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Innovative Mechanism for Building Leadership Skills and Competence among Youths in Educational Setting: The Outcome of a Three-Phased Experiment.....152

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Innovative Mechanism for Building Leadership Skills and Competence among Youths in Educational Setting: The Outcome of a Three-Phased Experiment

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Abstract

This study reported the outcome of a three-phased experiment on building leadership skills and competence among undergraduate students at the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The basic objective of the experiment was to find-out if students, given the leadership and authority figure to facilitate teaching, would develop and acquire leadership qualities and skills. The experiment was carried out in three phases: The first phase involved 25 students who registered for a course ADE 207 (Principles and Practice of Adult Education) in first semester, 2015/16 academic year. The students were allocated each topic in the outline to prepare and facilitate the teaching on rotational basis. The second phase took place in second semester 2015/2016 academic year with a course ADE 208 (Cost, Budgeting and Financing Adult Education Programs) and the third phase took place in first semester 2016/2017 academic year with ADE 303 (Current issues and Problems in Adult Education). During the methodological processes, other students were asked to secretly rate their colleagues, who assumed the lectureship position, using these rating scores: 1-2 (Poor), 3-4 (Fair), 5-6 (Good), 7-8 (Very Good), and 9-10 (Excellent) on identified parameters. The outcome of the experiments showed that the performance rating scores of all the students, at the first phase, was poor between (1-2) in most of the parameters. However, at the second phase, the rating scores had improved to between (5-6) marks while at the third phase, the performance rating had improved to between (7-8) marks. Two implications were derivable from this experiment: firstly, schools' curriculum and teaching methodologies must be re-structured to give students, the future leaders, the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and competence right from the school; and secondly, leadership skills can be acquired if people are given continuous exposures and opportunities.

Key Words: Leadership skills, preparation, confidence, composure, communication, presentation, persuasion

Introduction and the Justification for the Experiment

It is indisputable fact that leadership is essentially the possession of requisite knowledge and skills needed for effective management of human and non-human resources to produce desired results or outcomes. In other words, the desired qualities associated with result-oriented leaders are significantly determined by the amount of knowledge and skills possessed. These knowledge and skills are largely theoretically acquired through exposure to learning opportunities provided by educational institutions before they are complemented with practical experiences. In this context, it is strongly believed that educational institutions have a major role to play in the production of good, effective, and efficient leaders.

Unfortunately, in Africa, this is not the case. Leadership building process does not start from the educational institutions. In the typical African traditional educational system, knowledge is seen as a gift bestowed by the teacher, through the transfer of existing knowledge, to the students who

unquestionably receive, file, and store deposits. The curricula, ideas, and values are imposed on the students considered as passive objects; thereby, submerging their consciousness. Students in this setting merely memorize and repeat knowledge transferred to them by the teacher. This has produced alienated consciousness as students are not involved in the real act of knowing but are given a ready-made view of social. This type of education is what Paulo Freire (1973) called “domesticated education”. The resultant outcome of this educational system has been the production of students who are passive in nature, self-depreciated, denied the right of questioning the teacher as authority figure, live in culture of silence, immersed in alienated consciousness, and highly indoctrinated and manipulated.

In order to reverse this trend where students are immersed in reality in some predetermined manner by the traditional educational system, this three-phased experimental study was carried out. The cardinal objective of the experiment was to find-out if students, given the leadership and authority figure to facilitate teaching as lecturers, would develop and acquire qualities associated with leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership problem or failure of leadership is not often associated with the West and other industrialized nations; it is always linked to Africa and other third world countries. This is largely a truism considering the chronic systemic dysfunction plaguing the continents. Leaders in African and less-developed countries are often judged and criticized in terms of performance and effectiveness in leadership roles. However, most discussions of failure of leadership in Africa do not focus on the process of building students, who are often tagged future leaders, to acquire leadership skills and competences right from schools through methodologies of teaching and learning. This probably might have contributed to the emergence of youths in Africa who are shy of taking leadership roles or who are bereft of leadership skills and competences especially in political affairs.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What was the result obtained in the first phase of the experiment when students took the mantle of leadership and authority figure in the facilitation of their teaching?

2. What result was obtained in the second phase?
3. What was the outcome of the experimentation in the third phase?
4. What were the specific qualities and skills associated with leadership displayed by the students at the experiment?

Literature Review on Leadership

Literature review for this study was anchored on four major areas: contemporary perception of leadership, qualities associated with of effective leaders, Leadership skills, and Leadership competences. The essence of this review was to determine if the qualities, skills, and competences manifested by the students during the experiment were synonymous with those associated with effective leaders' as recognized in literature. Some of the most appropriate literature relevant to this study is presented below:

Leadership is often seen as one of the most important and effective responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by the global context. Definitions of leadership are many and varied. Leadership, as a concept, seems to be a fluid one, as there is a range of variety on what it is (Kort 2008). Regardless of the paradigm, or the perspective, there is one core problem that seems to be persistent (to date) in leadership studies: its definition (Kramer 2008; Northhouse 2010). Leadership is increasingly defined and judged in relation to complex global socio-economic and environmental risks and opportunities, and the pursuit of 'sustainable development'.

The leaders of today – be they political leaders, corporate leaders or civil society leaders – have to act within the context of a dynamic system of global pressures and trends. These are tracked every year by the World Economic Forum's (WEF, 2016) Global Risks Report. In some specific terms, leadership means authority, control, direction, guidance, initiative, influence. (Lindberg, 2002). Leadership is that process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment (Jaques & Clement, 1994). Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project (Cohen, 1990) while Kouzes & Posner, (1995) contended that Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.

The common themes identified in this review as relevant to the study show that the act of leadership by students, when they take authority figure in facilitating their own teaching, involves setting of purpose or direction for the teaching task, moving or mobilizing other students along in order to accomplish shared aspirations, competence, and full commitment.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, (2004) once remarked that “there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader”. This connotes that a leader must possess certain qualities for turning thing around with an intervention. Some of the qualities identified by scholars include the following: ability to argue cohesively and coherently (Senge, 2006); ability to try just one more time, for example, the legendary great scientist, Thomas Edison tried 10,000 times before succeeding in the invention of his light bulb (Axelrod, 2008); articulation of vision (Lencioni, 2008), humility, empowering, collaborative, communicative, and fearlessness (Sprou, 2011), genuineness, self-awareness, leverage, transition and supportive (Clark, 2010), honesty, ability to delegate, communication, sense of humor, confidence and commitment (Lencioni, 2008), open-mindedness, readiness to learn from others, flexibility, core values, high expectations of others; and emotional resilience and optimism (Day & Leithwood, 2007).

The dominant qualities identified in this review as relevant to the study show that the act of leadership by students, when they take authority figure in facilitating their teaching, involves cohesive and coherent presentation of ideas, the spirit of never giving up, humility, communication; sense of humor, confidence, and commitment.

Despite the existence of thousands of leadership studies, many scholars lament that conceptualizations of leadership skills have received inadequate attention (Wright & Taylor, 1985, 1994; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). However, leadership skill requirements are often considered a complex of multiple categories (Phillips & Hunt, 1992; Zaccaro, 2001). Previous conceptualizations of leadership skill requirements suggest they can be understood in terms of four general categories: (1) Cognitive skills, (2) Interpersonal skills, (3) Business skills, and (4) Strategic skills (Connelly, Gilbert, Zaccaro, Threlfall. Marks, & Mumford, 2000; Zaccaro, 2001). Cognitive skills are the foundation of the leadership skill requirements comprising basic cognitive capacities, such as

collecting, processing, and disseminating information (Lau & Pavett, 1980; Zaccaro, 2001), oral or speaking skills (Shipper & Dillard, 2000), active listening (Graham, 1983), ability to learn and adapt (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987), and critical thinking (Gillen & Carroll, 1985).

The next category of leadership skill requirements is referred to as interpersonal skill requirements because they involve the interpersonal and social skills relating to interacting with and influencing others (Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro, & Reiter-Palmon, 2000). Others are: social capacities (Zaccaro, 2001), social perceptiveness which allows for an awareness of other's reactions and understanding of why they react the way they do (Yukl, 1989), coordination of actions of oneself and others ((Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro, & Reiter-Palmon, 2000), and persuasion skills to influence others to be more effective in the accomplishment of a goal (Yukl, 1989). Strategic skill requirements are highly conceptual skills which include planning-related skills of visioning (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), problem identification skills (Cox & Cooper, 1988; Yukl, 1989), and solution appraisal as well as objective evaluation skills (Mumford, Marks et al., 2000).

The notable qualities identified in this review as relevant to the study show that the act of leadership by students, when they take authority figure in facilitating their teaching, involves collecting, processing, and disseminating information, oral or speaking skills, active listening, ability to learn and adapt, and critical thinking, social skills, social perceptiveness skills, persuasion skills, planning-related skills of visioning, problem identification skills, solution appraisal skills, and objective evaluation skills.

Methodology

The study was quasi-experimental in nature since the variables were not strictly controlled. The population comprised 200 Level students in the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The students were grouped into 4 groups with each group comprising 5 students. Each student was assigned a topic for a 20-minutes presentation to the entire class. The study was carried out in three phases:

The first phase involved 25 students who registered for a course ADE 207 (Principles and Practice of Adult Education) in the first semester 2015/16 academic year in the Department. The students were allocated each topic in the outline to prepare and facilitate the teaching on rotational basis.

The second phase took place in the second semester 2015/2016 academic year with a course ADE 208 (Cost, Budgeting and Financing Adult Education Programs) while the third phase took place in the first semester 2016/2017 academic year with a course ADE 303 (Current issues and Problems in Adult Education).

A jointly-constructed rating scale, with ten parameters: Agenda setting, Preparation, Communication, Presentation, Persuasion, Composure, Confidence, Practicality, Evaluation, and Sense of Humor, was developed by the researchers with the students. The rating score was 1-2 (Poor), 3-4 (Fair), 5-6 (Good), 7-8 (Very Good), and 9-10 (Excellent). The rating scale was administered to the students at each phase of the experiment. In order to ensure easy readability, understanding, and applicability of the entire processes of the experiment, the researchers decided to avoid technical statistical procedures to analyze data obtained and thus settled for simple percentages.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Research question one was raised to ascertain the performance level of the students at the first phase of the experiment when students took the mantle of leadership and authority figure in the facilitation of their own teaching. The result obtained is shown in table 1.

Table 1 showing the performance level of students at the first phase of the experiment:

Indicators:

P= Poor (1-2)

F= Fair (3-4 (Fair)

G=Good (5-6)

V=Very Good (7-8)

E=Excellent (9-10)

Variables	G1					G2					G3					G4				
	P	F	G	V G	E	P	F	G	V G	E	P	F	G	V G	E	P	F	G	V G	E
Agenda setting	18	2	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-	16	4	-	-	-	15	5	-	-	-
Preparation	19	1	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-
Communication	20	-	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-
Presentation	20	-	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-

Persuasion	20	-	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	17	3	-	-	-
Composure	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-
Confidence	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-
Practicality	20	-	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-
Evaluation	19	1	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-	18	2	-	-	-
Sense of Humor	20	-	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-	19	1	-	-	-

The assessment rating in the first phase of the experiment showed they scored between 1-2 marks while only few of them scored between 3-4 marks. This showed that all the groups performed poorly in all the parameters of assessment. However, all the group members were applauded for their efforts since it was their first experience in such exercise. In a question and answer interaction with the members, the researchers informed members what they performed poorly and what they needed to do to improve their performance in each parameter in subsequent presentations. They were specifically advised to read extensively by consulting more literature on the content areas of their topics and listen consciously to the presentations of good and notable speakers especially on subject/content mastery, agenda-setting, language sophistry, confidence, composure, and practicality. Some notable and universally acknowledged speakers like, J.F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr, Barrack Obama, Winston Churchill were suggested. Thereafter, members were advised to prepare for the second phase of the experiment.

Research question two was raised to ascertain the performance level of the students at the second phase of the experiment.

The result obtained is shown in table 2 on the next page.

Table 2 showing the performance level of students at the second phase of the experiment:

Indicators:

P= Poor (1-2)

F= Fair (3-4 (Fair)

G=Good (5-6)

V=Very Good (7-8)

E=Excellent (9-10)

Variables	G1					G2					G3					G4				
	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E
Agenda setting	-	5	15	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	2	18	-	-	-
Preparation	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	2	18	-	-	-
Communication	-	6	14	-	-	-	5	15	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	3	17	-	-	-
Presentation	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	3	17	-	-	-
Persuasion	-	5	15	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	4	16	-	-	-
Composure	-	7	13	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	6	14	-	-	-
Confidence	-	7	13	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	6	14	-	-	-
Practicality	-	6	14	-	-	-	5	15	-	-	-	5	15	-	-	5	15	-	-	-
Evaluation	-	5	15	-	-	-	5	15	-	-	-	5	15	-	-	4	16	-	-	-
Sense of Humor	-	7	13	-	-	-	7	13	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	6	14	-	-	-

The assessment rating in the second phase of the experiment showed that the groups scored between 5-6 marks while few scored between 3-4 marks. This showed that there had been an improvement in the performance of the groups' presentations in all the parameters of assessment. The improvement in the presentations and performances of the students was as a result of the improvement and motivational tips provided by the researchers at the end of the first phase of the experiment. This reflected in their improvement on agenda setting, use of language, composure, confidence, practicality, and evaluation. However, the shortcomings noticeable in their presentations were pointed out and were subsequently advised to improve on these shortcomings. They were, thereafter, greatly appreciated and applauded for their improved performance at the second phase of the experiment. They were further assured that with constant and continuously practice and repetition of the suggested mechanisms, they will further develop their sophistry in eloquent presentation of ideas to people which is the hallmark of 21st century leaders.

Research question three was raised to ascertain if the students actually worked on the shortcomings pointed out to them at end of the second phase of the experiment. The result obtained is shown in table 3.

Table 3 showing the performance level of students at each group at the third phase of the experiment:

Indicators:

P= Poor (1-2)

F= Fair (3-4 (Fair)

G=Good (5-6)

V=Very Good (7-8)

E=Excellent (9-10)

Variables	G1					G2					G3					G4				
	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E	P	F	G	VG	E
Agenda setting	-	-	4	16		-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-
Preparation	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-
Communication	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-
Presentation	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-
Persuasion	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-	-	-	2	18	-
Composure	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-
Confidence	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	4	16	-
Practicality	-	-	4	16	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	2	18	-
Evaluation	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-	-	-	3	17	-
Sense of Humor	-	-	7	13	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	-	6	14	-	-	-	4	16	

The assessment rating in the third phase of the experiment showed that the significant proportion group members scored between 7-8 marks while few scored between 5-6 marks. This showed that there had been a significant improvement in the performance of the groups' presentations in all the parameters when compared to the results of the first phase. The deduction arrived at with these scores was that the students had actually worked on the shortcomings pointed-out at the end of the second phase of the experiment. This simply confirms the age-long maxim that "practice makes more perfection". This phase concluded the experiment.

Research question four was raised to ascertain from the students the specific areas where they think they had recorded improvement after the third phase of the experiment. The result obtained is shown in table 4

Table 4 showing the specific areas of improvement by the students:

Variables	G1			G2			G3			G4		
	G	VG	E	G	VG	E	G	VG	E	G	VG	E
Agenda setting	1	4	-	-	5	-	1	4	-	-	5	-
Preparation	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	5	-
Communication	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-
Presentation	2	3	-	1	4	-	2	3	-	1	4	-
Persuasion	1	4	-	2	3	-	2	3	-	1	4	-
Composure	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-
Confidence	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-	1	4	-
Practicality	1	4	-	2	3	-	1	4	-	1	4	-
Evaluation	2	3	-	2	3	-	2	3	-	2	3	-
Sense of Humor	2	3	-	2	3	-	2	3	-	2	3	-

The assessment rating by the students themselves at the end of the experiment showed that they had significantly improved in the following areas: agenda setting, preparation, communication, persuasion, composure, confidence, and practicality while all of them agreed that they still need to further work on their presentation, evaluation, and sense of humor. This simply connotes that the process of building leadership qualities and skills in people is never a one-time process but a continuous exercise.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this three-phased experiment showed that students performed poorly in the first phase of the experiment because it was their first experience in such leadership role. However, there were tremendous improvements in their performances in the second and third phases of the experiments. With the third experience of the students, they had developed to provide effective responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by the responsibilities entrusted on them. This is one the most important attributes associated with leadership. Besides, they had grown to acquire some of the qualities and skills associated with leadership. For example, their improvement in agenda setting is associated with what Lencioni, (2008) termed “articulation of vision”, “planning-related skills of visioning” (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), and “problem identification skills” (Cox & Cooper, 1988; Yukl, 1989). Their improvement in preparation is linked with what Lau & Pavett, 1980; Zaccaro, (2001) termed “basic cognitive capacities of collecting, processing, and disseminating information”. Their improvement in communication is linked with what Shipper & Dillard, (2000) termed “oral communication skills of speaking”, “active listening” (Graham, 1983), “ability to learn and adapt” (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987), and “critical thinking” (Gillen & Carroll, 1985). Their improvement in

persuasion is linked with what Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro, & Reiter-Palmon, (2000) called “interpersonal and social skills of interacting and influencing others”. Their improvement in composure and confidence is linked with what Llopis, (2014) called “positive mental attitude” and “decisive response”. Their improvement in confidence is linked with what Janseen, (2004) termed “preparation”, “past success (es)”, and “praise”. Lastly, their improvement in practicality is linked to what Mumford, Marks et al., (2000) termed solution appraisal.

Furthermore, the lessons derivable from this experiment can be summarized as follows: (1) The acquisition of leadership qualities and skills is a process and not a chance or accidental phenomenon. Effective leaders are not produced in a day. They are produced through a constant and continuous exposition to leadership roles and responsibilities which was what the second and third phases of the experiments were designed for. (2) Leadership production process must begin with and from the educational institutions. Every child enrolled in school must be made to pass through leadership tutelage so as to make him or her begin to think, speak, and act like future leaders. (3) Leadership must be seen as a building enterprise. In other words, acquisition of leadership qualities and skills must begin at youthful ages before transition to adulthood. One fundamental error in leadership in Africa is that the building process usually takes place at adulthood when people assume leadership roles and responsibilities. If leadership is perceived as a building enterprise from youthful ages, young ones will be prepared, right from the outset, for leadership roles and responsibilities at adulthood ages.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has been able to establish that it is highly possible for students to facilitate their own teaching and develop their cognitive skills without so much reliance on their teachers or lecturers. This process will help them to assume leadership role and empower them leadership qualities and skills. Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that:

1. For maximum self-development and self-fulfillment, students, especially at tertiary institutions, should be allowed at every point in time to assume leadership role by facilitating their own teaching instead of over-reliance on their lecturers. Through this process, they will begin to develop qualities and skills associated with leadership.

2. Every school at primary and secondary schools level must be mandated by law to establish leadership clubs where pupils are trained to play leadership roles and acquire leadership qualities and skills. Such clubs must be made a compulsory extra-curricular activity for all pupils in such schools.
3. The National Policy of Education in African countries must be revised to allow for the inclusion of leadership building as an important or vital part of the national goals which education is used as a tool to achieve. Leadership building should also be introduced as a compulsory subject at primary and secondary schools and compulsory course at the tertiary institutions.

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