A Critical Literature Review of Studies in Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

The objective of this review was to analyze the existing studies on teaching and learning and to make a comparison of the strengths of the findings for practice. Works of literature were randomly searched and reviewed depending on the criteria. There is a bulk of studies conducted in teaching in Ethiopia. However, the weaknesses observed are that the findings lack strength compared to findings from the world because the research types are mainly surveys, cross-sectional and case studies compared with similar studies in the world that are longitudinal, experimental and meta-analytic studies that focus on the real practice and improvements of the practice. The other problem is that, mostly, the studies focused on identifying the problems as they are rather than focusing on the sources of the problems and how they might be solved.

Keywords

Critical Literature Review, Studies, Teaching and Learning

1. Review criteria

The criteria used to review the research findings were: 1) observing the findings in relation to other similar findings; 2) analyzing the strength of the findings depending on the internal and external validity of the data by observing the design, sampling, and data analysis methods; 3) observing the relevance and applicability of the findings to the real situations in education and the up to datedness of the findings.

2. The Review

Theories have their own implications in different contexts and time and we can say that no theory of education is without function. Behaviorists view the effective teaching from the input teaching characteristics and relate these input teaching characteristics with outcomes whereas cognitive theorists look at the psychological processes invoked in the teaching process and assert that effectiveness pertains to the processes involved in transforming content knowledge into instruction. This transformation requires adapting, altering, and enriching content based on past experiences of teaching the same content. They tend to focus on the processes of understanding to measure effective teaching. Generally, various assumptions about teaching are there and any view about effective teaching is determined by the philosophical stands (Kindra, 1984; Košťálová, 2005; Kyriacou, 2009; Ayele, 2010; Saroyan & Amundsen, 2011; Creemers, Kyriakides, and Antoniou, 2013; Dean, 2000; Leonard & Haugh, 1996; Timperley, 2008; Zhang & Kou, 2012).

The components of effective teaching in Ethiopia have been categorized by Gemeda & Tynjälä (2015) under four headings: professional knowledge and understanding, teaching skills, values and attitudes and the ability to create a good en-
environment for learning. Similarly, MoE (2009, as cited in Desalegn, n.d.) listed the following components of good teaching that are expected from teachers to be developed through CPD: 1) Professional knowledge and understanding (up-to-date subject matter and curriculum knowledge, a good understanding of classroom pedagogy, etc.); 2) Teaching skills (learning plans for students’ involvement, use of active learning methods, reflect on classroom practices, etc.); 3) Values and attitudes (love of the profession, form an excellent relationship with colleagues, strive for learning and self-improvement, high expectations for students, etc.) and 4) Learning environment (maintaining an attractive and supportive learning environment, creating a safe and orderly environment, use of appropriate teaching aids).

Teaching problems regarding teaching methods reported by research findings and literature at an international, African and Ethiopian level were discussed in the review. Findings from developing countries, according to Kindra (1984), Burke (1996), Abadzi (2009), Zwiep (2008), Chang & McKeachie (2010), describe the problems of teaching techniques in developing countries as 1) an approach to classroom work which is too teacher-centered, rather mechanical, unduly repetitive, and over-concentrated on recall of information. The reports stated that although new pedagogic approaches were often advocated and included in aims (e.g. learner-centered lesson development, group work, role play, project assignments, and reflective debate), there was little evidence of their application to the training process; 2) An over-emphasis on passivity on the part of pupils and an under-development of their problem-solving skills; 3) Under-use of teaching aids; lack of effective classroom-management skills; lack of strategies for attending to individuals’ needs; under-use of grouping methods to foster co-operative learning and/or cater for different ability groups; 4) Inability to manage multi-grade teaching effectively; 5) A preponderance of lower-order and under-use of higher-order questions; 6) Unsatisfactory mastery of content area knowledge and 7) Lack of fluency in the language used for instruction. In Ethiopia, Kasahun and Zelalem (2006) reported that, introducing TV lessons in high schools created several new implementation problems like lack of coordination with the teacher, fast to understand, inappropriate planning of the lessons, inefficient utilization of the technology, misunderstanding as if the plasma TV present the lessons independently by itself without the involvement of the teacher and the like which need adjustment somehow. Amare, Daniel, Derebsa and Wanna (2006) also stated that since the curriculum, textbooks, and examinations are crowded and rigid, they send messages counter to active learning and force teachers into a teacher-centered, rote-learning mode.

Student assessment studies in developing countries reported that much assessment is narrow in scope, restricted in cognitive level, and paper-based rather than practice-based. Student assessment studies in Ethiopia reported that (1) Proper student assessment in the sampled secondary schools are inadequate because (a) most of the sample secondary school teachers lack skills of assessing students’ performance in using continuous assessment, (b) school principals established to help the implementation of continuous assessment have not to their expectations of teachers, and (c) manuals and directives of continuous assessment are inadequate and (2) Continuous Assessment Strategies were not properly used (Birhanu, 2013; Desalegn, 2014).

Other major problems reported by the findings were language proficiency problems from both teachers and students, underestimation of the teaching profession by the society, teachers’ low teaching efficacy and reluctance to develop their personal career as teachers, teachers turnover because of difficult work conditions and low salary, problems of poor classroom management and poor student background that result in cheating and contamination of education quality and wastage of instructional time because of many reasons (Mabratu, 2015; Eba, 2014; Korie, 2012; Desalegn and Girma, 2013; Workneh and Tassew, 2013; Mawcha and Berihu, 2015; Tewedaje, 2014).

The Challenges of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Ethiopia were identified as 1) In nearly four out of five schools, the structure of CPD is either absent or inadequate; 2) 93.5% of the CRCs (Cluster Resource Centers) were not adequately trained to run well organized, inspiring, and transforming CPD activities; 3) Failure to synchronize the
career structure and the CPD values and activities; 4) the CPD facilitators high turnover; 5) Time constraints on teachers as well as their school leaders; 6) the CPD programs lagging behind its time and the tendency of rushing to cover the course; 7) Total absence or inadequacy of the minimum resources to run CPD and 8) Lack of systematic coordination between the education bureaus, Teacher Education Institutions, and NGOs (Daniel, Desalegn & Girma, 2013; Desalegn, n.d). The gap observed in one of these reports is that one of the papers is a PDF paper in which the publication date is missing.

Regarding teacher education, some major problems raised were 1) lack of consensus in the goals and the teacher preparation processes, for example, lack of sufficient and organized professional supervision that can promote meaningful learning of teaching and 2) Inefficiency in resource utilization (Jeylan, 2011; Bekalo and Weford, 2010; Kedir, 2007; Workneh and Tassew, 2013; Tadele, 2013; Lewin, & Stuart, 2003; Ishumi, 2013; Kedir, 2007).

Generally, according to the author’s reading of a myriad of research findings and observations, it is found that there is a large gap in schools in developing countries when the theories, standards and practices on teaching worldwide is compared. Studies in developed countries tend to verify the gaps between theories and practice more precisely and forward timely solutions. Literatures from developing countries show that research findings lack strength to show these gaps in theory and practice and to forward strong recommendations for practice. How teachers teach and assess student learning and what is stated in the curriculum show mismatches in developing countries. However, one may not totally attribute the problems to teachers and researchers since the source of problems are many, such as over whole education and schooling system, shortage of resources, organizational climate and other factors.

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