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The Effects of Teaching Strategies on Student Engagement in Secondary Schools in Malawi: A Case Study of Bvumbwe, Mountain View and Thunga Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of various teaching strategies on student engagement in secondary schools in Malawi, focusing on Bvumbwe, Mountain View, and Thunga secondary schools in Thyolo District. The study explores how different instructional approaches influence students' motivation, participation, and academic performance. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. Findings suggest that student-centered teaching strategies significantly enhance engagement, while traditional teacher-centered methods often lead to disengagement. The study recommends that professional development programs should be implemented to train teachers on innovative pedagogical techniques that promote interactive and participatory learning environments.

KEYWORDS: Teaching strategies, student engagement, secondary education, Malawi

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have a significant part to play in the lives of their students inside the classrooms. Their job is not just to teach, but their teaching styles is a reflection of the actions and environment they set in the classrooms. The student's success does not deepend solely on the grades being achieved but how the grades were achieved whether students took interest or it was learnt just for the sake of it. Hence, the psychological sense of being with others in a comfortable environment is equally vital in the classroom.

Teaching styles are significant environmental and social factors in satisfying the need of belongness in classroom which consequently influences motivation and performance (Gillet,Vallerand,Amoura & Baldes ,2010). Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that a childs perceptions of teachers involvement can predict the successive engagement in class to a point that when children experience teachers as warm and affectionate, children feel happier and more enthusiatic in classes. Furthermore, relatedness with teachers positively can predict students self-reported motivation in schools even after taking into account their control beliefs and prior motivation (Wentzel & Caldwell,2017).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Student engagement plays a vital role in academic success by influencing motivation, participation, and learning outcomes. Research indicates that interactive and student-centered learning approaches have a positive impact on students' cognitive and emotional involvement in their education. In Malawi, despite continuous educational reforms, many students remain disengaged in classrooms. This disengagement manifests in low participation, lack of interest, and poor academic performance. Factors such as large class sizes, outdated teaching methods, and insufficient teacher training contribute to this issue.

There is growing interest worldwide in developing the learning process in secondary school education and engagement is an interesting factor in this regard (Quaye,Harper and Pendikur 2019). It has become necessary to activate the role of students in the learning process to abtain better outcomes(Murray,2018). Engagement may increase students in the learning process and this os evident in several forms including an attempt to break away from traditional learning patterns and pedagogies (Groccia,2018).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The challenge of student disengagement in Malawi's secondary schools is a critical issue that affects overall educational outcomes. Despite teacher training programs and curriculum reforms, students often remain passive in classroom activities. The traditional teacher-centered approach, characterized by rote memorization and passive listening, is widely practiced, contributing to low student motivation. This study investigates how various teaching strategies influence student engagement and academic success, providing insights into effective methods that can enhance learning experiences.

This study aims to explore participants views about student

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the this study was to find out the effects of teaching strategies on students engagement in secondary school schools in Malawi within Bvumbwe, Mountain View and Thunga secondary schools. The specific goals are to:

1. Find out the level of teacher understanding of student engagement in the teaching -learning process.

2. Identify teaching strategies that increase student engagement.

3. Identify factors affect student engagement during the teaching-learning process.

4. Find out student engagement affects learning.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant as it provides empirical data on the effectiveness of various teaching strategies in enhancing student engagement. The findings will be beneficial for policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers to develop effective teaching practices. Additionally, it offers recommendations for professional development programs to improve teacher effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

Teaching strategies refer to the approaches, methods, and techniques educators use to deliver instruction. Effective strategies should cater to diverse learning styles and promote active participation. According to Picard (2004), an appropriate teaching style should consider students' needs, the subject matter, and the teacher's expertise.

Herrell and Jordan (2004) categorize teaching strategies into traditional and student-centered approaches. Traditional methods, such as lectures and rote learning, focus on content delivery with minimal student interaction. In contrast, student-centered methods, including group discussions, problem-solving activities, and technology-enhanced learning, encourage active participation and deeper understanding (Crosby, 2002).

Factors Affecting Student Engagement

Several factors influence student engagement in classrooms, including:

Teacher-Student Interaction: A warm and supportive learning environment fosters motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Teaching Styles: Active learning strategies, such as cooperative learning and inquiry-based teaching, enhance engagement (Hiver et al., 2021).

Classroom Environment: A positive and inclusive atmosphere promotes student participation.

Curriculum and Assessment: Engaging content and fair assessment methods encourage student involvement (Burke, 2019).

 The Role of Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered learning (SCL) emphasizes active participation and critical thinking. According to Lea et al. (2003), SCL involves problem-solving, collaboration, and reflection, making learning more meaningful. Studies in Helsinki (Lonka & Ahola, 2005) show that students in active learning environments develop better study skills than those in traditional settings.

Despite its benefits, implementing SCL faces challenges such as large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate teacher training (Bantwini, 2009). Overcoming these barriers requires proper planning, professional development, and investment in educational resources.

Influence of teaching styles:

He Wen suggests that teachers with short teaching experience tend to favor conseevative teaching styles while teachers with more than 20years of teaching experience are more inclined to legislative and radical styles. Sceince teachers and teachers of other subjects tend to be more executive than liberal arts teachers. Genaralist teachers tend to favor the executive and journal of education, himanities and social sciences PSHE 2024 volume 29 (2004) 508 conservative styles more than high performance teachers but these styles are less popular because they are relatively simple and ineffective. The percentage of highly effective teachers is much lower among teachers with 1-4 years of teaching experience than among those with more than 5 years of

teaching experience suggesting that as teachers enter the maturity stage they refine their teaching experience style and other aspects of their teaching and increase their effectiveness. Compared to teaching the focus on factors influencing the formation of teaching styles in countries other than China has been more centered on school,student and teacher factors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active student participation in the learning process. Constructivists argue that knowledge is best acquired through meaningful interaction and engagement rather than passive reception (Vygotsky, 1978). The Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) also supports this study by explaining how intrinsic motivation can be fostered through autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Teaching strategies significantly affect student engagement by shaping classroom dynamics, motivation, and learning experiences. Research shows that student-centered methods, such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and technology-enhanced instruction, lead to higher engagement levels compared to traditional teacher-centered approaches (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Several factors influence student engagement, including the learning environment, teacher-student interactions, classroom resources, and curriculum design. Studies indicate that schools with well-trained teachers, modern teaching tools, and supportive learning environments report higher student engagement rates (Fredricks et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Surveys, interviews, and classroom observations were conducted to assess the impact of teaching strategies on student engagement. The combination of both methods provides a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

This approach was beneficial beacuse:

. Quntitative data provided stastical evidence of trends.

. Qualitative data offered in depth perspective on student engagement.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The study targets secondary school teachers and students from Bvumbwe, Mountain View, and Thunga secondary schools. A sample size of 150 participants was selected using stratified random sampling, compromising students, teachers and school administrators. The sample size was determined based on:

. The need for diversity in perpspectives.

. The feasibility of data collection.

. The desire for accuracy and reliability in the results.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

The study used :

1.Questionnaires: structured questionnaires were distributed to students and teachers to capture their views on teaching strategies and engagement.

The questionnaires helps in covering a large number of respondents in a short time

2.interviews :in depth interviews were conducted with school administrators to gain deeper insights into institutional teaching policies and strategies.

3. Observations: classroom observations were carried out to assess real time student engagement and teaching methods.

The researcher carried out observation during the school visits.

The rsearcher arrived at the school before 7:00 am in the morning . The aim was to observe how and when the school activities start and when actual teaching and learning commence

SECONDARY DATA

Existing literature, educational reports anf academic background information and support the studys findings.

The use of multipal data sources helped triangulate findings, reducing bias and improving reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods were applied.

Quantitative analysis: Qualitative data from questionnaires werw applied using descriptive statitics (percentages, mean scores) to summarise the findings. Inferential statistics, to determine relationships between teaching strategies and student engagement.

Qualitative data analysis: Quantitative data interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis that identifying common themes and patterns responses, narratives analysis this understands personal experiences shared by teachers and students.

RESEARCH TOOLS

1. Questionnaires used for both students and teachers to collect quantitative data

2. Interview guides structured questions were used to facilitate discussions with school administrators.

3. Used to record student teacher interactions and engagement levels in the classroom

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The tables in the document summarize key findings from the study on teaching strategies and student engagement. Here's an explanation of what each table represents based on the results:

Table 1: Teaching Strategies and Their Effectiveness

TEACHING STRATEGY	TEACHER USAGE (%)	EFFECTIVENESS RATING (1-5)
Group work	68%	4.2
Interactive discussions	55%	4.0
Technology use	42%	3.8
Lecture-Based teaching	73%	2.5

Interpretation:

Most teachers (73%) rely on lecture-based teaching, but it has the lowest effectiveness rating (2.5/5), indicating that students may not engage well in passive learning environments.

Group work (68%) and interactive discussions (55%) are more effective, with ratings above 4.0, suggesting that when students collaborate, they engage better and retain information more effectively.

Technology use (42%) is less common but has a relatively high effectiveness rating (3.8/5), indicating that digital tools could improve engagement if utilized more widely.

This table highlights a misalignment between teaching strategies and effectiveness. Teachers tend to use lectures despite their lower effectiveness, while more engaging strategies like group work and discussions are underutilized.

Table 2: Factors Affecting Student Engagement

CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT	TEACHER REPORTS (%)
Large class sizes	61(%)
Lack of learning resources	58(%)

High teacher workload	47(%)

Interpretation:

Large class sizes (61%) are the most reported barrier to engagement, as overcrowded classrooms make student participation and individual attention difficult.

Lack of resources (58%) affects student learning, as inadequate textbooks, digital tools, and classroom materials hinder interactive teaching methods.

High teacher workload (47%) contributes to the reliance on lecture-based teaching, as teachers may lack time to prepare student-centered activities.

This table suggests that systemic issues in education—such as class size and resource shortages—negatively impact student engagement. Addressing these barriers could improve the implementation of more effective teaching strategies.

Key Insights from the Tables:

Lecture-based teaching remains dominant despite being the least effective.

More engaging methods (group work, discussions, and technology) have higher effectiveness but are not used as frequently.

Structural challenges (large class sizes, resource shortages, and teacher workload) limit the ability of teachers to implement student-centered learning.

Implications for Policy and Practice:

1. Reduce class sizes to create a more interactive learning environment.

2. Invest in resources such as digital tools and learning materials to support engagement.

3. Provide teacher training on active learning strategies to improve classroom participation.

4. Encourage blended learning approaches that combine technology with interactive teaching methods.

These findings reinforce the need for education reforms that prioritize student engagement through improved teaching strategies and better learning conditions.

Findings indicate that student engagement is significantly influenced by the choice of teaching strategies. Student-centered methods, such as cooperative learning, interactive discussions, and problem-solving activities, enhance motivation and participation. Traditional lecture-based teaching, on the other hand, often leads to passive learning an disengagement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICES

Teachers who adopt diverse instructional strategies tailored to students' needs create more engaging learning experiences. Professional development programs should emphasize innovative teaching techniques to foster student involvement and active learning.

CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that teaching strategies play a crucial role in shaping student engagement and learning outcomes. To enhance engagement, schools should implement student-centered teaching approaches and invest in teacher training programs. The government should also provide resources to improve classroom conditions and support modern pedagogical tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers should incorporate interactive and student-centered teaching methods.

2. The Ministry of Education should provide regular professional development workshops.

3. Schools should integrate modern technology to support active learning.

4. Further research should explore long-term impacts of engagement strategies on student performance.

5. Classroom sizes should be reduced to ensure effective teacher-student interactions.

6. School management should foster an inclusive and participatory learning environment.

CONCLUSSION

Student engagement is essential for academic success and overall learning experience. This study highlights the importance of adopting diversified teaching strategies to enhance classroom participation, by implementing student-centered approaches, professional development programs and technology integration, Malawi's education system can create more engaging learning environments.

Future research could wide to other sides anf educationa levels, ensuring a deeper understanding of how teaching strategies impact student engagement across different contexts.

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