Islamic Universities and the Issues of Instructional Strategies: A Case Study of Al-Qalam University, Katsina

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ABSTRACT

The World Muslim Conference held in Mecca in 1977 provided impetus for the development of holistic individuals through curriculum reform and the establishment of International Islamic University in Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uganda. Subsequently, more Islamic Universities were established in other Muslim countries. In Nigeria, Alhikma University, Ilorin and Al-Qalam University, Katsina were established. One of the objectives of these Universities is to produce more Muslim graduates who can compete with their counterparts in any academic discipline besides their background in Islamic education and to better serve humanity. These objectives may not be achieved without proper adoption of instructional strategies that suits 21st century students. Therefore, this paper aims to discover the issues faced by the lecturers of Al-Qalam University in adopting the instructional strategies in teaching. A number of lecturers and administrators were purposely selected and interviewed. The findings show that lack of support from the university management, crowded learning environment and lack of teaching professionalism are some of the issues that hinder the effective instructional strategies. Finally, the paper provides suggestions for better improvement of the university and on how get rid of the issues of instructional strategies.

Keywords: Instructional Strategies, Islamic University

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic universities all over the world are challenged to compete with their counterparts in the worlds in terms of quality of their creativity and publication, availability of learning resources, effective instructional strategy, and excellent performance and confidence of their graduates in addition to their sole foundation in Islamic education. To tackle with the challenges, Islamic universities need multitalented, versatile lecturers who are expected to use best instructional strategy to help students learn essential skills, attitudes and knowledge that suit the need of 21st century students. Besides that, the universities’ classes need to be equipped with latest technological gadgets such as internet, computers, smart boards that help the lecturers and students to enhance teaching and learning respectively.

Alqalam University (formally Katsina University, Katsina) is the second Islamic university in in Nigeria. The University was established in 2005 with 200 students and four Departments; Depart of Islamic Studies, Arabic, English, and Computer Science. Currently, the university has eleven departments with four colleges; College of Natural and Applied Sciences, College of Humanities, College of Social and Management Sciences and College of Education.

The mission of the university is the pursuance of academic excellence through providing quality education and promoting research and community service through high standard in students’ admission and staff recruitment. To achieve this objective, the University employed many Muslim scholars as lecturers and top administrators of the University. Similarly, Most of the university’s high ranking administrators and lecturers especially in the department of Islamic studies and Arabic are the graduate of International Islamic University, Madina, while majority of the lecturers in the other departments are the graduates of Nigerian Universities. The university also tries to diversify its fund getting donation from philanthropists like Alhaji Aminu Dantata and others to equip it with adequate learning resources.

Notwithstanding, the University faces many obstacles that may deny the university from actualizing its dream of producing Muslim graduates with excellent and intellectual leaning capabilities. One of the issues is the issue of method of teaching challenges (students centered methods in particular) faced by the university lecturers. Therefore, this paper aims to discover the issues faced by the lecturers of Al-Qalam University in adopting the instructional strategies in
teaching. Based on the objective, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

1- What are the lecturers’ thought and experience on the instructional strategies?
2- What instructional strategies do the lecturers of Alqalam University adopt in their teaching?
3- What are the challenges do the lecturers face in the adoption of students centered methods in their teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional strategies is defined as the procedure and actions used by the teachers to help students achieve their stated lesson objectives (Arends, 2009, Jaboksen,Eggen & Kauchak, 2008), and they are categorize into teacher centered and student centered (Cruickshank etal, 2010). This categorization is made based on the different theories of learning (Behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism) identified in the literature. Each of the theory has different view on learning and how it occurs.

Teacher centered methods like lecture, demonstration, and drills and practice methods are originated from behaviorism and cognitvists theory of learning (Tomei, 2010). Lecture method is dominantly adopted in Many Islamic universities due to it’s simply and its affordance to serve large number of students at once (Newby et al, 1996). However, teacher centered methods some limitations such as lack of students’ involve-ment in the learning activities which may negatively affect students’ motivation and their understanding (Arend, 2009, Smaldino et al 2007).

Student centered instructional strategies on the other hand gained its support from construcvists (Tomie, 2010). To them, learning is not to transfer knowledge to students in which students are considered as an empty can, rather it is an act of knowledge construction by students through the help of a teacher (Jonassen, Peck and Wilson, 2010). In such case, teachers serve as facilitators or coaches, offering guidance to students when students actively engage in learning activities and experiences that are directed by teachers (Jonassen, Peck and Wilson, 2010). Unlike teacher centered methods, where-by teachers take the active role of teaching, while students serve as recipients of knowledge passively. Some of the students’ centered methods are discovery learning, problem based learning method, discussion method etc.

The 21st century students are flexible and digital in nature due rapid technological development they experience nowadays. This
opens new challenges for lecturers to make their instructional strategies suit the needs of the present day’s students. Students centered instructional strategies seem to be more appropriate higher learning students nowadays. This is because, the students can use the available technology in the schools like internet, computers or even their smart phones to search and analyze many information (International Education Advisory Board). No wonder many universities in the developed countries like America, England, Canada and so forth has gone so far in implementing the methods in their instruction.

On the other hand, there are many issues that may hinder effective implementation of student centered method in the schools of developing countries. Some of these issues are big class size, inadequate instructional materials and curriculum coverage (Jabbour, 2013 & Than, 2010). Other issues that hinder the implementation of SCM Teacher’s perceptions about teaching and learning and culture of “face” saving (Than, 2010), school leadership and lack of staff professional development (Jabbour, 2013).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Qualitative research designed was employed by the researcher to explore to problems that hinder the adoption of students’ centered method of teaching among the lecturers of Alqalam University, Katsina. The methodology affords the opportunity to the researcher to experience people involved in the study and gain more understanding of the school (Hatch, 2002). However, case study was an appropriate choice by the researcher; it provides a detail perspective of the participants, and their experiences in the involvement of the schools and it allows for the in-depth exploration and provides opportunity to gather information about school activities in natural settings.

Research Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants of this study consisted 4 lecturers and 2 Heads of Department from the University. The participants were purposively selected based on their willingness to and ability to provide adequate information required by the researcher. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) qualitative researchers mostly engage themselves into purposive sampling as they feel it yield the best understanding of what they are studying. Creswell (2012) reported that: purposive sampling
is the best to assist the researcher to discover, gain insight, and have an in depth understanding of the school through the perspective of the participant.

Research Instruments

There are several instruments of data collection in qualitative research method; such as interview, observation, text analysis and documentary analysis. Janesick (2004) stated that the collection of data must be thorough, relevant, and triangulated to produce sufficient evidence on the issue explored. Hatch (2002) also reported that researcher should endeavor to obtain data that will answer their research question. Therefore, observation and interview were the techniques used to triangulate data collection for the present study.

Observation

Observation is defined as the process by which facts became data (Johnson, & Christensen, 2012). In other words, observational research is the systematic process of recording the behavioral patterns of people, objects, and occurrences without questioning or communicating with them. Observation can lead to deeper understanding than interviews alone, because it provides knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may enable the researcher to see things that participant themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, the researcher conducted series of nonparticipant observation in different classes with different teachers to observe the instructional strategies adopted by the lecturers in the university. Nonparticipant observation deals with the nonparticipation of the researcher in the event to be observed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Interview

Another technique used by the researcher to collect data in this study was interview, which is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in education and it relies on human experience (Lichman, 2008). The most common form of interview is the person to person encounter in which one person elicits information from another. The main purpose of interview in qualitative research is to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990).
Therefore, the researcher interviewed four heads of department and two lecturers of the university. The purpose of the interview was to ascertain participants’ thoughts, experiences and to the extent do they use students’ centered methods in their teaching in one hand and the issues that may hamper them toward the adoption of students centered method in their teaching on the other hand. Apart from that, the respondents were asked about their demographic information such teaching experience their position in the university.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Lecturers’ thought and experience on the instructional strategies
The finding of this study revealed that most of the lecturers do not have in-depth knowledge about instructional strategies, it categorization into students center and teacher centered and how the methods should effectively applied in classroom situation. This is because most of the lecturers are not teachers by profession. In Nigeria, professional teacher is referred to someone who obtain at least one of the three teaching qualification; (a) National Certificate on Education (NCE), (b) Degree in Education, and (c) Post Graduate Diploma in Education. The finding shows that most of the lecturers do not obtain any of the required qualifications of teaching rather than qualification of their different specialization such as Hadith, Qur’anic science, computer science and so forth. This indicates that the lecturers know what to teach but they lack knowledge on how teach.

Instructional strategies the lecturers of Alqalam University adopt in their teaching
The finding shows that the lecturers use lecture method to deliver their lectures. The method is really traditional in which the lecturer dominates 90% of the classroom activities. The lecturers do so because to them this is the most common method of teaching and adopted in Nigerian universities and they leant through the method. As one of the respondents says

“….Actually I prefer to teach my students in form of a lecture because it is the method used to teach students in almost all Nigerian universities and we learnt through the same way”

on the other hand, lecture method is adopted by the lecturers because it is the only alternative method they can adopt for teaching due to high
number of students they have in the class as mentioned by one respondents

“yes I do agree that students centered method is the best method for teaching students nowadays, but, the problem is that even if intended to apply the method in my class I cannot due to high number of students in my class, I cannot easily divide them even if there is space for that talk-less of monitoring the students in their respective groups. Therefore, the last alternative is lecturing the students”

The challenges do the lecturers face in the adoption of students centered methods in their teaching

Though some of the lecturers are professionals in teaching and realize the essence of the student centered methods of teaching such as problem based learning, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning. But, they cannot apply any the methods in their teaching because of the following issues that hinder them to apply the method:

Class size

Big classes are one of the fundamental reasons which trigger lecturers to maintain traditional teacher centered approach of teaching in one hand and hinder the implementation of teamwork approach in the university classes. The data revealed that some the university classes are overcrowded with students, especially in the computer science whereby almost 200 students receive a lecture in a class. One of the lecturers says

“Sometimes we want to engage students into group work or activities in the classroom but by looking at the number of students we have in the classroom as we have about 200 students in the class we change our mind to use a lecture method being the only alternative we have”.

This places the lecturers of the university to in a circumstance in which they have no choice rather than to adopt low level teaching strategies like lecturing. As a result of that, lecturers become the ones instructing
students and students are brought into restrictive and highly regimented learning environment as they are always instructed what to do. This might make students to be passive, uncritical and reproductive.

**Lack of Inadequate Instructional Materials**

The provision of adequate instructional materials (such as projectors, computers, internet and so forth) in a university resource center or in the classroom will help lectures to effectively use them to facilitate their instruction. Through the use of instructional materials, teachers can engage students into class activities develop students’ potentials of creativity, enhance students’ motivation. Instructional materials are generally in short supply in the university. Lecture rooms and theatres of the university are not equipped with the latest instructional materials such as projector, computer, internet, etc.). The only material in the lecture rooms are whiteboards and markers. Moreover, there is no resource centers in the faculties which help students to find more important books for their subjects. Therefore, students perceived that the only required text for a particular subject given or dictated by the lecturer is the definite resource for that subject, and they do not need do not need to consult any other information resource.

**Curriculum structure**

Another factor that impedes the lecturers of Alqalam University to implementation of student centered method in is quantitative nature of the curriculum or course outline. The lecturers are required to cover the entire course outline in a semester. This does not give the lecturers enough time to engage students into classroom discussion and other approaches of students centered methods. As one respondent says:

“Another reason why I do not apply students center method in my teaching is the time constrain. We are giving course outline for each subject and we had to cover the whole content. So, our only alternative left for us is lecture method through which we can cover the whole contents”.

As a result of that, what students can do at the end of each semester is to try to memorize what is covered in the curriculum or what teacher says in the class in order pass exam.
Lecturers’ Perception about Teaching and Learning

Another issue which is revealed through observational data is that teachers perception about teaching and learning. This means that most of the lecturers consider themselves as main sources enriching students’ knowledge. Once they gained adequate knowledge from books and others sources like internet, they only need to interpret, analyze and elaborate on the points for the students. As a result of that, students only receive the knowledge from teachers as a truth rather than try to think independently and analyze teachers’ knowledge and draw their conclusion. Based on this perception, lecturers do not give students freedom to share their thought and opinion in the classroom. Sometimes, the lecturers used to be annoyed when a student asks them critical questions about a particular point.

Discussion on the findings

First of all, the finding of the study revealed that most of the lecturers of Al-Qalam University are not professional teacher, thus, they frequently prefer lecture approach of teaching. Lecture method of teaching is purely traditional approach of teaching and highly un-interactive as the lecturer dominates major proportion of teaching and learning activities. Though the method is considered advantageous for lecturers as it helps them to cover a large portion of a subject within a short time it has many. Some of the limitations it makes class boring, less interactive classroom, promotion of forgetting on the part of student (Newby, 2005, Smaldino & Lowther, 2007). This might make students to be passive, uncritical and reproductive (Thanh, 2010).

Second of all, it is discovered class size, in-adequate instructional materials, curriculum structure of the university and lecturers’ perceptions about teaching and learning are the main factors that hinder the lecturers from adoption of students centered methods in their teaching. This finding is similar to the finding of Thanh (2010) as he conducted a research on barriers of implementing a student-centered learning approach at Vietnamese higher education institutions. In addition to that, the finding is also similar to that of Jabbour (2013) in which he discussed on the issues that restrain teachers from adopting student-centered instruction in Lebanese schools.
Suggesting Solutions to the Challenges Faced By the University Lecturers

Based on the above, various factors were identified which hinder the effective implementation of student centered method of teaching which is seen as the best method that suits the needs of 21st century students. However, failure to effective implementation such method may result in producing impetuous graduates with low intellect and productivity in the society. Below are suggestions if taking into consideration the University can root out the obstacles.

1- Provision of good and accommodative learning environment
2- Supplying adequate instructional materials to classrooms as well as the provision of resource center in the university.
3- Provision of ICT facilities in the university.
4- Establishment of Academic Staff Development Committee/Department. The department will be responsible for organizing seminars, conferences, and workshops for the lecturers. Moreover, the committee will be responsible for developing lecturers’ academic career. For instance, unprofessional teachers will be urged by the committee to obtain certificate or diploma in education.

CONCLUSION
Education is a major factor for development and transformation of any country. However, teaching is the best way of transforming education to the citizens and making them productive in the society. Thus, this will not be achieved unless effective method of teaching is being adopted by the teachers. However, Islamic Universities in general and Alqalam University in particular are challenged to produce high qualitative and productive graduates to serve their community from all dimensions of life (vicegerent of Allah). But the university is confronted with the issues of instructional strategies that prevent lecturers to adopt diversified method of teaching. This paper explores the issues and provided possible solution to the problems. Thus, it would be a guide for the university management to know the issues the university facing in one hand and know the possible solutions to the problems. But, implementing the recommendation made in this study, hopefully, the university can realize its vision.
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