOLOGY

Empirical Studies

Various studies have been conducted on teacher coaching which confirmed its effectiveness in enhancing teachers' instructional delivery and students' performance (Bean, Belcastro, Draper, Jackson, Jenkins, & Vandermolten, 2008; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2008; Giamellaro and Siegel, 2018; L'Allier, & Elish-Piper, 2006; Piper, Zuilkowski, Dubeck, Jepkemei, & King, 2018; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain & Lamitina, 2010). For instance, Giamellaro and Siegel (2018) conducted a study on coaching teachers to implement innovations in teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). They administered an intervention in which a STEM coach supported teachers implementing STEM across a school district. They also examined how different educators within a school system perceive, access, and co-construct the role of a STEM coach. Their findings reveal the effectiveness of coaching in connecting to outside resources, teaching teachers and students, and planning STEM initiatives.

Piper, Zuilkowski, Dubeck, Jepkemei, and King, (2018) also carried out a study on teacher coaching in Kenya in order to identify essential ingredients to students' literacy and numeracy improvement. They evaluated the benefits of the following ingredients: (1) teacher Professional Development PD and teacher instructional support and coaching; (2) revised student books in literacy and numeracy, at a 1:1 ratio, added to PD and instructional support; and (3) structured teacher lesson plans added to student books, PD, and instructional support. They found that two of the three combinations of ingredients had statistically significant positive impacts on learning outcomes. The results showed that the third combination—PD, teacher instructional support and coaching, 1:1 student books, and structured teacher lesson plans—was most effective. It

is also shown that the option of PD and instructional support, 1:1 revised books, and teachers' guides was the most expensive.

In another study, Piper and Zuilkowski (2015) explored teacher coaching in public and non-formal schools in Kenya and provided 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 and number of visit per coach. Findings of the study reveal that 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.

Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain and Lamitina, (2010) in their study explored the relationships between coaching in reading 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 show that teacher coaching can also be effectively implemented in Nigeria because the contexts are similar.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Requirements for Coaching

To effectively coach teachers to improve their classroom instruction 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 required for coaches. 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.

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 on how to effectively coach teachers. 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-

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DOI: 10.30575/2017/IJLRES-2019050801

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 a 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 also be 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 programs, 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 team and individual meetings with 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.

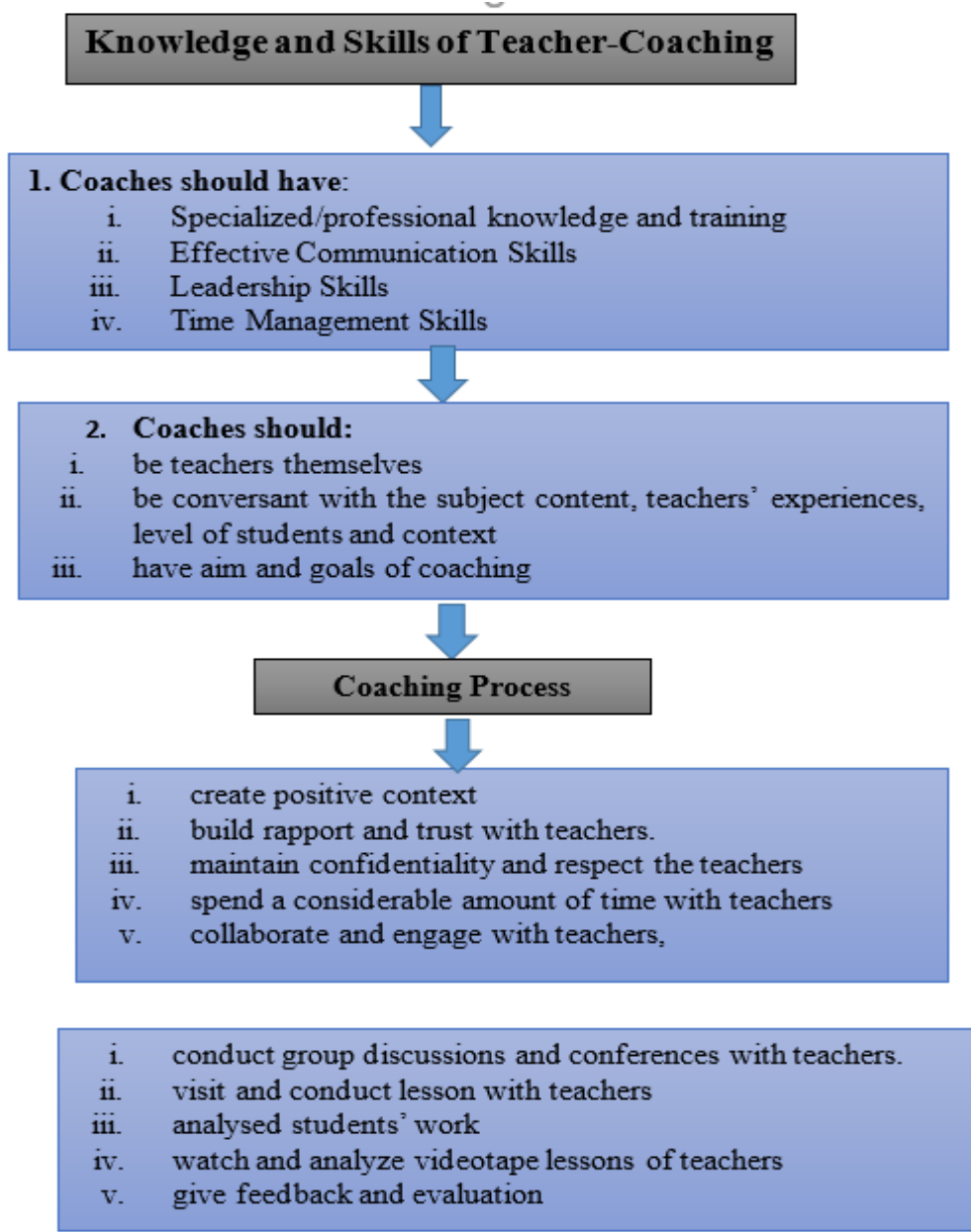


Figure1: Teacher Coaching

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to identify essential requirements for effective teacher coaching and describe how it could be implemented. It has identified the knowledge, skills and stages of coaching. The paper also reviews some previous studies which revealed the importance and effectiveness of teacher coaching. Finally, the paper makes

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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 should make sure that coaches have the required knowledge and skills for coaching. Language teachers should be appointed as coaches and sent for professional training like postgraduate diplomas or certificates. Government should establish Teachers' Advisory Centers that would be responsible for supporting, supervising and training teachers in Nigeria as obtained in Kenya. In addition, government should provide adequate funding and other resources for coaching program to ensure its proper implementation, sustainability and overcome all challenges. During the coaching process, 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. For instance, a ratio of ten teachers to a coach (10:1) in urban areas and, five teachers to one coach (5:1) in rural areas can be considered. This is because generally teacher coaching is newly introduced in the country. Other factors such as teachers' background, poor power supply, the distance between schools, limited access to the internet may hinder the coaching process in rural areas. The ratio will also enable the coaches to have more number of visits to each school and to fully engage and model lessons to the teachers. 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. Finally, future studies should investigate implementation of teacher coaching programs in Nigeria in order to provide empirical evidence on its success or otherwise.

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