

EDUCATION:
**A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH
TO IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE**

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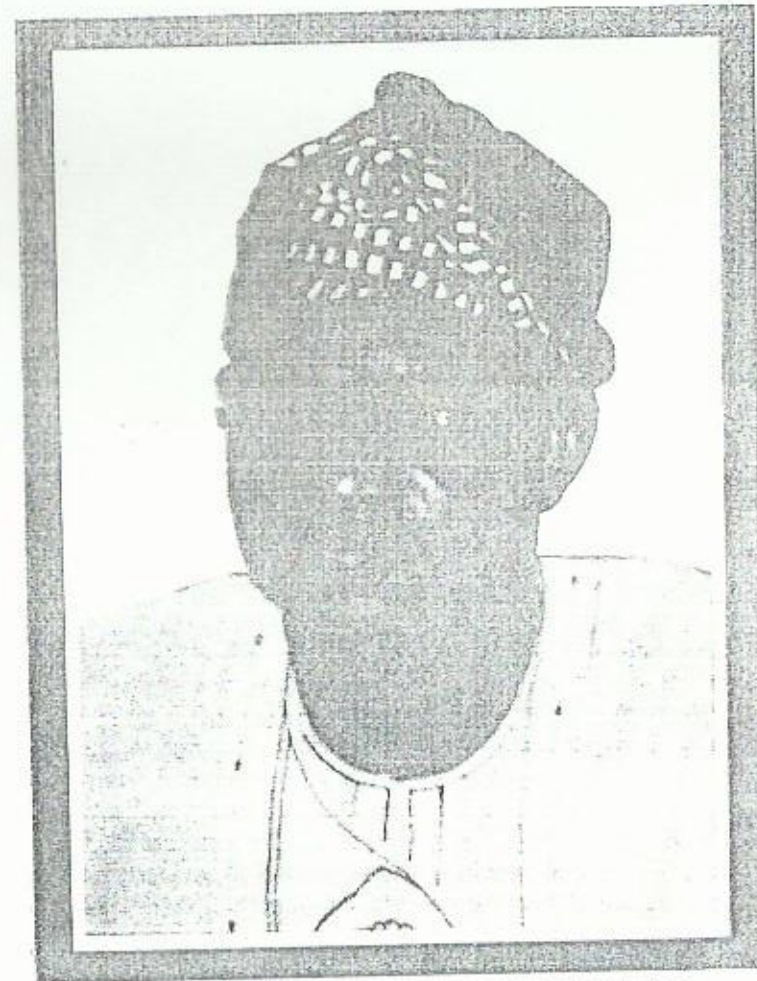
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Labelling in the School System: An Aspect of Hidden Curriculum for Improving Quality of Life

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Abstract

Labelling in the school system has become unresolved controversy among teachers and students. Hence, it has become a reality in the school system such that, be it positive or negative, labelling or self-fulfilling prophecy has an effect on quality of life of student(s) being labelled. When labelling is positive, it is quite acceptable by the student, while if negative, it leads to rejection as well as seeking to avoid the teacher's expectation. Thus, labelling which is part of hidden curriculum in this respect makes people to internalise their positive or negative labels because it significantly affects quality of life. This paper therefore, reveals that teachers, students, parents as well as society should indeed avoid labelling in order to improve life chances as well as quality of life of students.

Key words: Labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, school, teachers, students.

Introduction

School is an integral part of the society and it holds a very prominent role in the society. Morrish (1980) views the school as an institution set up for the purpose of socialisation and cultural transmission. In other words, school helps in socialising the child and in transmission of cultural values.

Noah and Sadiku (1998) define the school as a social institution established specifically to socialise the youth. The school can therefore be seen as an institution where learning activities take place, since it helps to socialise the child. Learning activities in the school take two major forms. These are overt (planned curriculum) and covert (hidden curriculum).

The term "hidden curriculum" means all those things the pupil learns in a school which are not on the time-table or arranged for them by the teachers. These are things that could be learnt from his/her classmates or through

watching the teachers' behaviour in different circumstances. The major point is that the teachers do not include it in their planned experiences or his/her intended outcome.

From the above explanation, this study sets out to examine the impact of labelling on the self-perception of the labelled which is our hidden curriculum (Covert Curriculum). Orukolan (1990) stresses that hidden curriculum is unplanned curriculum, it includes varied engagements like teasing school mates, bullying junior students by senior ones, labelling, learning to hate Mathematics, learning to like history, learning to sneak out of the school before closing time, gossip, learning to date male or female friends.

Labelling is part of hidden curriculum; it is not a planned curriculum but is seldomly used by school mates or teachers to depict a particular meaning. For instance, students and teachers may label a student as a "grammarian"; this may be as a result of test scores of the students in English Language. Other examples are: 'Omo teacher' (Teacher's favourite), Chike Obi (very good at Mathematics), 'Efiko' (always studious) and so on. Rist (1977) submits that labelling takes place as a result of diverse variables as social class, test scores, language patterns among others. For instance, a student may be labelled as a 'teacher's child' - this may be as a result of his/her test scores and interpersonal relationship with the teacher. In view of this, Omokhodion (1987, 1989) stresses that some people are labelled on the basis of their parents' professions.

Labelling or social reaction theory as far as the field of sociology of education is concerned, is part of hidden curriculum - It is an unplanned curriculum which is usually used in schools to 'stigmatise' some students as a result of their social class, physical appearance, test scores, race, sex, language patterns, their parents' professions as well as their religious beliefs.

Ann and Harold (1981) assert that the schooling process reveals the everyday social behaviour of teachers and students in schools. This connotes that on the issue of school labelling, teachers' participation is not exempted.

An interesting refinement of labelling or social reaction theory was introduced in 1964 by Erving Goffman. He further explained that people react differently to those so stigmatised, and more often than not, the reaction has no basis in logic. In view of this, Scheff (2010) posits that when one is labeled, one loses face and gains embarrassment, shame or humiliation which means that there is a social emotional element in all human contact.

Labelling theory or social reaction theory puts forward two questions: (1) How is deviance socially produced? and (2) How does labelling affect a person's latter behaviour? It is the emphasis on the process of defining a person's behaviour that has given this approach its name. Labelling comes into use through the interaction between the person who commits the act and those who respond to it (Becker, 1963). Also, the key point in labelling is that declaring someone deviant may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy and this may

reinforce the behaviour of the labelled which may not help in improving quality of life of such student(s).

A pertinent question every educationist may want to ask is; how does labelling apply to students in school and what impact does it make to academic achievement of students?

In the field of education either formal, informal or non-formal, labelling can have such an adverse effect on the labelled which will eventually affect one's life chances as well as quality of life of the student.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) argue that teachers hold certain expectations of the students which become operationalised within the classroom so as to produce what the teacher had initially assumed. Furthermore, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) argue that biased expectancies can significantly affect reality and create self fulfilling prophecies in the activities of the students. Thus, Omokhodion (1996) posits that labelling is sometimes called the transactional theory with the belief that the deviant behaviour has the characteristics of a transaction between one person and another or others. In other words, a particular behaviour is "deviant" because it has been defined or labelled by a group of people in the society who have their definitions recognised.

Labelling and the Curriculum

Everyday, human beings endeavour to plan their activities, set goals, objectives and look up for a target; the end-product of their activities such as the goals, objectives and target becomes the achievement. Since an industrialist will look for feasibility study before he embarks on his project, so also the school cannot do without the curriculum.

The term curriculum was derived from the Latin word *Currio* which means "a running course" or "run away". In other words, it is a course to be run before the attainment of a goal.

Blakemore and Cooksey (1980) view curriculum as the knowledge taught in school lessons or included in some other way in the time-table. Thus, the term curriculum is the embodiment of planned experiences of the school. These are the activities scheduled on the time-table with specific time; it indicates what to teach, who should teach and how to teach (methodology).

In the school, hidden curriculum seldomly takes place both teachers and students learn from one another and such learning are unplanned unlike the official curriculum of which learning activities have been tailored, planned and structured, organised and controlled.

Labelling

In the classroom, a lot of things happen - pupils talk, pupils listen, pupils take decisions, pupils produce written materials for themselves and for teachers, pupils work in groups, pupils laugh; indeed different kinds of behaviour takes place in the classroom.

Akinade and Adedipe (1994) explained that behaviour is a function of integrative process of the growth of each child; thus behaviour is classified into 'adient' and 'abient'.

Adient behaviour refers to behaviour that attracts someone to another or to something. For instance, success in a particular subject would attract the student to that subject and he may develop interest in it, whereas abient behaviour may be described as negative behaviour. This refers to a behaviour that leads to someone avoiding, withdrawing or moving away from or fearing to respond favourably to someone or something. In view of this, Omokhodion (1998) describes labelling as the creation of stereotypes which may be positive or negative.

According to Rosenthal and Jacobson (2003), labelling is "when teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do; when teachers do not have such expectations, performance and growth are not as encouraged and may in fact be discouraged in a number of ways". The researchers further explained that our expectations strongly influence the performance of people around us, such as footballers as well as students in our classes.

The definitions therefore show a kind of behaviour students exhibit before being labelled. Labelling, as far as the field of sociology of education is concerned, is part of hidden curriculum - it is unplanned curriculum (covert curriculum) which is sedomly used in schools to 'stigmatise' some students as a result of their behaviour, social class, physical appearance, test scores, race, sex, language patterns, their parents profession as well as their religious beliefs (Rist, 1977; Omokhodion, 1998; Bluhm, 2012).

Labelling Theory

Labelling theory is well rooted in the Chicago tradition of Mead, Thomas and Blummer as well as the work of Goffman. Labelling theory attempts to focus attention from those engaging in deviant behaviour to those who make the rules that design certain men and women as deviants.

Labelling theory stressed that one could not understand deviant acts in terms of the behaviour of deviants alone but that such acts tend themselves to full sociological analysis only if and when it is realised, just like all other social acts, they involve interactive relationships.

Furthermore, labelling or social reaction theory was developed in the 1950s, and its roots go back to earlier symbolic interactionist studies of juvenile delinquency. To Karabel and Halsey, (1977) labelling theory is viewed as an interactive process between those who violate a norm (or who are believed to have done so) and others who interpret and react to the acts. In the same vein, Worsley (1970) views labelling theory as an attempt to determine which people are, and which are not acting in accordance with its rules.

Jon (1981) argues that labelling theory attempts to fill the gap by focusing on the process of creating rules and judging the behaviour of others according

to the rules. Jon (1981) further argues that no act is inherently deviant, deviance is always a matter of social definition. He therefore concludes that "an act is deviant only if others respond to it as such; behaviour is deviant only if others label it as deviant".

Haralambos (2003) explains that labelling theory helps to explain some of the possible effects of teachers' definitions of pupils. Furthermore, it helps to explain negative definitions applied to individuals who are seen to deviate from the rules. In view of this, Omokhodion (1996) argues that labelling theory is a theory which is sometimes called the transactional theory with the belief that the deviant behaviour has the characteristics of a transaction between the deviant person and another or others. Omokhodion (1996) explains that a particular behaviour is "deviant" because it has been defined or labelled by a group of people in the society who have their definitions recognised. Jon (1981) explains that labelling theory allows us to understand why certain things happen. It helps us to understand that labelling occurs when people respond to some behaviours as deviant. Labelling theory suggests that, labelling is all that is required for an act to be deviant. However, labelling theory implies that those who react against deviance are the culprits and however, deviance cannot be defined without some references to norms or rules.

Teacher's Expectation

Since the publication of *Pygmalion in the Classroom* by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968, there has been unresolved controversy on the study of 'self fulfilling prophecy'. Also, different studies in the field of sociology have emerged seeking to explain the mechanisms by which the teacher comes to hold certain expectations of the students and how it has become successful within the classroom so as to produce what the teacher had intended to achieve through the academic performance of the students.

The origin of teacher expectations have been attributed to such diverse variables such as social class, physical appearance, contrived test scores, sex, race, language patterns and school records, of which the labelling approach allows for an examination of what indeed is happening within schools as part of hidden curriculum; since it will affect the quality of life of the learners, be it positive or negative.

Scimecca (1980) explains that teachers' expectations are centred on judgment teachers make about students. The teacher establishes the role of social reaction theory of the classroom; students perceive this role, act out the role of labelling (hidden curriculum). In essence, the teacher assigned role becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. For instance, the "good" student is one who listens attentively to the teacher, does not disobey or disturb the teacher or class, and is always receptive to the teacher's instructions. Obviously, teachers make value judgments about students quite early, sometimes within the first week or month of the year and on the basis of such factors as Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and personal appearance.

In view of this, Schnecca (1980) conducted a research in Fairfax County, Virginia, an affluent suburb of Washington, D.C., and asserts thus:

A questionnaire administered showed that the teachers had lower academic expectations for black students than for white students. More than half of the teacher's question believes that minority students are not adequately prepared to take advance academic courses. The findings so troubled the country's top school administrators that they labelled the studies "confidential" and asked school board members not to discuss it publicly.

Basically, teachers are engaged in a form of labelling behaviour. The labelling or social reaction theory which originally develops in the study of crime and deviance is an extremely useful device for identifying individuals who do not adapt themselves to the acceptable behavioural norms (rules and regulations) of the dominant group. However, Good and Brophy (1973) explained the process within the classroom as follows: "The teacher expects specific behaviour and achievement from particular students". Based on these different expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward different students. The teacher treatment informs each student what behaviour and achievement the teacher expects from the student and this invariably affects students' self-concept, achievement, motivation, performance and level of aspiration and perhaps, quality of life of the students. In other words, if the teacher's behaviour is consistent for a long time and the student does not resist or change it in some way, it will tend to shape his achievement and behaviour. For instance, high expectation students will be led to achieve at high levels, while the achievement of low expectations students will decline (Graf, Koeszegi, Pesendorfer and Gettinger, 2012).

As the labelling or stigmatisation of such student progresses, the student's achievement and behaviour will conform more and more closely to that originally expected of him.

Labelling Perspective in Schools

One of the earliest applications of labelling perspective to schooling is Aaron Cicoure and John Kitsuse. Cicoure and Kitsuse investigated the process by which students come to be defined, identified, classified and recorded in the categories used in their high school records. The results of the researchers revealed how definitions and procedures are given to students differentiated and labelled as:

"college material"
"academic problem"
"trouble makers" and so on.

Cicoure and Kitsuse (1980) concludes that school counsellors' judgement of students on the basis of a student's biography, social class and social type are even more important in predicting school achievement than the student

ability and performance. On the other hand, another famous labelling perspective is the study of Rosenthal and Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the classroom*. In their studies, students were classified or labelled "bloomers" and "spurters". The researcher conducted test on the students called "The Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition". The result of the test was startling and attitudinal changes were also observed. Finally, the teachers rated the 'spurters' as well behaved, more intellectually curious, more appealing and generally better adjusted than the 'bloomers'. In view of this, Rosenthal and Jacobson concluded that teacher expectations play a significant role in the educational achievement of students.

Similarly, Rist (1977) conducted a research to analyse the impact of teacher expectations and social interactions on the social organisation of a class. Here, he is particularly interested in the relationship of teachers' expectations of potential academic performance to the social status of the students. He labelled some students to be "fast learners" and some "slow learners". The result of the research showed that the fast learners fit the teacher's 'ideal type' of successful child. Therefore, when a learner is labelled "slow learner", he/she has no option but to continue as a 'slow learner', no matter what his/her performance (Rist, 1967; Gartner and Griespoon, 2012).

Why Students and Teachers Engage In Labelling

Labelling is used to assess students' academic performance in different subjects. Teachers too use labelling to 'tag' a particular student as a result of the student's test scores as well as the teacher's expectation(s). Students use labelling to assess students like themselves as a result of the students' academic performances. Here are some of them:

Labelling	Interpretation
* Baba Maths	Good at Mathematics
* Low achievers	Commercial/Arts students
* High achievers	Science students
* <i>Efika</i>	Always reading
* Backbencher	Student who sit at back rows
* My daughter	Student who answers teacher's question
* <i>Mumu</i>	A very dull student
* <i>Olofo</i>	A dullard or never do well
* Good boy	A child that does well academically
* Bad boy	Academically poor
* <i>Egbe Olofo</i>	Group of dullards
* Book head	Academically good
* Brain	Very brilliant
* Chike Obi	Good at Mathematics
* My friend	Student who passed the teacher's examination

* <i>Abi wera ni e ni</i>	Students who failed to answer questions correctly.
* Librarian	Always in the library reading.

Physical Appearance

Labelling serves as a mechanism of assessment. It is used to depict the physical appearance of a particular student. It brings about the description of students and teachers respectively. Here are some of the descriptions:

Labelling	Translation
Old man	This is as a result of physical appearance.
	An old man
Papa	Very fat
Big baby	Short and black complexion
<i>Ajantala</i> (an animal)	Big-tommy
<i>Lai Oloyun</i>	Very fat
Biggy	

Sport

A very prominent role of labelling is that both the teacher and students use 'names' of footballers to 'tag' themselves as a result of high performance of the players in the world cup. Here are some names:

- * *Bebeto* A teacher tagged his student *Bebeto* because he plays like *Bebeto* - a Brazilian footballer.
- * *Okocha* Some students are labelled *Okocha* because they play like *Okocha* - a Nigerian footballer.

The above labelling shows that students use very good players' names to 'tag' themselves. That is, people associate themselves with good things; thereby increasing their potentiality in whatever they are doing. However, this assessment makes us to revisit *Akinade and Sokan (1994)*, on adient and abient behaviour. Adient behaviour attracts while abient discourages. In other words, students who are gamesome use very skilful and efficient players' names to stigmatise themselves. For instance, since student 'A' is being labelled as 'Bebeto and Okocha', this means that student 'A' is as skilful as 'Bebeto/Okocha'. This can be referred to as positive labelling.

Furthermore, labelling can be referred to as "looking-glass self" propounded by *Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929)*. If a teacher allocate names to the students in terms of academic performance, test scores, behaviour and so on, that name allocated, is a reflection of the ability of the student which now serves as symbolic to the students, teachers, parents, as well as the society. For instance, if a student is good at mathematics, he could be labelled "Chike Obi". Here, the information to other people is that the boy is good at

mathematics. On the other hand, if it is negative, people would also look at the student as a 'never do well student'.

For instance, *Cooley (1864-1929)* explains that we think of what others see in us as been like and what they expect from us. Therefore, labelling serves as a reflection and information for people to assess. In the field of sociology of language, it is like figure of speech such as irony, metaphor and personification.

Conclusion

This study has been able to establish that labelling is a social act and it could lead to alienation because a student being labelled will associate with those similarly labelled and the behaviour of such students may affect the quality of life.

It is obvious that there must be high achiever, brilliant and low achiever, bad boys, poor boys, dullards and so on in a given class. In order to avoid subjective assessment and to create an effective pedagogy, educators should avoid frequent allocation of derogatory names. Also, educators should be able to help and encourage those who are low achievers, slow learners, dullards and so on, for effective learning in the school.

Recommendations

Teacher's expectation will help students to re-adjust towards the academic activities. Basically, teachers should note that to allocate derogatory names to students will affect the quality of life and such derogatory names will not create good interaction between the student and teacher.

Furthermore, the teacher and student should be mindful in allocating derogatory names. The reason for this is that, labelling is in form of assessment, if it is a negative type, the parent may not be enthusiastic to allow the child to continue his/her education since the teacher/student has labelled the child "dullard, lazy, slow learner, dummy" among others.

However, parents as well as the society should avoid labelling and creation of negative stereotypes because it affects life's chances. Teachers should avoid using derogatory names to assess their students because such derogatory names will affect academic performance of the students.

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