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## **Publish Or Perish- Publication Over Emphasized At The Expense of Effective Teaching: The Case of Ghanaian Universities**

### **Abstract**

*Almost all colleges and universities profess to be committed to effective teaching as evident in their brochures and catalogues. However, this representation is open to challenge from those who teach and those who learn in today's colleges and universities simply because teaching accounts for second rate status by lecturers who feel that greater consideration is given to scholarly publications than to teaching in recruitment, promotion and tenure decisions by university authorities (Seldin, 1989:3) In Ghana, the general axiom is "publish or perish" and not "teach well or perish" why should teaching have second rate status? This paper attempts to inspire discussion relating to refreshing arguments the balance between teaching and research publication. It advances arguments for effective teaching, not to emphasize teaching above research publications, but to give effective teaching its proper status and to conceptualize what effective teaching ought to be in our universities. It will assist Vice Chancellors, deans and department heads how to provide the needed leadership to foster effective teaching in their outfits.*

### **Introduction**

At the end of the Second Millenium, and in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the Developing World, society still faces the task of confronting myriads of problems. Among the many problems besetting mankind are illiteracy, poverty, disease, environmental degradation, the HIV/AIDS menace, moral decadence, civic inertia, and unemployment. But the greatest challenge, undeniably, is the evolution of an educational system, which through effective teaching, will endure the challenges. This conviction hinges on the belief that no meaningful development can be realized without the right kind of educational delivery system. Indeed, due to the poor economic standing many of countries in the Third World, they have not been able to provide adequate, quality and comparable learning opportunities to a vast portion of their populations.

These challenges, will no doubt, require the creativity and competence of universities (especially the teaching force) which are formed for the purpose of strengthening the learning environments of the other subsectors of the educational system through teaching research and community services. The content of courses and quality instructional delivery are clearly vital to the full realization of individual and societal goals. The objective of the human development strategy must therefore not just be "education for all", but "quality education for all". In the universities, effective teaching.

Inspite of these high sounding expectations, and despite all the efforts being applied so far, the consensus now beginning to take shape is that there is public, and increasingly official concern, that

notwithstanding, the reform of the educational system at the tertiary level in 1994 in Ghana, the quality of education at this level has deteriorated (Pajibo, 2006). Support for this comes from the evidence that publication for various reasons, have been emphasized at the expense of effective teaching in the universities. An illustration of the magnitude and nature of the problem is the popular phrase “Publish or Perish” which is on the lips of every university academics and which to a very, very large extent constitutes the *raison d’être* for appointment, promotion and eventually salary adjustment in Ghanaian universities. There is equally no doubt that in a developing economy like Ghana, where individual survival is at stake, all roads certainly will lead to publication. The burnt of the effects of all these developments is on the quality of teaching in the universities. Streeten (1992:8) “observes that as far as effective teaching and the products of universities, polytechnics and colleges are concerned, one can confidently point to the fact that existing machinery for maintaining academic standards, the establishment of a method of validation and the traditional peer review of university external examiners are over stretched and consequently it remains questionable whether the parity of the degrees can be seriously maintained between one institution and another. In many ways, teaching and learning processes of universities are not currently subjected external assessment”. Streeten (1992), adds that the various ways in which curricular are organized and courses are planned, and the different ways in which teachers teach and learners learn are generally considered as private concerns of particular academic departments.

Given this catalogue of arguments, especially from the angle of teaching, a few questions are asked as cross-cutting issues for reflection in the University Community: what concrete actions should be taken to make campus climate more responsive to effective teaching? What can university administrators do to create the proper instructional setting and provide tools to support effective teaching? What political and administrative “will” can be generated through appropriate reward system to improve the teaching of lecturers? Just as in the case of publication, how can teaching quality be linked to salary increment? What financial incentives can be put in place to encourage innovative instructional activities? How can universities and colleges bring a new professionalism to teaching as a core function in higher education? How can Vice Chancellors and Principal be made to champion effective teaching? In a synopsis, are there campus climates in Ghanaian universities that support and reward effective teaching and accord such teaching a status equal to that of publication? The purpose of this study is to assist in creating the context in which these substantive questions about effective teaching in Ghanaian universities can meaningfully be discussed. The paper is also geared towards stirring interest in achieving a better balance between teaching and publication to realize a better balance of priorities by university lecturers.

### **Objectives**

This paper was written for the purpose of achieving the following objectives:

- i. to demonstrate, exemplify and conceptualize the equal and comparable significance of effective teaching as one of the core functions in Ghanaian universities
- ii. To identify and discuss the problems that confront effective teaching in Ghanaian universities
- iii. To establish guidelines for creating a balance in the attention given to research publication and teaching as complementary functions in educational delivery in universities
- iv. To proffer solutions to the problems of effective teaching in universities.

### **Literature Review**

Drawing on the relevant literature relating to this paper, the following major headings are useful:

- i. University campus climate in which teaching takes place
- ii. Strategies for effective teaching in universities

### **University Campus Climate in which Teaching Takes Place**

The prevailing university campus climate that has held sway, especially in the Third World, can best be summed up in the utterances of two university lecturers according to (Seldin, 1989:4):

Why bother to improve my teaching skills when the road to promotion and continuing tenure is largely through my research publications?

Theoretically, teaching is still important in my department, but in practice my salary and promotion are determined by my research output. I can write research papers for publication in the time it will take me to revise my teaching notes. I will get the notes eventually, but for now I will write the paper for publication because I have to think about upward mobility in my career

A similar argument given by Austin (1990), is that the comparatively low value assigned to teaching as compared to publication, has been due to the fact that the products of good research (the published articles) are more visible and quantifiable. Seldin (1989), concurs, noting that when teaching is pitted against research, teaching automatically loses because it is more or less considered relatively a private affair between professors and students behind a close door, where as research results are published and become a matter of public discourse. Reinforcing this point, Austin (1990) adds that the university job description which highlights teaching, research, and community service is a fantasy and a “smoke screen”. The reality is that universities reward publication more than teaching.

In an informal discussion with a fellow research fellow on the subject matter, the writer got the following response: “I like to be a better teacher, but I will perish in this university if I don’t publish”. As bare as the facts are, it is particularly important to give voice to the arguments of Rice (1988) who noted that at the heart of the culture of institutions of education should be the unswerving commitment to teaching which would translate into the development of the “whole student.” Rice added that research publications, community service and governance activities are valued, but the must be valued in relations to a university’s primary agenda which is teaching.

One feature which is implicitly common to all of the writers is that just as publications are assessed and adequately rewarded, every university or college must consistently assess teaching and equally reward it. For the University of Education, Winneba, good teaching by lecturers should be seen as exemplary and be truly an organizational commitment. As a teacher training university, its attention must be drawn to the professional teaching roles of lecturers: the interpersonal role, the pedagogical role, the organizational role and the role of an expert in subject matter and teaching methods.

But what is happening on university campuses in Ghana is in sharp contrast to what one staff of the University of Ghana said in a lamentation:

Since I came here, there has never been a situation in which a head of department or a dean in my faculty show appreciation and recognition for a lecturer who is particularly successful in teaching.

Considering this remark, the time has come for higher education institutions in Ghana to put their actions where their rhetorics are. This is particularly relevant for the University of Education, Winneba whose Mission and Vision statements stress teaching and the preparation of teachers as the primary purpose. Consider First the Vision Statement:

The University of Education will be seen as a centre for the assemblage of professionally competent individuals for the nurturing teaching and old administrative competencies in basic education throughout Africa (Handbook of Academic Programmes, University of Education, Winneba, 1999:5).

Then the Mission Statement:

The University College of Education, of Winneba will serve as a Centre of Excellence which will imbue in its products with the necessary academic proficiency, professional competence and humanistic values for teaching, the production of teaching materials and the dissemination of relevant materials at the basic level of education and teacher training colleges. (Ibid,4).

Do these remarks can note that the only medium by which the University can toward teaching is by honoring just one “Best Teacher” during It’s congregation; and as it has been the care with all the public Universities in the country?

Equally worth mentioning are the underlying philosophies that gave birth to the Universities of Ghana and Cape Coast. For the University of Ghana, it states:

The University College of the Gold Coast was founded by Ordinance on August 11, 1948 for the purpose of providing for and promoting University Education learning and research. (Handbook for Graduate Studies, University of Ghana, 1999:4)

and for the University of Cape Coast:

The university of Cape Coast was established in 1962 out of the dire need for highly qualified and skilled manpower in education.... Precisely, it was established to train graduate teachers for second cycle institutions (Calendar of the University of Cape Coast, 1995-1999:1)

Analytically, a major stand that runs in all of the visions, missions and founding philosophies of these Ghanaian Universities constitutes teaching, education learning and research. There, to all intents and purposes, are expected to be achieved first and foremost by teaching, followed by research and then community services. What then can we summarize as the climate that constitutes the nature of activities especially teaching in Ghanaian Universities? The prevailing impression is one of difficulties. According to Pajibo (2006), teaching in Ghanaian Universities, like many of their counterparts in the Developing World, is characterized by heavy teaching load necessities by large class size, acute shortage of lecturers, aging faculty, undue number of courses taught by a single lecturer, unwarranted student-teacher ratio, relatively many teaching hours per week and difficulty and stress in marking examination and continuous assessment scripts. It is in the wake of these difficult and strenuous teaching activities that teaching is relatively under valued.

### **Strategies for Effective Teaching in Universities**

One of the striking passages which tends to summarize efforts aimed at strategizing for effective teaching in universities is the one by (Arreola, 1986:91):

Since the same high level of conceptual and analytical thinking, the same time and energy and personal dedication that characterize superior publication also characterize superior teaching, it is the task of university authorities to evolve institutional conditions that sustain morale and motivate faculty to take classroom teaching in the universities seriously.

According to Prof. Awoyemi, Head of the Quality Assurance Unit of the University of Education, Winneba, the first step is to confront the hostile campus climate in which teaching occurs by creating adequate and well furnished space for both staff offices and students’ lectures, hire more lecturers and improve lecturers’ competence and development (Awoyemi, 2006:51) Deductively, these steps border around faculty development, improvement in teaching-learning conditions, physical development and improved salary for staff. Manford (2005), expanded on these suggestions by indicating that in order

to encourage effective teaching, the Universities should strive for adequate funding, opportunities for staff development, opportunities for students to choose course of study, provision for systematic feedback on the quality of instruction, research and community service, regular and planned teacher-learners meetings and conferences, and opportunities for learners to exhibit what their interest are.

Specifically, in the classroom setting, the strategies would take due cognizance of the following according to (Arreola, 1986:92):

- Mastery of subject matter;
- Curriculum development-course revision
- Nature of course design;
- Delivery of instruction: students rating, video tapes;
- Assessment of instruction: graded exams, projects or papers;
- Availability of lecturers to students;
- Course materials: handouts, quality of lecture notes.

One may agree with Arreola that to sort out the performance of the particular lecturer, effective classroom presentation must be characterized by:

- Good material presentation that is logical, that arouses enthusiasm, curiosity and stimulates creativity among students;
- Detailed course design and redesign, updated and reasonable to reflect recent development;
- Curriculum and instructional contribution in which lecturers develop instructional materials such as textbooks, slides and video tapes;
- Students advice in which case lecturers formally and informally advise students

### **The Expected Roles of Deans and Heads of Department**

Considering what is expected of university authorities in enhancing quality teaching, what should constitute the specific roles of Deans and Heads of Department? How can they assist lecturers to improve in their skills of eliciting interest and enthusiasm of students? What can they do to make lecturers to provide a variety of learning activities? What can be done to ensure purposefulness of learning through the use of initiative and resourceful methods?

It is apparent from the inquiries above that deans and heads of department must, among many things, establish mechanisms or data system for observing and evaluating teaching. For the head of department, he must listen keenly to students' complains, observe classroom teaching, inspect course content, instructional delivery skills and course design skills. The school/faculty dean on his part, must seriously consider heads of departments rating of teaching staff, colleagues' opinions on a teaching staff, utilize systematic students' rating of teachers and evaluate the content of examinations. Other mechanisms that should constitute the assessment tools of both the dean or department head are popularity of elective courses, self-evaluation reports of individual teachers, students examination performance, videotaping of classroom teaching, and long-term follow-up of students after graduation.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has provided series of strategies for achieving the climate and support needed for effective teaching. The conclusion that can be drawn thus, is that the issue of balance in the attention given to both teaching activities and research is very important and there are reasons to believe that progress can be made.

Certainly, there are various forms of professional learning in a university setting. There are historians, mathematicians, agriculturists, etc. But a good historian is not necessarily a good teacher, hence the need to improve on his teaching skills. This is where leaders of tertiary institutions can make a difference. Deans who teach, Vice Chancellors who walk around campuses and meet faculties in their office and department heads who assign course to senior members can all assist in effecting a change

in the teaching climate. Together, they all can reinforce the conviction of making teaching equally a criterion for promotion and tenure. Department chairs must make teaching effectiveness a high priority goal in their departments. They should encourage teachers to visit one another's classrooms. Again, it is not the purpose of this paper to argue that teaching is not going on in the universities, but to make a strong case for effective teaching which can be achieved resource commitment and institutional reward system for very good teachers.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the challenge at hand, that is making teaching effective and rendering it equal of comparable attention, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Universities in Ghana, on an institutional basis, should establish Centers for Improving the Quality of Teaching. The Center in each University will assist in coordinating the Development of course design.
2. Every teaching staff appointed to all faculties should go through a special orientation on how to teach in Universities and Colleges.
3. Just as there is an office called Director of Research in the University of Education, Winneba, there should equally be appointed a Director of the Center for Improving the Quality of teaching

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