

Cooperative Stakeholding: Optimising Students' Educational Practice through Need-Centred Self-Determination, Connectedness with Learning Environment and Passion

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Abstract

The paper offers social-psychological options to solving the growing problems of educational decline in Nigeria. It takes a holistic view of educational practice in the country and asserts that quality education is achievable in Nigeria if everyone takes a position to contribute meaningfully to our presumably ailing educational system. The discourse explores three social-psychological strategies towards optimizing educational quality in the country. These include: engendering self-determination of educational practitioners and learners based on education as a felt need; feeling renewed and luscious connection with the educational environment, which goes beyond the physical environment; and creating opportunities for people to cultivate new sets of passionate behaviours towards educational activities. The paper also illustrates the beauty of Aron, Aron and Smollan's (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and how it can be adapted for self-expansion into the educational environment. In support of these strategies, seven salient principles for good practice in undergraduate education were also presented to ginger students' in-school and out-school alliances towards excellence in learning. The paper concludes that selective internalization of autonomous, self-directed learning experiences; psychological expansion of self into the learning environment, and careful selection of harmonious rather than obsessive impulses when exercising passion for learning materials, will greatly impact educational performance and quality positively. As these, in consonance with responsible networking, academic sessility, time discipline, respect for individual differences and quality of expectations interact to brighten the paths of academic excellence, students have unlimited choices and orientations to achieve all round excellence in their academic explorations.

Keywords: Optimal educational practice, social-psychological strategies, need-centred self-determination, learning environment, passion, connectedness.

Introduction

Every teacher or learner should be (or must be very) delighted at an opportunity such as this to regurgitate or relieve his experiences and speak with passion about the experience of the field he or she has freely chosen to advance. Just as learning is an interactive process that involves many individuals and many situations, so also are many kinds of behaviours and attitudes that are brought into the learning process. This assessment may not have been necessary if not for the purpose of bring educational stakeholders together to ask ourselves whether we are holding unto the rules of engagement concerning the mandate we freely and pro-socially took up as learners, teachers, or parents in the interest of humanity. Unlike other types of mandate, which are most times self-serving, we were not coerced, persuaded or cajoled into it against our will. Rather, our mandate which is the essence of this discourse, is to explore students' academic excellence within and outside the school. Academic achievement or (academic) performance is the outcome of education, to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals. Academic excellence is the demonstrated ability to perform, achieve, and/or excel in scholastic activities such as reading, writing, retention and remembering. It has been identified with achieving high grades and superior performance. But academic excellence is more than making good grades: it also involves the maximum development of a child's intellectual capacities and skills in service to humanity, either through a formal education process or the informal method. In most universities, academic excellence celebration is usually held to showcase students' academic projects and accomplishments in areas such as creative and performing arts, professional programmes and teacher education in a manner similar to "habituated action". As one arm of the university system, the parents-teachers forum owes a responsibility to help students stimulate learning to uphold the university as a symbol of noble purity as conveyed in the name "ivory tower". Generally the university years are viewed as a time in which young people can engage in new levels of self-awareness and career exploration (Beauchamp & Kiewra, 2004). This concern with self-awareness helps to evaluate one's stability on the domain of self-concept evaluation. The study of the self-concept has endowed us with the knowledge that our life successes and failures are products of the nature of relationships we have with others. When self-evaluations are negative, other-evaluations (i.e, how we evaluate others) will inevitably be negative. It is a fact that the general public is always there to either praise or blame teachers or the entire educational process for real or perceived inadequacies in the educational system. It is also true that at other times, teachers and other lieutenants in the educational "production" process are readily 'embellished' as heroes or

stigmatized as villains depending on the social perception of the perceivers. Even though there are teachers who deserve praise and blame respectively based on the tone of their professional practice, this paper is not dwelling on such common place (or should we say mundane) events, but on a stock-taking and stock-replenishing assignment. We say this because even if we (as teachers) sit and congratulate ourselves for an exceedingly outstanding performance, we cannot in the end come up with a communiqué or declaration announcing a ‘performance holiday’ for ourselves. It behoves us to always strive at further achievement, for in the language of fund raisers, “nothing can be too small” to add for the improvement of educational practice in our respective ‘areas’ (countries, states, ministries, schools, families etc) of operation. In order to have a limited focus, we have chosen to see how we (teachers, parents and learners) can cooperatively enrich educational practice through three carefully-selected concepts of self-determined needs, connectedness with learning environment and passion. I have chosen to reflect on these concepts based on my prolonged and diverse (kindergarten-Primary/Secondary/University) involvement with learners. I have come to realize that these variables (and several others) are useful cornerstones in the educational project. It is important to state that learning can have differential advantages at both individual and group contexts. At the individual level we first explore learning at a person-to-person level as elucidated within the self-determination theory, especially the positive psychology research and practice.

Learning: A Need Driven by Self Determination

The first thing to look at when considering progress in the learning process is to cognitively reflect on the reason to learn as a felt need in which the learner and the facilitators see their respective roles in the context of ranked needs which they must fulfill. For a need to be cravingly embellished, there is a great necessity for self-determination and commitment to be employed as necessary achievement-propelling tools. Need fulfillment has a lot to do with good social functioning and well-being and this justifies the primary push in people to acquire education as a first step in self-improvement. Interestingly, Deci and Ryan (1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) developed a Self-determination theory (STD) which is a theory of motivation and personality that focuses on the role of psychological needs in the growth and development of the person. Specifically, the self-determination theory posits that in order to grow psychologically, people need to satisfy their basic psychological needs of autonomy (a desire to feel a sense of personal initiative), competence (a desire to interact effectively with the environment), and relatedness (a desire to feel connected to with significant others). According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), in order to fulfill these needs, people interact with the environment and engage in various activities and associated experiences with such activities coalesce to help them grow and develop a sense of self. In other words: “To be self-determined is to endorse one’s actions at the highest level of reflection”. When self-determined, people experience a sense of freedom to do what is interesting, personally important and vitalizing” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The central thrust of this theory rests on motivation which takes many forms: *amotivation* (i.e. a state in which an individual cannot perceive a relationship between their behaviour and that behaviour’s subsequent outcome, when amotivated, there is little or no intention or action); *intrinsic motivation* (internal pressure to do something to align with values or simply to light-up the hedonistic pleasure of doing something); *extrinsic motivation* (a person’s inspiration to do something for the purpose of obtaining an external reward or outcome); *introjected motivation* (similar to intrinsic motivation but laced with the tension of guilt if not responded to); *integrated motivation* (when motives for an activity aligns with personal values and needs); and *identified motivation* (where a person knows that something needs doing but has not yet decided to do anything about it). In one of David Myres distinguished lectures on the science and craft of teaching psychology, Douglas Bernstein presented an illustration depicting the reasons behind a student’s lack of motivation, focus and interest in school and other social activities. For example, the lecture illustrates that in school a child walks into class late, smacking gum loudly, cell phone in hand and music blaring loudly from an ipad. A question will be asked: who raised this kid? Who is to blame for this child’s persistent misbehavior: parents, teachers or society? What parental styles of training could have resulted in this level of social contempt: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive or neglectful? It is important to understand that the ultimate goal of learning lies in people finding a meaningful place in the society in terms of how they uncton in the area of work or social relationship. Our personalized report, whether in our learning efforts, private businesses, organized employment or customized relationships such as marriage, parent-child relationships, teacher-student friendships or similar alliances will involve evaluation in fourteen (14) different dimensions divided into three groups as follows:

- Group 1:** Work competences: These include: organization, dynamism, anticipation, adaptability and tenacity.
- Group 2:** Social and emotional qualities: These are made up of enthusiasm, leadership, eloquence, diplomacy and self-control.
- Group 3:** Aspirations: Included here are need for autonomy, responsibility, commitment, ambition and sense of self.

But how does the self-determination theory apply holistically to educational practices? First, the

autonomy component requires that learning has to be voluntary (so also teaching), if the practitioners (learners and teachers) are to benefit fully from learning experiences. In other words, autonomy reflects the need for the learner to be volitional in his or her actions, to fully and authentically endorse his or her learning behaviors and to act as the originator of such behaviors. It is from the voluntary or volitional nature of the action that a sense of personal initiative will be felt by the learning participant. In the second place, the learner must have a sense of competence, i.e. he or she should see him/her-self as being competent to undertake learning (or teaching) as the case may be. This is seen as one's competence to interact with the environment, the environment meaning all the paraphernalia (human or material interfaces) that the learners will interact with. In other words, a need for competence reflects a yearning to feel effective in one's efforts and capable of achieving desired outcomes such as excellent school performance. With this comes the argument for aptitude, which is an important determinant of success in any endeavour. Aptitude has a close liaison with self-efficacy, a reflection of confidence or belief in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behaviour and social environment. When a learner feels competent to undertake the task before him/her, there is greater certainty that such tasks would be accomplished and inherent goals attained. The third need fulfilling condition of the self-determination theory is relatedness- a desire to feel connected to and be understood by significant others. This requires that one should feel to be an important part of the learning process and setting. Remember that this has to do with one's emotions and perceptions. Being convinced that one is connected to significant others (as students to teachers in the learning arena) is a psychological outcome based on one's satisfactory self-perception and resulting self-esteem, which could as well come from a satisfactory sense of competence and autonomy. Another important outcome of satisfactory self-esteem is the development of a sense of self-worth which progresses into higher self constructs (self-construals) or higher-order organization, which mostly takes place through the organism-integration process. This entails that the self becomes more complex over time through interrelations of self-constituents (evolution of phenomenal self) as well as the internalization of elements from the environment.

Physiological and Psychological Bases of the Self Determination Theory:

The self-determination theory perspective is somewhere between a continuum of two need extremes. In one study, Patrick, Knee, Canevello and Lonsbary (2007) offered the premise that need theories are either physiological or psychological in terms of the target of needs. It means in essence that the learner as a target of needs strives to satisfy his or her psychological challenges which appear as drives, towards psychological development in the form of self-actualization. This perspective fully captures Murray's (1938) theorization of needs as acquired and therefore as anything that moves an individual to action. In contrast, when needs are construed as "nutriments necessary for ongoing psychological growth, integrity and well being", it reminds us of needs that are physiological (survival needs such as sleep, air, food and reproduction) and Hull's (1943) drive-reduction theory is a typical and salient tool towards drive reduction and wellbeing.

Such needs which reflect tissue deficits, must be met for the organism to remain physically healthy, and like Maslow's (1954) base-line (physiological) needs, include food, water and other basic necessities. We are encouraged that research on self-determination has deep-rooted support in the expansive social psychological literature. For example, the need to connect with and be understood by others is a distinct human need that is echoed in most theories of motivation and development and as such is not merely restricted to the learning process. Reis and Patrick (1996) and Reis and Shaver (1988) refer to the theory's concept of relatedness as intimacy and go on to associate the feelings of being understood, validated and cared for as aspects of intimate experience. Educational practitioners would agree that some level of intimacy (without some inordinate motivations) is necessary between teachers and learners for greater educational outcome to take place. Baumeister and Leary (1995) referred to this as the need to belong and demonstrated that this form of relatedness plays a vital role in human motivation which, of course, includes the motivation to learn.

In terms of competence, early works by White (1959) and Bandura (1977) linked the feeling of competence with self confidence and self-efficacy respectively. Also, Carver and Scheir (1990) demonstrated that a strong belief in a person about his/her goal attainment is psychologically beneficial and desirous.

The need for autonomy based on self-determination theory has however elicited some controversy largely from misconceptions regarding the definition of autonomy. The theory has advanced the notion that autonomy refers to self-government or the extent to which people feel self-directed in their actions. The controversy dovetails as an outcome of peoples' confused conceptualization of the term as "independence" and associated fear of disconnection from others. This notwithstanding, the utility of autonomy in educational practice remains the unseen force behind independent research, inventions and painstaking studies that bring about new educational products such as mathematical formulas, new technologies, advertising skills and the recycling of old products to serve the dual purpose of waste management and thrift production. Moreover, it is obvious that autonomy, rather than exude independence and detachment from others, involves a sense of volition, agency and initiation and this can best be clarified if we reflect and compare the theory with de Charms's (1968) distinction between psychological "Origins" and "Pawns". In that work titled "personal causation", persons who

are ‘pawns’, unlike ‘origins’, did not feel as if they were the originators of their behavior and did not feel a sense of being fully engaged in their actions. As teachers and learners therefore, what role should we play (pawns or origins) in order to optimize educational practice in our different capacities? Should we act like people with “awesome brains” ending up with “awful achievements”? Awesome brains here mean sufficient abilities while awful achievements represent marginal successes occasioned by equally marginal utilization of enormous skills and abilities. This illustration is basically a modest approach to preach the salient gospel that we should not waste our optimum capacities when we have overwhelming opportunities to optimize them. If we feel like an awesome machine, we should be seen practically as such; and if we know our abilities are in the lower mould, we should be happy but strive towards newer and stronger brands. Ausubel (1968) once observed that “the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner knows”. What does this mean? To find an answer, let us cast our minds back to all the examinations we have written in our lifetime, including the UTME and its follow-up, the Post UTME. These examinations were meant to “intimate us with what we know so that we will eventually know what to intimate ourselves with” in the learning process. Sounds logical? The statement is clearly elucidating the notion that storing up information (i.e. the “met-before” information, Tall, 2004) in our brains is one of the most adaptive strategies in the promotion of learning. Basically, McGowen and Tall (2010) believe that new experiences built on prior knowledge (met-befores) are much better remembered; and anything that does not fit into prior experience is either not learned or learned temporarily and easily forgotten. The term “met-before” as used here applies to all current knowledge that arises through previous experience, both positive and negative (McGowen and Tall, 2010).

Nevertheless, it may appear as if we have intentionally excluded the concept of personality in the learning process. As is well known, the model of “factors approach” in personality, which emphases five traits that disposes a person to particular thoughts, feelings and behaviours shows much relevance to the concept of learning. Among the various factors of personality(Neuroticism, extraversion, openness-to-experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) research reports clearly show that conscientiousness as well as openness-to-experience are consistent predictors of a range of outcomes including academic and occupational achievement, physical health and longevity among others (Roberts, Jackson, Edmonds & Meintis, 2009; Ottu & Oladipo, 2014).

Internalization of Experience: Autonomous or Controlled Process?

Learning has been identified as one of the cognitive determinants of behavior (Eyo, 2003). Learning is generally defined as a process by which relatively permanent changes in behavior are brought about through experience, instruction or practice (Morgan & King, 1975). Also, Osilon and Hergenbahn (2013) see it as a relatively permanent change in behavioural potentiality which occurs as a result of reinforced practice. This implies that learning can be formal, involving planned, deliberate and directed delivery and receipt of information as contrived in the school system and involves teachers and students with back-up support from parents; or informal, involving covert, conscious or unconscious adoption of processes and practices that lead to positive or negative additions, subtractions and adaptations in the behavior of the individual. Despite the many forms of motivation earlier discussed, two central theoretical aspects of the SDT differentiates autonomous and controlled types of motivation. In the sphere of education, an internalization of learning can take place in the same two ways: autonomous or controlled processes. An autonomous internalization, according to Vallerand, Salvy, Mayeau, Elliot, Deris, Grouzet and Blanchard (2007) occurs when individuals have freely accepted an activity as important for them without any contingencies attached to it. As conceptualized by Deci and Ryan (2000) and Ryan and Deci (2003), this type of internalization emanates from the intrinsic and integrative tendencies of the self and produces a motivational force that gingers people to engage in the activity willingly. The resultant self-construal engenders a sense of volition and personal endorsement about pursuing the activity. In this situation, people are not compelled to do the activity but freely engage in it. Hodgins and Kree (2002) on the other hand present controlled internalization as originating from intra-and/or inter-personal pressure, either because certain contingencies are attached to the activity (such as feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem) or other contingencies are derived from ego-invested self-structures.

Many of past research on self-determination theory have shown that activities that are not interesting can be internalized in either a controlled or autonomous fashion (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon, 2002; Vallerand, 1997; Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997). For example, in the past “few” years, the Federal government of Nigeria has been led by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on a form of forced internalization of the problems confronting education in Nigeria, especially higher education. But at every stage, government appears to be ignorant of the enormous problems facing the education industry in the country. This attitude has generally been fuelled not by ignorance but the pretentious gesturing by politicians to perpetuate corruption through the diversion of huge government revenue to self-serving programmes, or sometimes bare-faced embezzlement of government revenue appropriated for education. It is important to emphasize that the right to education is one of the undeniable rights that every government owes her citizens, especially children. In the

words of Koffi Anan, a former United Nations Secretary General: *“There is no trust more sacred than that which the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, their welfare protected, their lives free from fear and want, and that they grow up in peace.”* On the strength of this, it is absolutely lawless and immoral for such rights to be taken away either directly or through indirect ways, including negligence. It is then reasonable to opine that much as privately initiated schools (primary, secondary and universities should be encouraged, government should not “go on leave” and allow the private sector to be the main proprietor and propeller of educational programmes in the country. Quality instruction, teachers and infrastructure at these levels of education remain the sine-qua-non for meaningful raise in the standards of students academic performance at all levels. Poor quality instruction and materials at the primary and secondary schools levels leaves a domino (bandwagon) effect on cumulative quality and results in the production of incompetent and unemployable graduates at different levels of instruction. If past Nigerian governments were allowed to promote the large-scale privatization of educational institutions (especially universities) as they proposed, our children’s right to education would greatly have been curtailed as most of our undergraduates today would not have been able to pay the sky-bound fees charged by private universities in the country.

The Learning Environment and Teacher-Learner’s Connectedness

The construct of learning environment in this paper is extensive and goes beyond the mere conception of the physical environment. It logically includes the psychological and ecological components of the learning situation. Some may say: What is the place of ecology in the classroom? The answer is that there is so much! The classroom is a complex ecosystem involving many components such as teacher, student, sense of community, general management and organizational skills, instruction, behaviour management, tools, teaching aids etc. In the first place we can look at (i.e. construe) the learning environment as the natural and built structures encompassing the learning situation, then the human interdependence between both objects and other humans. Thereafter, we go on to consider commitment to the environment, interconnectedness, the resulting ecological behavior (occasioned by the nature of educational ecosystem) and the cumulative environmental behavior as well as behavioral responses and reactions. When teachers and learners construct peculiarly different but integrative relationships in a learning situation, we quickly reflect on the concept of autonomy discussed by the self-determination theory. Autonomous relationship with the educational environment is a personal and an intricate thing, which is why people perform differently at the feedback stage of educational evaluation. There is however, evidence of greater overlap between individuals’ self-identity with learning environment (Schultz and Tabanico, 2007). The notion of interconnectedness with the environment is even taken to the extreme by some religions (e.g. Buddhism) which claim that the boundary between self and others and between self and environment are blurred or even non-existent (Nhat Hanh, 1999). Much as this may appear as a fanatical approach towards the self-environment integration, Clayton (2003) reported that an environmental identity can function like a collective identity (e.g. an ethnic identity) and foster connection and felt-similarity. All these views point to the fact that creating a ‘loving’ and passionate relationship with our educational setting (which is the psychological portrayal of the learning environment as academically sensual) is bound to lead us to more commitment to the cause of education and navigate to greater excellence. Just as individual’s (i.e. married couples) can include in their self-concept aspects of their romantic partner’s identity, resources and perspectives; students, teachers, educational facilitators and practitioners can similarly project themselves into the beauty of education, by getting interconnected with related educational concerns such as sports, academic competitions and task accomplishment. This is the cognitive, and more specifically, empathic dimension of our relatedness with the educational environment and requires emotional and autonomous attachment to the educational setting as our “personal space” as would be described by environmental psychologists. Remember that autonomy as applied to self determination does not mean independence or individualism but the goal-directed freedom to initiate and do what is interesting especially in an attempt to internalize one’s cultural orientation and wellbeing (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003). Sometimes, we can reconstruct new self-environmental relationships through scenarios, i.e. an imagined or projected (role-played) sequence of events. This is called self-presentation. Self-presentation is behaviour that attempts to convey some information about oneself or some image of oneself to other people/oneself. In psychological science, self-presentation can serve both positive and negative purposes depending on the goal (i.e. motivations) of the self-presenter, the personality (i.e. innate disposition of the “actor”) and what situational factors are present to elicit them. In public relations and marketing, self-presentation is generally called impression management. The reason behind psychologists’ interest in self-presentation is not for its negative ends (which of course, they “psychologists” attempt to control) but for all the positive innuendos that can be gleaned from it. Erving Goffman (1959) who used a dramaturgical analogy in his seminal book “The Presentation of self in Everyday Life” and Social Psychologist Edward E. Jones (1964) re-enacted interest in this area of study. Research evidence has shown that strategic self presentation (self-enhancement or self-deprecation) has the potential of altering previous self-images by creating new (phenomenal)

selves in the direction of the self-presentational episode (Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir, 1986; Ottu, 2005). By application students can enact academic excellence through internalized self-presentation using relevant and moral strategies of self-expansion from the taxonomy of self presentational styles such as assertiveness, protectiveness, offensiveness and defensiveness which can manifest in the forms of ingratiation, self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification or supplication, depending on intended goals. Therefore, no matter what our profession is, we cannot escape from using any of these impression management styles but the difference lies in their altruistic and humanitarian application without neglecting the moral element of our existence. Students can benefit educationally from self-presentation by learning to make resilient and splendid choices in pursuit of excellence.

Person-Education Environment Relationship: The Self-expansion Approach

In the 1980s an important contribution was made to the field of social psychology when Aron & Aron (1986) proposed the self-expansion theory to examine inclusion of other in the self-concept of people, a theory that was used to investigate relationship commitment among married couples. Later, Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992) evolved a diagram of a series of increasingly overlapping pair of circles (Venn diagrams) one representing the self and the other representing the partner, to reflect (or depict pictorially) the degree of a person's "inclusion of other in the self". This graphic representation of identity overlap merges the concepts of interconnectedness and closeness. This measure (scale) of felt interconnectedness with another has been used fruitfully in close relationships research, and also has been modified for use in other socially relevant areas e.g., inclusion of self in the community (Mashek, Stuewig, Furukawa, & Tangney, 2006); inclusion of the in-group in the self (Tropp and Wright, 2001) and inclusion of nature in the self (Schultz, 2001, 2002). In like manner, educationists can modify the inclusion of other in the self scale to assess the level of commitment of educational practitioners and learners to the cause of education by, for instance, measuring "inclusion of educational environment in the self", or conceptualizing the inclusion in several other dimensions beneficial to education. Since this scale was basically developed to measure commitment among married couples, it means that the cognition of students' 'marriage' to the educational environment (including educational content) should be the central empathic concern of those using the scale to promote education. The university environment remains the ivory tower of truth and intellectual pursuit disconnected from the practical concerns of everyday life. Every student who needs success should cognitively expand him/herself into this kind of utopian ideation and mimic its behavioural ideals.

Passion and Performance

Passion is a very strong feeling about a person or thing. To have passion is to have intense emotion and compelling enthusiasm for something. Passion is like commitment, the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity as an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of counter-productive action. Robert J. Vallerand (2010) defines passion as "a strong inclination towards self-defining activity that people love, find important, and in which they invest time and energy. Passion reflects a strong investment in any activity, which implies that the passionate individual is committed to engaging in that activity in a competent manner (Vallerand et al, 2007). It is an important source of fuel that allows people to go through long and, at times, frustrating practice sessions, and such emotional investments eventually help them to attain high levels of performance. Just like in any form of shaky "dyadic" interaction, students without passion for or commitment to their studies forget their lessons even as they leave the classroom.

Thus, when names like J.J. Okocha, Wole Soyinka, Serena Williams and Mother Teresa are mentioned in social circles, what would readily come to the mind of perceivers would be the different spheres where these individuals have passionately made their marks. In this example, the respective fields of football, literature, lawn tennis and religious charity (humanitarian work) would readily come to play. However, in the context of these achievements, most people, guided by mere intuition would easily assume that the exploits of these performers are almost exclusively the result of remarkable natural talent; but scientists conducting expert performance research (e.g. Charness, Tuffiash, Krampe, Reingold & Vasyukova, 2005; Ericsson & Charness, 1994) suggest, and rightly, in their findings that individuals such as those listed above, have achieved high levels of performance because they engaged for several years in highly-structured practice aimed at improvement and skill refinement. Most times social perception may not recognize that these individuals had to work dutifully and silently, like the proverbial water lily, before we can recognize their outward beauties in the form of high level achievement. At other times, people are apt to question what psychological factors enabled these performers to maintain somewhat consistent and sustained levels of intense practice over a lifetime? Early research (e.g. Ericsson & Charness, 1994) noted that the nature of the motivational forces behind such performances were unclear, but as a way out, Vallerand, *et al* (2007; Vallerand, 2008) suspected that the concept of passion may represent the energy underlying such persistent involvement. Indeed, to them, being passionate for an activity may lead individuals to dedicate themselves fully to their activity, thereby allowing them to persist, even in the face of obstacles, and to eventually achieve excellence. But they were also quick to warn that while passion may

ensure dedication towards an activity and eventually performance, it may also be associated with positive or negative subjective well being depending on the type of passion driving the individual towards achievement goals. These days, in our numerous institutions of learning, passion is far from the ideals and values of some of our students. Only a few students work hard in pursuits of academic trophies. Others lack persistence but depend on short-cuts. They engage in examination malpractice in many of its surprising forms including the daring and despicable component of buying marks from anti-professional teachers. This stunts educational growth rubbishes the effort of honest students and teachers and defeats the whole essence of merit and excellence in evaluation and achievement. Unfortunately, students heedlessly call this “sorting” when a better use of the word should be the process of arranging their educational experiences systematically in preparation for their examinations. Student should yearn for holistic guidance on strategies for effective learning. On the basis of this, it is essential for students to examine Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of cognitive levels (one of three learning domains) which include: knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, as steps towards effective learning.

The Dualistic Model of Passion

In their study, Vallerand *et al.*, (2003) proposed a dualistic model of passion in which they define passion as a strong inclination towards an activity that individuals like (or even love). There are activities that people find important, invest time and energy in and later come to be internalized in their own identity. For students, learning should be that activity. This model which is based in part on the expanded doctrine of the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), proposes also that people engage in various activities in the hope of satisfying basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. In the course of time, certain enjoyable activities come to be wholly self-defining that they represent central features of one’s identity. For instance, those who have a passion for teaching or learning do not merely teach their specialty subjects or learn their passionate subjects or trades, they go further to internalize them, to become ‘teachers’ or ‘learners’ of substance. These passionate activities become part of their identity of who they are. Following from these, we should guard against students studying courses which they do not like up to the point of making them part of their own identity.

The dualistic model of passion posits that two types of passion develop among people, based on the type of internalization process that take place (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Sheldon, 2002). The two types of passion are obsessive passion and harmonious passion. It is also the purview of this paper to attempt to explore the two dimensions of passion to see in what ways they relate in part with the self-determination theory and how stakeholders can utilize them to advance the cause of qualitative education in Nigeria. How then can we safely guide ourselves and the growing generation of learners to be passionately inclined to learning?

Harmonious Passion: Based on research outcomes and daily experience, we can see that harmonious passion results from an autonomous internalization of an activity into a person’s identity. This occurs when individuals have freely accepted the activity as important to them without any contingencies attached to it. When applied to improve the quality of education, this type of internalization will readily produce a motivational force in an individual to engage in the learning process willingly, showing clearly that the individual possesses a sense of volition and endorsement about the learning pursuit. As educational practitioners, volitional engagement in the teaching or learning activity will bring about a sense of commitment and persistence which would eventually lead to attainment of achievement goals. Passion is the lifeblood of self determination in any realm of life engagement. It is the purveyor of every activity that is valued and highly estimated. It could be likened to a constellation of stars that brightens one’s ways as he or she walks in a pane of hope and ecstasy. Passion exemplifies many things including energy, power, radiance, splendor, luminance and anything that combines autonomous inclination towards any activity with resilience, perseverance and harmonious posturing that promotes wellbeing. Let us then see what obsessive passion involves.

Obsessive Passion: By contrast, this kind of passion is a product of controlled internalization of environmental activity into one’s identity. Such internalization takes its roots from intra and/or interpersonal pressure, “either because certain contingencies are attached to the activity, such as feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem (inter), or because the sense of excitement derived from such activity’s engagement becomes uncontrollable (intra).

A common characteristic of individuals with this kind of passion is in the development of ego-invested self-structures (Hodgins & Knee, 2002) and a display of rigid persistence i.e. refusal to give up when unsuccessful at a chosen activity. When a person is not successful (i.e. cannot attain the goals inherent) in an activity, his/her psychological health tends to be jeopardized and as such, cannot function optimally within the confines of the passionate activity, and would as well feel as if they were prevented from engaging in the activity in the first place.

This strand of passion when applied in the field of ensuring quality in education would yield negative outcomes. When students, for example are pressured by parents or motivated by pedestrian benefits to undertake courses for which they have very little or no aptitude, the result could be that of underperforming in such areas

(if they would not fail out-rightly) and this, apart from affecting the quality of graduates produced in that field, would also lead to the reduction in the self-esteem and therefore life satisfaction of affected persons. In the same vein, teachers as practitioners could be affected when poor quality personnel are recruited to lead students at different levels of education. Obsessive passion, whether intrapersonal or interpersonal, remains counterproductive because the sources of motivation for the passionate activity are controlled by forces alien to the individual and therefore, not in harmony with his/her aspirations.

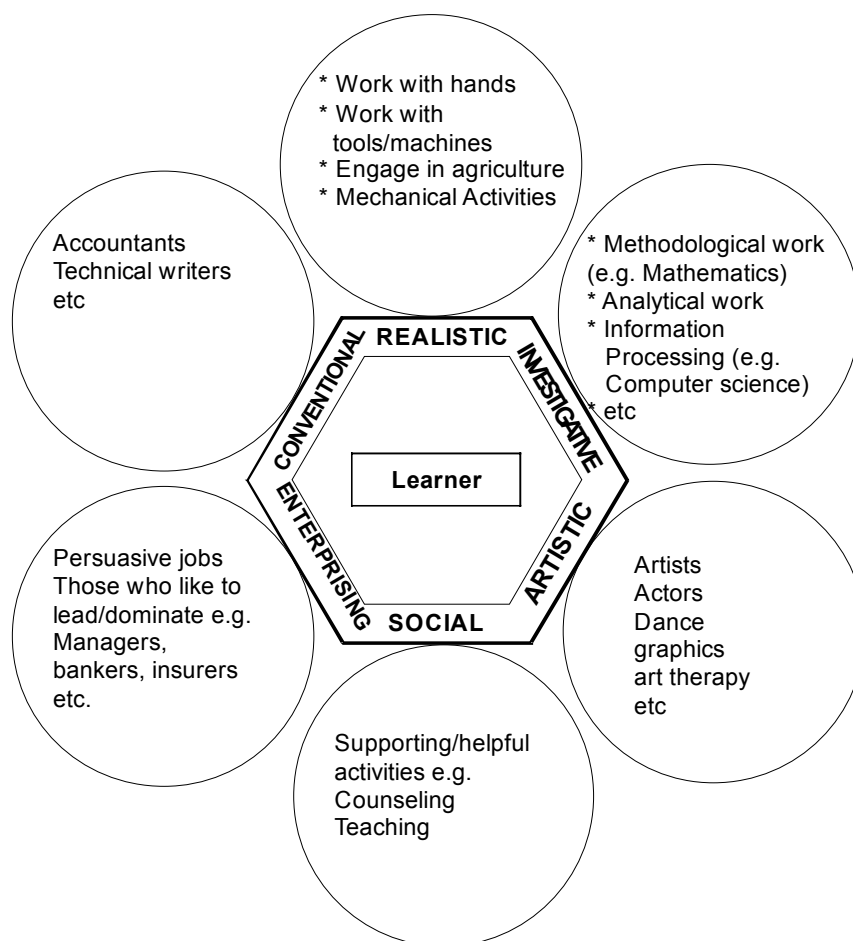
In summary, a number of researches suggests that both obsessive and harmonious passion may contribute to performance through their impact on deliberate practice. Nevertheless, while harmonious passion may lead to positive subjective wellbeing, obsessive passion comes with a price which is the elicitation of negative experiences and conflict with other life activities (e.g Vallerand *et al.*, 2003).

Supporting principles of academic excellence: In order to emphasize the other side (i.e. group domain) of student connectedness and involvement in learning, it is important to explore and add flesh to Chickening and Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, with salient research applications. Teachers have a duty to help students in a number of ways which, I feel, should also be enhanced by parents and students themselves. Let us consider the following as important areas of collaboration:

1. **Encourage contact between students and Faculty:** Experience has shown that frequent student – faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement (Chickening and Gamson (1987). Concern of faculty members helps students surmount rough times to get through academic challenges. When students keep good contact with a few faculty members, it enhances their intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. Contact may be the “proposal” for the formation of mentor-mentee relationship.
2. **Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students:** For a long time, educational stakeholders have agreed that learning is enhanced when it is more like teamwork than an individual effort. Working with others has often increased involvement in learning, sharpens thinking and deepens understanding with others, especially when people share their ideas and receive reactions from others.
3. **Encourage Active Learning:** One of the greatest pitfalls in today's learning experiences is when students remain passive in class, almost assuming the role of spectators. It has severally been proven that students do not learn much by merely sitting in class listening to teachers. It is expected that students must talk in class and share in the entire educational experience rather than merely memorizing presented assignments and churning in the answers. It is part of good learning ethics for students to make what they learn to be part of themselves and help stimulate learning with personal ideas. All these must be enhanced by the teacher through student's involvement in learning. As Stoneham and Feltham (2009) premised, “*Tell me, and I will forget, show me, and I may remember, involve me, and I will understand*”.
4. **Give Prompt Feedback:** Teachers should give feedback to students to help them appraise their performance. When a student knows what he/she knows (strengths) and what he/she doesn't know (weaknesses) he/she will be able to define his/her focus in future learning goals and strategies. Sometimes, in addition to a teacher's feedback, students may reflect on their abilities and learning process and explore needed opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and what they still need to learn. This paper is providing one of such opportunities.
5. **Emphasize Time on Task:** Today many students may misunderstand a teacher's emphasis on time management. There are some students who believe that assignments and/or term papers should be submitted at the student's discretion. Any attempt to inculcate the discipline of time consciousness will leave many teachers with uncanny labels. In their submissions, Chickening and Gamson (1987) derived a mathematical explanation that “time plus energy” equals learning. They believe that there is no substitute for time on any task and accordingly premised that as critical as time is, an institution's definition of time expectations for students, faculty, and other professional staff can set the lower and upper limits for high performance and excellence. Time management, in an undergraduate's world view, is not merely related to assignments; it is very much related to when a student should begin to read for a semester's exams which, of-course, is immediately after the semester's first lectures. Procrastination is one of the most rapacious “thieves” of our time. Among students and other members of the society are six (6) different types of procrastinators: (1) the perfectionist (2) the Dreamer (3) the Crisis maker (4) the ‘Defier’ (5) the over-doer and (6) the worrier. Let us take personal initiative to read up the details of each, find out how we fit into each mould and take action(s) to free ourselves from them. Investing time to read meaningfully is what most students lack. While C. S. Lewis believes that “when we read we are not alone”, another educationist A. C. Grayling says: “To read is to fly, it is to soar to a point of vantage which gives a view over wide steams of history, human variety, ideas, shared experience and the traits of many inquiries.”
6. **Communicate High Expectations:** Expectations are important in the life of everyone. In Psychology,

self-efficacy remains an important concept indicating how an individual can evaluate his or her expected performance on a task, either positively (high self-efficacy) or negatively (low self efficacy). Expectation by people (whether teachers or students) on the performance of the other has been known to have noticeable impact on performance. For teachers, expecting students to perform well often lead to what is known in psychological circles as self-fulfilling prophecies. The same goes for students when they expect a teacher to do badly. This concept emerged from a study by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) who falsely informed teachers after a pseudo-test in their class, that some of their pupils were bloomers (people who have the capacity for effective learning) while some were not. Actually, the children labeled bloomers in the study tagged “the Pygmalion in the Classroom” were merely drawn by means of random choice of names from a hat. Armed with this information, the teachers “helplessly” saw the ‘bloomers’ performing “better than” other pupils due to inherent prejudice already fixed in their minds by the researchers (the valence of first impression). This is the power of the self-fulfilling prophesy, a striking phenomenon that has been replicated many times in several studies (e.g. Rosenthal, 1994). This implies that if we have any opinion about a particular individual (e.g. Xanna is an insincere Christian or Kepsa is a stupid student) chances are that Xanna will not (by expectation) exhibit any Christian virtues before us and neither will Kepsa say any clever things in our presence, thus the self-fulfilling prophesy. It is clear that the self-fulfilling prophesy can only allow us to see what we expect to see in people because our minds were already made up. Self-fulfilling prophesy is the bane of all human relationships.

7. **Respect Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning:** The learning industry is a complex labyrinth with many people bringing different talents and styles into learning. The general belief here is that there are many roads to learning. Some are brilliant (fast) learners while others are cautious (slow) learners. Howard Earl Gardner (1983) in his work “Frames of Mind,” identified seven distinct intelligences “to justify that nobody should be presumed unintelligent”. These include linguistic intelligence, logical – mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, body-kinesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. With these diverse intelligences, students and other skills-searching people can easily locate their domain of best performance, leading to the choice of disciplines which they have absolute comparative advantage. Therefore proper choice of career (career leanings), related expertise, and understanding commonly called “career maturity” become central in the mastery and high performance in chosen areas, especially in the context of conscious effort matched with openness to related experience (Ottu & Oladipo, 2014). Related to this, also, is Holland’s (1997) model of six personality and work environment types including: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, environmental and conventional (RIASEC) which defines how human personality aligns to different educational and career climates. Take an exploratory look at the model below:



This model is a useful resource in guiding every student to “test-run” his/her likes and talents towards the attainment of excellence. However, no single personality/environmental type is independent of the others. For example, as a teacher I provide helpful and supporting services to people and this in turn may require working with hands (e.g. demonstrating an experiment to a student); analytical and investigative work or clinical interventions (as in the use of statistics to predict psychological outcomes); some artistic and graphic works (found in the use of graphs and illustrations), and mostly in the teaching act itself (since teaching is a performing art). A teacher, at other times, is a manager of people as can be found in class organization and control, the central focus of the social psychology of the classroom, as expected corporative learning may lead to group cohesion (Sprinthal, Sprinthal & Ona, 1994). Teachers can also be seen as “support accountants” in numerous professional spheres, especially in the delicate computation of students’ grades and maintenance of class records and inventory. As reported by Leung (2008, pp. 115-132):

“The theory by Holland offers a simple and easy-to-understand typology (framework) on career interests and environments. Holland postulated that vocational interest is an expression of one’s personality and that vocational interests could be conceptualized into six typologies which are: Realistic (R) investigative (I), Artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E) and conventional (C). If a person’s degree of resemblance to the six vocational personality and interest types could be assessed, then it is possible to generate a three letter code (e.g. SIA, RIA or EAR) to denote and summarize one’s career interest. The first letter of the code is a person’s primary interest type, which could play a major role in career choice and satisfaction. The second and the third letters are secondary interest themes, and they would likely play a lesser but still significant role in the career choice process. In the career choice and development process, people search for environments that would allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, and to express their aptitudes and values. The concept of ‘congruence’ is used by Holland to denote the status of person-environment interaction. A high degree of match between a person’s personality and interest types and the dominant work environmental types

(high degree of congruence) is likely to result in vocational satisfaction and vice versa”.

Conclusion

This review is a theoretical study of associated factors (self-determination, connectedness with learning environment, passion) as predictors (or otherwise) of quality educational outcomes in our country. It is important to note that the reviewed problems of quality in educational outcomes in our country are mostly that of inadequate planning and lack of commitment on the part of the various stakeholders of education. For the students who are the primary focus of this self-assessment, they should digest the basic themes of evolving deliberation and see how they can improve on their study habits. Also, although parents' contribution towards children's academic excellence are enormous, they still need to give more support especially to the category of students who find it difficult to balance their self-directed leverage on learning. We also need to prompt and support the government and encourage her to provide the needed environment and leadership in educational matters. Also, students should be able to balance recurring dialectical tensions between initiated educational advocacies and educational realization. Like in a marital relationship, some students (spouses) don't talk enough about what they are thinking and feeling and some students (spouses) talk too much so their teacher (partner) *can't get a word in edgewise!* Successful academic achievement (marriage) therefore requires a great deal of effective communication about many diverse topics as a way of regulating the floodgate of excellence (stability).

Also, as generally observed, it is paradoxical and frightening that government's attitude towards education has always looked like an episode of excuses about its inability to fund education. As a follow-up therefore government is always “encouraging private sector participation – a situation that has almost relieved her of educational responsibilities to the citizenry. It is believed that in as much as private sector participation in education is a welcome development, government's perceived indolent and dodging attitude is worrisome and a threat to the future of the country. Government should correct this negative impression because she is in an advantageous position to motivate individuals and especially students towards qualitative outcomes in education. This, for instance can be done through provision of scholarships (scholarship have always meant full sponsorship of students) and not scenarios where a few thousand Naira are paid for a year to sometimes, individuals who do not even need such money. When people are financially empowered (financial aids and grants for research) a lot of problems would be curtailed. Student problems which could affect quality performance through lowered self-determination include: hunger, homelessness (some students are actually homeless on campus and resort to squatting), no books, no water, no electricity and as a result, no discipline and the list is endless. For a student with these problems, his GPA (Grade Point Average) has already been split into several domains of associated problems. So when a student graduates with a third class degree or something more ineffectual, *it is difficult to say if the school authorities were actually measuring his academic ability or his capacity to groan under unfavourable conditions?* This question is only applicable to those group of students groaning under the weight of these adverties and not those who invest their energies in activities detrimental to academic growth and progress. Government is only used here as an example. What about some of us who (in our gracious capacities) withhold our contributions to education in other areas?

It is the belief of this discourse that when the educational environment is embellished with the right kind of attitude, equipment and conditions, both teachers and students will draw essential and harmonious passion within their arsenal of self-determination to stabilize the right and sustainable quality of education in Nigeria. Let us therefore reposition ourselves as educational “origins” instead of “pawns” in the crusade for academic excellence. *It is a fact of life that most obstacles melt away when we make up our minds to walk boldly through them.* Sometimes the road may be rough, but we need to remain resolute to get to the end. And, if we stumble, we should be quick to make it a part of our “dance”. At the moment, while we reposition ourselves for this onerous task, it is pertinent that we (students, teachers, parents, government) as stakeholders reflect deeply on Theodore Roosevelt's timeless and impassioned speech at the University of Paris, a speech which continues to illuminate the minds of conscientious and value-oriented people:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and short-coming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat”.

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