Promotion of Secure Learning Environment: A Clarion Call for Teachers and Facilitators

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Abstract

The significance of learning environment in the teaching and learning process is non-negotiable. In spite of the efforts already exerted by the providers of both primary and post-primary education to secure school learning environment, the classroom teachers, specialist teachers and facilitators must also play their own role to promote the safety of the pupils, students and learners in order to complement the efforts of the providers of education at primary, post-primary schools and adult learning centres. To this end, the paper examines teachers and facilitators as actors in the promotion of secure learning environment. In order to achieve this feat, the paper discusses secure learning environment, teachers and facilitators under conceptual clarifications, and core values required by teachers and facilitators for effective promotion of secure learning environment. The paper also discusses how teachers and facilitators can possibly promote the school environment to make pupils, students, and learners safe from all hazards that can retard the pace of learning achievements. Based on the discussion of the paper, it was recommended, among others, that safety education should be incorporated into teacher education curriculum as a compulsory course for all disciplines.
Keywords: promotion, secure, learning, environment, teachers

Introduction

Learning environment remains the only medium through which effective teaching and learning process can take place. Going by this assertion, learning environment should be prepared in such a way that it is devoid of all indices that may pose any threat to smooth transmission of knowledge. It entails the organization of the entire conditions necessary for promoting learning activities in the school setting. According to Mgbodile (2014), learning environment needs to be healthy and attractive in order to promote learners' pride in their school and to also encourage them to continue their education.

A conducive and secure environment does not only include adequate/comfortable classrooms and other school facilities, and absence of threat-posing situations but it promotes cordial and mutual relationship between teachers/facilitators and the pupils, students and learners

necessary for achieving improved productivity. Hezekiah et al. (2020) argued that learning environment comprises all those internal conditions of a school that influence students' academic performance.

Secure school environment as opposed to insecure one connotes a state where protection of lives and properties in school is guaranteed. It offers a learning atmosphere where learners are free from fear, injury, danger, exploitation, anxiety, harm, intimidation, disease, or uncertainties that may jeopardize their academic pursuit. To this end, it is imperative for all stakeholders in education industry especially teachers, facilitators, and instructors to jack up their level of commitment towards strengthening the security of their schools.

Secure learning environment
A learning environment is said to be secure when the physical environment is primarily established for the purpose of accommodating learners in order to effectively participate in all the programmes of activities put in place by the school. Mwoma et al. (2018) further stressed that a secure learning environment is that environment which promotes safety, inclusiveness, gender equality, academic support, healthy inter-personal relationship, learners' participation and freedom from discrimination and any form of abuse. Consequently, Egle (2007) cited in Duruji et al. (2014) identified social environment, physical environment, emotional environment, cognitive environment and holistic environment as the five (5) basic elements of secure learning environment.

Secure learning environment is crucial to the teaching and learning process in any school as it encompasses all the physical facilities available in the school. Such facilities include the school buildings, school premises, field, laboratory, library, school plant, play items and a host of others. Focusing Resources of Effective School Health (FRESH) (2013) affirmed that such school infrastructure often conforms to security standard and to some extent have resistance to natural disasters and free from hazardous materials.

A secure learning environment is a medium through which many stakeholders in education (school boys and girls, parents, teachers, administrations and others) are equipped with the knowledge to become active agents in propagating the need for violent-free schools. It also helps to promote the use of positive disciplinary method and child centred pedagogy/learner centred andragogy methods of teaching, which focus on child and adult learners' interest.

A secure learning environment enhances the use of rules which are also being followed strictly by the pupils, students and leaners to prevent violence of different kinds within and around the school location. Gatua (2015) submitted that in a secure learning environment violent incidents are reported, victims are given proper care while perpetrators are identified and handed over to appropriate quarters. In addition to this, Soretire and Adejobi (2019) reported that a secure learning environment has plans for frequent practices that allow for prompt and safe reactions in situations of emergency, conflict and fragility.

Teacher and facilitator

A teacher is someone that helps other people to learn; hence he is regarded as reservoir of knowledge. The teacher plans and makes decision on what to teach, how to teach, methods to adapt and why a particular topic has to be taught at a particular time. Ajayi (2019) posited that a teacher is someone who helps to increase learners' knowledge through instruction. Teachers are instructional delivery personnel that place premium on influencing pupils, students and learners towards imbibing desirable changes in their behaviour.

Teachers stand as the central authority in the classroom since their major concern is to impart knowledge to pupils, students and learners through a combination of strategies that bother on the use of instructional methods, teaching technology, collection of instructional materials and a host of other teaching resources that will make learning achievable within the shortest possible time. According to Idowu et al. (2019), teachers stand as authority that dish out contents of a subject in sequence, with the view of developing the mind of the learners. The pedagogical skills exhibited by teachers in the classroom are evident in their teaching styles and teaching theories. Teaching styles can be in many forms which include phonics, retrieval practice, Socratic questioning, Montessori and others; all of which are predetermined by the teachers' background, preferences and context. Idowu et al. (2019) also noted that a teacher stands in a better position to employ any of the teaching approaches or a combination of two, depending on the contents of the subject matter at hand.

Teaching theories emphasize the way and manner through which one can practically absorb, process and retain knowledge. Teachers employ these theories to complement their teaching. Many of the contents are simplified and modified through the use of these theories; hence comprehension of contents becomes easier for the pupils and students. Good examples of such teaching theories include SOLO taxonomy, Bloom's taxonomy, Flipped learning, Growth Mindset, among others.

Facilitators on the other hand have their major focus on guiding those individuals that are regarded as adults to learn without any form of threat, intimidation and compulsion. The understanding displayed by facilitator in learning centres is the manifestation of the flexibility in andragogy method of instructional delivery. Andragogy which is centred on imparting knowledge to adults is basically learner centred in nature. It offers learners the opportunity to select their learning experiences, the time that suits them and gives them the understanding that learning is not a do or die affair. Glasser (1996) asserted that andragogy is a need based, adaptive and holistic learning where personal interpretation, evaluation, decision making, reasoning and strategies are developed to give expertise.

Unlike pedagogy which places premium on the teacher, andragogy affords every learner the opportunity to act as a stakeholder since such learner is involved in the identification of his learning needs and the strategies to be employed in meeting those needs. Going by the philosophy of andragogy, facilitators are always very careful when dealing with the adult learners. Adediran et al. (2019) affirmed that a facilitator must maintain a careful balance in the presentation of new materials and its application, discussion and participation among the learners.

Teachers and facilitators are both instructional delivery personnel that employ different approaches to impart knowledge to their recipients. Apart from the fact that the two approaches to learning have their target audience, their ideology, time and places of contact, instruction made, among others, are distinct in nature.

Core values required by teachers and facilitators

Teachers and facilitators play a major role in the education industry. In spite of the fact that there are variations in their instructional delivery approaches, their major concern of making changes in the behaviour of their recipient is the same. In view of this, values required by teachers and facilitators to promote a secure learning environment are the same. Such values include:

a) Empathy: This emphasizes the act of putting oneself in another person's situation. Empathy is a term that propagates love and respect for people, especially the ones in one's vicinity. Showing love and respect by teachers and facilitators to their learners is an indicator that teachers and facilitators have gone beyond discharging their traditional duty of imparting knowledge to making the learners feel secure in both classroom and outside classroom situations. Egle (2007) cited in Duruji et al. (2014) reported that emotional environment which is an aspect of learning environment fosters learners' self-esteem by encouraging involvement, contributions, respect for people, careful handling of confidential matters and provision of constructive feedback.

b) Respect for sanctity of life: This value holds that every human being is precious and sacred; hence all hands must be on deck to make sure that things that may cause injury or lead to death must be accorded immediate attention and eliminated. Physical environment which is also an aspect of learning environment must be well-taken care of. Good ventilation, large and convenient classrooms, convenient seating arrangements, illuminated classrooms, fixing of dilapidated building and many others, are typical examples of conducive physical environment. Teachers and facilitators who are advocates of conducive physical environment for learners will equally demonstrate zero tolerance for injuries and loss of lives caused by poor physical learning environment.

c) Unity: Unity is a core value that campaigns for oneness among the diverse ethnic groups. The spirit of oneness demonstrated by teachers and facilitators will undoubtedly go a long way to promote holistic environment (an aspect of learning environment) which emphasizes the need to recognize and incorporate individuals' cultural and religious differences which sometimes determine individuals' learning preferences. Besides, these personnel should discharge their duties with high sense of humility which will in turn help learners feel secure in their learning environment.

d) Public spiritedness: This value is premised on the assumption that people must socialize and show immeasurable interest in the people around them. Ideally, formal schools, literacy centres, skill acquisition centres and the likes often parade instructional delivery personnel that are well trained in the area of socialization since schools and learning centres are generally regarded as socialization agents. Instructional delivery personnel who is conscious of the learners' social environment, which happens to be an aspect of learning environment, should employ various welcome signs, introduce group activities both within and outside the learning environment, engage learners in activities that will make them come together, share and exchange ideas; while he oversees, guides and makes possible corrections when and where

necessary. Learners, whether children or adults, are social beings; hence teachers and facilitators need to help to identify and bring out the social traits in them.

e) Motivation: This involves the use of various strategies to arouse the interest of the learners. Motivation helps to build confidence in learners and it also makes them worthy by boosting their self-esteem. At this point, it is worthy of note that confidence and self-esteem are major indices required by learners to solve problems of varying magnitude. Teachers and facilitators need to employ various motivational strategies to make learners see the relevance of learning. By doing so, they have prepared a secure cognitive environment (an aspect of learning environment) which is evident in the ability of the learners to participate in decision making process which may be instrumental to their successful academic pursuit.

Teacher, facilitator and promotion of secure learning environment
The imperativeness of the teaching and learning process demands that it is carried out in an environment where learners can possibly have theoretical and practical knowledge of concepts without experiencing any form of intimidation, discrimination, rejection and deprivation. A learning environment which does not guarantee learners' safety may not serve as a good platform for conveying knowledge, skills, attitude and other transferable values to the learners.

Teachers and facilitators as experts in the teaching field must demonstrate that they are good confidants, guidance counsellors, and psychologists. They should be able to understand that learners' feelings are factors that must be reckoned with if learning must be achieved. Wardman (2016) argued that before learners can succeed academically, they must feel safe, both physically and mentally. Therefore, teachers and facilitators should create an emotional learning environment that will accommodate the feelings of the learners in a way that will make learning achievable within the shortest possible time. They can do this by taking time to observe their learners, ask them questions that may give clue to the problems confronting them, encourage them to share their burdens, and above all, making themselves available and approachable for the learners especially when they are emotionally down or financially handicapped.

Teachers and facilitators should organize their learning environment in such a way that it is safe and devoid of structures that can cause injuries or death. They should be conscious of the conditions of their physical learning environment and make amends where possible or call the attention of the school or learning centre manager for immediate action. Murugan and Rajoo (2013) reported that creating an ideal physical learning environment ought to be a priority of every concerned educationalist because being comfortable should be a combination of several factors which include temperature, lighting, noise control, among others. More so, the arrangements and organization of all the facilities in the physical learning environment must suit the taste of the learners. Balog (2018) asserted that the physical learning environment must be organized in such a way that it evolves positive responses and holds the interest of those that inhabit it. A situation whereby teachers and facilitators are able to prepare the physical learning environment to conform to learners' taste and interest is a right step towards achieving maximum learning.

It is also pertinent to note that learners are of diverse cultures and religions, hence teachers and facilitators have a lot to do in organizing holistic learning environment that will foster

cooperation among the learners irrespective of the differences in their religious beliefs and cultures. Cooperation among learners offers each and every one of them the opportunity to share his or her ideas and equally tap from the ideas of the other learners in the group. Holistic learning environment makes learners to feel free especially when and where learners from different ethnic groups converge to learn together. In the course of learning together, they develop skills of critical thinking which are employed to solve many personal and societal problems. According to Racoon (2018), such learning environment emphasizes the use of critical thinking, knowledge and information to solve problems of varying types, affords learners the opportunity to work collaboratively, communicate effectively and develop academic mindset that will significantly increase students' engagement.

Conclusion

Secure learning environment is the responsibility of all the stakeholders in education. Teachers and facilitators as major actors in education play a significant role in the promotion of secure learning environment which has proven over time to be the platform through which learning is achieved. This is evident in the fact that a save learning environment promotes safe minds which in turn enhance concentration and optimal learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

i. Safety education should be incorporated into teacher education curriculum as a compulsory course for all disciplines. This will undoubtedly help to broaden the knowledge of the teachers and facilitators in areas that relate to the safety of the student.

ii. The providers of primary, post-primary and adult education programmes should organize or sponsor their teachers and facilitators to attend conferences, seminars and workshop bordering on safety issues. This will go a long way to acquaint the teaching personnel with the new strategies involved in keeping the learning environment safe for students.

iii. Safety clubs should be established in primary and post-primary schools. These clubs will help to compliment and expand the scope of teaching of the old ones like Girls' Guide, Boy Brigade, Boys' Scout, Red Cross and Man O' War while students will also have opportunity of joining new safety clubs.

iv. Teachers should be placed on duty to check the excesses of the students especially during the break time when their activities are at peak. Through this arrangement, the occurrence of injuries among students will be reduced to the barest minimum.

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