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How Teacher and Student Leader Collaboration Contribute to Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

The collaboration between teacher and student leader as a possible factor contributing to learning outcomes remains under-researched. To understand the combined efforts of teachers and student leaders toward attaining teaching outcomes, this paper addresses the following questions: What are the value-added dimensions of the teacher toward achieving learning outcomes? How do student leader activities contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes? Without making any claim to tight causal relationships, this paper argues that the effective involvement of student leaders in the teaching process has considerable effects on learning. These effects do not only revolve around student development (for example leadership skills, and citizenship awareness in terms of rights, duties, and responsibilities), but also on the teaching and learning output (Heck, & Hallinger, 1999). Undeniably a common acceptance is that the teacher is permanently the leader while students are mere followers, who do not share teaching and learning behavior when it comes to the exhibition of power and authority within the classroom social environment. Nevertheless, this research reveals how collaboration between teachers and student leaders may improve students' academic outcomes.

Keywords: teacher, student, collaboration, pedagogy, learning outcomes

1. Introduction

Little is known about the value-added contributions a student leader makes to bring about learning outcomes. Researchers in many countries of the world have arrived at many plausible conclusions on teachers' role in the successful educational process (Muijs, Reynolds, 2017; Kochoska & Ristevska, 2018); hitherto, research is scarce on whether student leaders' efforts count toward attaining learning outcomes in the classroom (Harris et al., 2019). Some scholars have promoted teachers in their research, concerning their effort towards learning outcomes in the classroom, but overlooked the efforts of student leaders. Therefore, Warren (2021); van Dijk et al. (2019), and Madigan and Kim (2021) believe that teacher efficacy has done more to influence students' attainment of quality learning, student motivation, and collective classroom management, resulting in students' academic outcomes.

The role student leaders play in achieving the goals and objectives of teaching is rarely mentioned in any educational setting. Students get mixed messages when requested to take up pedagogical leadership roles in the classroom (Zydney et al., 2020; Robinson and Gray, 2019), because they usually see teachers in the semblance of a 'hero' who does not share professional classroom roles with students (Kohen and Solo, 2019). Even though teachers occupy powerful positions in the production of knowledge (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Chu et al., 2021), the success of their students should hinge on fostering a sense of ownership (Lazarides et al., 2020). That may only occur when student leaders meaningfully participate in leadership decision-making (Jansen et al., 2014; Shonubi, 2012).

Assessment of the variable associated with student leaders has made significant progress toward determining how much value they add to the teaching and learning process. Arendale (2021) declares that the role of student-leaders appears to be evolving. Some of these roles are being strengthened by administrative structures utilized to validate student leadership positions in schools. Therefore, this paper explores how the teacher and student leader's collaboration contributes to learning outcomes. To understand the combined efforts of teachers and student leaders toward learning outcomes, this paper addresses the following questions: What are the value-added dimensions of the teacher toward achieving learning outcomes? How do student leadership activities contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes?

2. Context of the Study

This study explores collaboration between teachers and student-leaders towards achieving learning outcomes. Thus, two

public secondary schools (one highly performing and the other, somewhat performing school) that exhibit differential academic performance were examined. The selected schools are located within a sub-urban, socio-economic environment, and education district in Lagos State, Nigeria. Because the schools were selected based on similar parameters they have comparable numbers of students, standardized and spacious classrooms; and well-functioning teaching and learning resources, among others. Both schools also receive comparative administrative and financial attention from the government which monitors the performances of both schools through appointed superintendents.

The school principals, vice-principals, Heads of Department [HoDs], and teachers at the sampled schools possess similar academic qualifications and work experience. Each of the classrooms where students learn is co-managed by a student leader, who is expected to provide learning assistance by mediating key interactions between the teacher and the class (Thompson, 2020). The specific functions that student leaders perform in collaboration with the teacher include organizing, communicating, and controlling.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study draws from three different theoretical traditions. The core conceptual basis for the paper is derived from the cooperative theory of classroom management, advocated by Rudolf Dreikurs, and cited in Tauber (2007). Rudolf Dreikurs posits that when teachers understand the personality of students, they share power with students - although with limitations – thus, allowing them to make rules of learning that are necessary to the creation of an environment that permits learning.

Buttressing the importance of Rudolf Dreikur's theory, Brown (2004) confirms that effective teaching and learning generally involves the ability to share specific responsibilities, power, and authority. This is done to develop a social classroom environment in which students agree to cooperate and collaborate with teachers and fellow students in the pursuit of academic growth. In further attestation to the value of the positive influence of the cooperative theory, Johnson et al. (2014) established that cooperative activities influence students' goal achievement due to social support, sense of belonging, perspective display; and other variables that mediate the effectiveness of cooperation such as positive interdependence, accountability and positive interactions and social skills utilizations. Cooperation between the teacher and student leader brings about a complex process that involves much interpersonal and pedagogical awareness, and the application of strategies, contributing directly to engagement; and achievement gains (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

This study also borrows from the collaborative theory of classroom management, which rests on the assumption that teachers believe in creating a learning environment that allows for interaction and cooperation among a teacher and students. Therefore, the needs of the students are satisfied through care, love, and affection, devoted to meeting their learning needs in the classroom (Gordon, 2010). Gordon extended this theory by using the notions of self-confidence, purpose, and empowerment, based on the belief that students who are cared for experience democratic self-esteem and confidence toward their studies (Daniel et al., 2019). In addition, the growth and self-confidence of students (Matthews et al. 2021) facilitate the development of responsible decision-making, interpersonal relationships with peers, and teachers, and the creation of a democratic classroom community.

This theory also stresses that there must be good working relations between the teacher and students so that there can be trust, openness, and belief where students and teachers can work together. As the student leader mingles with teachers and other co-students, it contributes to collaboration and harmony of teaching and learning in the classroom. A collaborative classroom environment maximizes social interaction between the teacher, student-leader, and other student peers in the classroom; thus, necessitating effective organizing, communication, and class control (Ahiatrogah & Koomson, 2013).

The outcome emanating from Premo, et al. (2018), in their analysis of students' collaborative study, further indicates that learning tasks carried out in a structured and cooperative nature caused higher student achievement in comparison with competitive tasks. In essence, cooperative learning intensifies students' learning outcomes. Similarly, Arendale's (2021) research survey indicates that collaborative learning theory encourages student leaders to engage in a learning environment that delivers a free flow of academic improvement benefits through interactions with their teachers and fellow students.

This study also draws on the learner-centered theory put forward by Glasser (1984), which accounts for the degree of affection and care (pastoral role) displayed by the teachers toward the students, despite their diversity and complex profiles. Ertesvag (2009) adds that reinforcing and supervising students' activities, both inside and outside the classroom would necessitate learner-centeredness functions put forward by Glasser (1984). To further practice learner-centeredness, teachers may find the help of student leaders inevitable. A teacher must build a caring learning community where connections with and among students create a safe place to learn; and an emotional climate where students can take risks, laugh, and trust one another, including their teacher (Bondy, 2007). In a way, learner-centered theory provides insights into the degree of freedom enjoyed by students, depending on the nature and forms of control exercised by the teacher to ensure that students focus on their studies.

4. Research Methodology

The qualitative research approach which allows for the construction of a cross-contextual broad view was adopted. In-depth qualitative knowledge focuses on insight, discovery, and understanding from the lens of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). 2 highly performing; and another 2 somewhat performing schools were selected for longitudinal case study purposes (Mills et al. 2009; Yin, 2009).

Multiple data like one-on-one interviews provided a contextual description of the in-depth narrative and worldview of the participants. More so, classroom observations and documentary evidence were all utilized for data gathering. These varying methods of data collection provided a means of increasing the credibility and validity of data collection (Creswell, 2012); whereby confirmation and understanding of the accuracy of participants' worldviews were established. During the interviews, probe questions were asked to elicit further clarity on the initial answers provided by the participants (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2012).

Participants were carefully and purposively selected from an education district (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2003; Struwig & Stead, 2004). To ensure maximum data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). A compulsory subject was offered to every student (English Language), and the English Language teachers from the 2 sampled schools were utilized in the research. The selected teachers also possess some of the highest teaching qualifications (academic and professional work experience). The selected teachers had officially taught for at least 5 years at the highest grade level - Grade 12 - at the time of data collection in the sampled schools.

Additionally, 2 student-leaders from Grade 12 Classes were selected in each of the sampled schools. That summed up a total of participants in the study. Furthermore, to ascertain and justify the comparative basis of selecting the sampled schools for this study, students' official academic performance records in sampled schools were retrieved from the national examination body in Nigeria. The national examination body organizes and conducts certified and accredited secondary school assessment before students finally depart from high school in Nigeria.

The criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) of showing tentative results of the research to the participants, to assess the degree of truth and validity of the collected data was used. Thus, to guarantee confidentiality, the names of the participants have been represented by codes (Cresswell, 2012; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2012) to protect the participants in this study. Every step of this research was guided by ethical approval obtained by the researcher, as ethical consideration allows for sound research practices during the entire process of investigative research (Creswell, 2012). Data analysis was carried out through inductive analysis. Thus, themes that emerged from the data were analyzed accordingly.

5. Analyses and Discussion

Two research questions that guided this study are: What are the value-added dimensions of teachers toward achieving learning outcomes? How do student leaders' activities contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes? The themes that emerged from the data collected are organization of learning space collaboration, and interaction and lesson delivery collaboration. The high-performing school is tagged School A, and the participants are labeled as follows: Teacher - T1 and T2; Student Leaders - SL1 and SL2. On the other hand, the somewhat performing school is tagged School B, and the participants are labeled as follows: Teacher - T2 and T2; Student Leaders – SL3 and SL4, respectively. Highlighted differences in participants' responses in Schools A and B formed the basis of the discussion after the analysis.

6. Organization of Learning Space Collaboration (Schools A and B)

School A teachers both agreed on how seats are arranged in the classroom. They explained that the arrangement of the classroom is mandatory. Therefore, proper seating arrangements are made and maintained all the time (without or during teaching). Teacher 1 said, *I always remind the class leader to prepare the class. So, teaching materials would have been made available before I got to the class for teaching. When in the class, I allow students to settle down for my lesson, based on the proper seating arrangement of the students, and teaching resources* (T1).

Teachers 1 and 2 were primarily concerned with the arrangement of the physical space and the day-to-day logistics like the collection and distribution of students' marked scripts. They were also more concerned with the wider planning and organization of the learning space beyond the classroom's physical space. The researcher's observation corroborated Teacher 1, as student leaders were observed coordinating the students as they occupied their seats in the classroom.

Another student leaders' behavior practice that seems to align with how teaching is organized is how they serve as an intermediary between the teachers and fellow students, to impact teachers' job performance in the classroom. According to Student Leader 1: *I make sure that students sit according to how they were pre-arranged by the teacher. I also collect assignments from the students, submit them to our teachers for marking, and return them to the students anytime our teacher has marked them* (SL1).

Regarding classroom sitting arrangements, Student Leader 2 said: *our classroom teaching resources and sitting arrangements are strictly taken care of by me so that some students do not change their seats at will. The seating arrangements make us understand what our teacher is teaching us, and we do understand what the teacher teaches us* (SL2). Additionally, the researchers observed that student leaders' tasks go beyond the physical furniture arrangements in the classroom because the student leaders partook in facilitating teaching feedback. That is, they collected students' classroom academic assignments, submitted the assignments to their teachers for marking, and eventually returned them to their fellow students after they were marked by their teachers.

School B

In School B, Teachers 3 and 4 similarly explained that considerable attention is paid to teaching resources and the physical arrangement of the classroom. In the words of Teacher 4: *student leaders must organize their classroom before going to teach them. That is, by making sure that students sit according to their heights. The shorter students occupy the front seats so that they may see the chalkboard clearly, while I am teaching. If the taller students sit in the front seats, they will block the view of the shorter students* (T4).

Contrary to Teachers 3 and 4's comments on classroom arrangement, the physical arrangement of students in their classroom appeared chaotic. To buttress the teacher's contradiction, Student Leader 3 said: *No student-leader has 'guts' to inform any student where they should sit in the classroom, because the students will not listen* (SL3). Furthermore, Student Leader 4 said: *I think that it is the responsibility of our teacher to arrange the classroom because as class leader, I am not responsible for telling my colleagues where to sit and where not to sit. Our teacher should be the one to make the arrangements. I should be more concerned with my seat and desk so that it is not disrupted by other students* SL4.

The views of SL3 and SL4 indicate students' sporadic switching of seats by fellow students and that behavior appears to be normal. It also appears that student leaders in school B remain confused about their responsibilities, as far as organizing themselves in the class is concerned.

Discussion

School A teachers appear to prioritize orderliness, responsibility, and fairness in the manner they approach teaching and learning in the classroom. They also seem to be committed to effective teaching practices, classroom management, and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in collaboration with the student leader.

Closs, Mahat, et al. (2021) found that a well-organized class allows the teacher to move from one end of the classroom to another. The movement of the teacher from one end of the classroom to another end enables the teacher to supervise and monitor students' learning, particularly through the student leaders. Thus, power relations are more fluid, more balanced, and stabilized between the teachers and student leaders. As a result, student leaders and their fellow students collaborate, participate in knowledge sharing, interact, and are motivated towards increasing their learning experience (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004).

Hay & Dempster (2004) in their study, established that the consequence of teacher and student leadership is the continued feedback generation. This is because of the creation of an effective learning environment facilitated by student leaders, who take on leadership roles. In addition, student leaders develop skills like effective communication, critical thinking, planning skills, problem-solving, engagement, motivation, interpersonal relationships, and self-confidence, which are gathered and utilized to enhance fellow students learning.

7. Interactions and Lesson Delivery Collaborations (School A and B)

School A

School A teacher engaged extensively with student leaders during teaching. Findings revealed that dialogue and interrogation were constantly utilized between teachers and student leaders. Even when a student gives wrong answers to his questions, School A teachers usually commend their students. Teacher 1 said: *I encourage dialogue and not monologue in the classroom. I cannot teach and talk alone during teaching. Students who ask questions are commended for right or wrong answers, as far as they make attempts. I also allow students to air their views on questions asked by me in the classroom. That gives them the confidence to give their opinions or answers in response* (T1 and T2).

On the part of Student Leader 1 and Student Leader 2, they had similar views on how students interact during teaching. Thus, the comment of SL1 and SL2: *I communicate with our teacher about whatever they have taught us during and after every class. I also communicate subject assignments to my co-students when teachers give me an assignment to pass on to my colleagues in the classroom* (SL1 and SL2).

Both Student Leaders 1 and 2's comments on teachers' interaction patterns as regards teaching and learning are similar. According to Student Leader 1: *Our teacher calls me through any of my students' colleagues he finds so that I can collect graded assignments to be distributed to my fellow students in the classroom. Our teacher also tells me to explain to them*

(fellow students) about the methods they can utilize to do any given assignment so that they can get their answers right (SL1).

More so, School A teachers (T1 and T2) indicate two important attributes which they exhibit. The first attribute reveals teacher-student leaders' collaboration to affect pedagogical and content knowledge, as illustrated in the teacher's teaching strategies. The second is the insightful appreciation of the contextual issues that affect classroom learning through the involvement of Student Leaders in the introduction of concepts taught in the classroom. That resulted in expanding the classroom into a social learning space. Thus, integrating the prior knowledge and experiences of the student leaders and other fellow students on the topic taught. Social learning space may also be thought of as having different dimensions, as it impacts students' learning.

School B

Teachers 3 and 4 do not perceive student leaders as possible collaborators toward successful learning. They believe that students are passive recipients of knowledge and that, they must listen to understand what is taught in the classroom. He said: *I think that the reason students are in the school is to listen to their teacher. No matter the knowledge the students think they have, we must let them realize that they are still learners. They must listen rather than debate with the teacher or try to think that they have any kind of prior knowledge* (T3). The response of T3 and T4 points to a teacher who "knows all" as far as the dissemination of subject contents is concerned.

T3 and T4 both believe that students must be inactive during teaching and learning, therefore, whatever students have to say does not matter. This suggests that T3 and T4 don't believe in the residual knowledge students possess before learning new concepts. The researcher observed that students are also not allowed to ask questions to clarify their misunderstandings, even though they are student leaders.

Student Leader 3 explains how he interacts with fellow students: *I don't communicate with my colleagues when we do not know something that the teacher has taught us in class. My fellow students are sometimes afraid to ask some of our teachers about the area they are not clear about in a topic because they are afraid of our teachers' negative reactions* (SL3). The teacher's interaction pattern with students seems like an intellectual dissociation behavioral pattern as stated by SL4: *I am always afraid of telling our teacher that he is wrong because he will shout at me and say, What do you know*? *Our teachers do not even think that we have the right to say what we understand about the topic we are learning* (SL4).

No student leader, nor fellow students stood to ask any questions as observed in the T2 classroom during teaching. This is probably because of the fear of the negative reaction they have been encountering when they ask questions to clarify concepts taught by the teacher.

Discussion

The following sections indicate discussions on how School A teachers, student leaders, and fellow students alike engaged extensively during teaching and learning, which is in contrast with School B. In School A, dialogue, two-way interaction, and teachers' encouragement of teachers learning served as a tool to motivate, influence, and modify student leaders' behavior stood out as one of the crucial possessions utilized by School A teachers and student leaders during teaching and learning (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007).

Baumert & Kunter (2013) found that a teacher exhibits profound knowledge and insight into teaching, as evident in the teacher's development and selection of teaching methods, presentations, students' responses interpretation, understanding, and corrections of students' errors and challenges. Keller & Neumann et al. (2017) add that for cognitive realization, teachers must design a challenging, but supportive atmosphere that enables students (particularly student leaders) to willingly and easily participate and support students in an organized environment, while on the look-out for concurrently assisting students in solving problems they encounter.

Athaya et al. (2021) reveal that when teachers and student leaders collaborate, interact, and encourage autonomy, it has a positive impact on fellow students' satisfaction. This implies that a student's further understanding of what the teacher teaches in the classroom may be well achieved through the student leader's engagement with the teacher. The "level playing field" created by the teacher through interactions with student-leaders during and after teaching may also be a reason for students' adequate knowledge acquisition, as students were motivated to ask further questions to indicate that they were following the "thought" of the teacher.

Similarly, Balwant et al. (2019) noted that engagement and interaction are key indicators that influence students' positive academic performance positively. In School A, both teachers and student leaders play a role in helping their peers utilize interactions to shape and alter behavior. Furthermore, research conducted by Balwant et al. (2019) confirmed that the interactions among student leaders, teachers, and other students during the teaching and learning process might have been a factor contributing to the effective acquisition of knowledge by fellow students.

Molin, et al. (2021) highlight that students and student leaders often collaborate to enhance their comprehension of the teacher's instructional content. Concerning dynamics of interactions and control in School A, student leaders, and fellow students are encouraged to freely express their perspectives during discussions. That not only helps student leaders develop essential learning skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of the teacher's learning material (Molin et al., 2021). Molin et al. further argue that such exchanges enable students to foster and apply knowledge that they might not have otherwise acquired if they hadn't engaged in learning alongside their student leaders.

The findings indicate that the School A teacher seems to encourage democratic behavior by encouraging discussions where the student leaders and fellow students share, reconstruct, and reinforce their understanding. More so, Brown (2004) concluded that democratic interpersonal relationships between teachers and student leaders contribute to the development of mutual respect. This mutual respect, in turn, encourages teachers to exhibit a genuine personal interest in every student, ultimately contributing to effective teaching and learning. Richmond, Wresh & Gorhan's (2009) research shows that students do not communicate effectively with their teacher or complete tests well when they are fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or scared to communicate with their teacher; hence do not do well in the classroom environment.

8. Implications

The argument pursued in this paper has significant theoretical and methodological implications. It points to the need to account for the complex ways in which the traditional classroom has changed, in response to the changing social and technological environment; where a classroom is no longer confined to the physical space where learning only takes place primarily.

The research highlights the impact of collaborative management of the class during teaching by teachers and student-leaders; and how that brought about timely and proper use of teaching time because of teachers' delegation of duty. This implies that the classroom may have also evolved to include other domains, like student leadership in and beyond the classroom, among others. Another implication for practice is that theories of teaching effectiveness should evolve to include a student leadership-centered perspective that values student agency in the classroom.

Nevertheless, this research confirms the attributes and dimensions that demonstrate the extent to which collaboration between teachers and student leaders makes a difference in the classroom. Therefore, schools and districts should invest in professional development programs (Aluko & Shonubi, 2014) to train teachers in collaborative classroom management strategies that emphatically inform teachers about the process of leadership skills.

9. Conclusion

This research was narrowly carried out to understand how teachers' and student leaders' collaboration influences effective learning without making any claim to tight causal relationships. The study only highlights some of the value-added contributions of student leaders toward learning outcomes. This is because many other dimensions within teacher control that significantly impact teaching outcomes (McBer, 2001) are not investigated in this research. Thus, the study also only draws attention to how teachers and student-leaders collaborate towards students' learning.

Moreover, it is important to note that emphasis on the collaborative role of the teacher and student leader towards effective teaching and learning does not discount the impact of overall school leadership and management (Harris, Jones, Ismail, and Nguyen, 2019). In a sense, the discussion on the efforts of teachers towards effectiveness aligns with classroom management variable. That is, in alignment with Marzano and Marzano (2003) who emphasize that setup of the classroom - classroom arrangement, identification, and implementation of classroom rules; and implementation procedure, amongst others, are also very important towards students' learning outcomes.

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