

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: Akinsete, Alfred Aanu

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My teaching philosophy is guided by the axiom ‘Tell me, I’ll listen, show me, I’ll understand, involve me and I’ll learn’, which elevates involvement and participation as key issues in the learning process. Reflecting on my teaching, I am aware of the magnitude of the impact I am to my students. As a faculty, my primary goals are to provide qualitative teaching, nurtured by quality research and other services to the university and the community within their respective foci and mandates. In the discharge of this responsibility, especially in the mathematical sciences classroom, I see the learners as the focus, the teacher as facilitator, resource, organizer, participant and assessor, while the classroom becomes part of the rich learning environment, where learners are assisted to develop those skills that promote lifelong learning in their various vocations. Over the years, I have seen myself *teaching and educating students*, rather than only *teaching them mathematics and statistics*.

I have embraced learner centeredness in the course of my teaching profession, through the use of tasks and activities that promote learner autonomy and encourage students to become problem solvers, as these have beneficial influence on learning as well as the dynamics of the classroom itself. The beauty of the learner centred approach is that it allows the teacher to understudy each group of learners and offers the teacher the benefit of switching smoothly between the roles of facilitator, resource, organizer and participant, in order to enhance learning, rather than being the focus in the classroom. I therefore see it with utmost responsibility to organize my courses and conduct myself in a manner that allows students to benefit immensely from this approach. I fervently believe that different levels of teaching and different categories of learners place before the teacher different demands and challenges. Ultimately however, students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by effective participation and involvement in class through direct interaction with instructors and course-mates emerge matured and independent, and are capable of navigating successfully through challenges in their work place. I have found out that students are generally willing to participate as long as they are made to understand the significance of the process, and not a way to uncover their ignorance. Therefore, I continue to see my classroom as not just a place for disseminating knowledge to my students, but as a rich soil for nurturing precious seeds to maturation, with well-formed, critical and analytical minds capable of sound reasoning in their approach to similar issues which confront them outside the classroom.

Obviously, some students initially are negatively disposed to this approach, particularly in a learning culture that reveres the teacher as a repository of knowledge. Also learners who are timid may readily not adjust to this method. However, with continued counselling, persuasion and perseverance, such students soon realize that the whole essence of learning itself is the development of the learner through interaction and involvement, that they too become very comfortable as they readily blend with others in the class. I encourage my students to interact with one another and work in small groups. This affords the students the opportunity to engage in interpersonal relationship, be more relaxed, and ultimately benefit from one another.

Where students are genuinely disadvantaged, I have learnt to assist them until they reach a comfortable level of ease to flow in the class. However, there are a few exceptions and instances when this approach may have to be adapted with other classical approach to accommodate varying needs. One of such instances is allowing my students to genuinely identify any mistakes I may make during problem solving (sometimes intentionally). By this, students are able to identify problems and suggest possible solutions. Knowing that students in general would prefer to keep silent in the classroom, I always asked my students if they understood what they are being taught, to the extent that the phrase “Do you understand?” often becomes a common statement in my classroom. In doing this, students are given the opportunity to state whether or not they understood the topic under discourse.

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One of the great attributes of being an excellent teacher is to also be teachable. An individual is not an island of knowledge, and there are great and many ideas and resources that one could learn from others. To this end, I solicit feedback from my students in the middle of the semester, and lately on continuous basis, rather than having to wait for the usual end of semester evaluation. I also meet regularly with class representatives on what are needful to be addressed to ensure that a healthy environment is created and maintained for learning. This self assessment allows me to address any problems that might have arisen in the course of my teaching and their learning.

In my various teaching activities, I actively pursue the *principles for best practices* in higher education. Some of these *principles* are listed and briefly described as follows:

- **Cooperation among students** – Great and quality learning is achieved when it is viewed as a collaborative or team work, rather than a competitive or a solo effort. I encourage and practice group learning in my classes.
- **Student–faculty rapport** – One of the most significant factor in motivating students is the frequency of student-faculty contact in as well as outside the classroom. A student intellectual commitment to academic matters and other areas of life is enhanced when he or she is given the opportunity to know a faculty well without eroding the respect for the institution of learning. To this end, I am very open, approachable and accessible to my students’ needs that would foster excellent learning.
- **Active and interactive learning** – There is a great advantage when students are actively involved in the teaching and learning in the classroom instead of listening to series lectures. Students are effectively engaged in my classes.
- **High expectation** – The level of expectation required from students determines their input and consequently determines their output. I demand high expectation from my students and successfully motivate them to attain such a high standard.
- **Continuous feedback** – As explained before, I am involved in a continuous assessment of my teaching activities in the classroom, rather than having to wait to the end of the semester’s evaluation. There is an ongoing weekly record of “important moments” of my teaching, which enables me to give prompt attention to issues raised by students that would promote better learning and understanding for students. These are comments recorded by students while teaching is going on.
- **Diversity of talents** – Students are endowed with diverse talents. I take advantage of the diversity of talents and ideas students bring to my class, and harmonize them in such a way that everyone benefits from one another.

While making sure that students in my classes acquire detailed contents of the curricula, situations may arise that require the flexibility of style and approach, without having to water down or compromise the contents. For example, I may need to spend more time with a student outside of the classroom to enable such student to be brought to a convenient level of foundational understanding that is required in the course. And while students continue to sign for my classes to learn mathematics or statistics, they also continue to learn about themselves, how to interact with their contemporaries, and celebrate excellent teaching and learning. My students know that my class is not the type a student attended, and reflecting back some years later only to say that he or she had not acquired knowledge.

When all is said and done, and reflecting on my contributions to the teaching profession, I would like to be seen to have sufficiently contributed to the advancement and betterment of higher education in any

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positions and roles I had assumed in the course of my career. I would like to have positively impacted the generations that were entrusted to my care and trust. I would like to have shaped the minds of those that have sat under my mentorship, to the extent that ideas drawn from me would assist them in making concise and good decisions that would make the world a better place.

In summary, my teaching methodologies and beliefs consist of, but not limited to the following:

- a) Prepare myself effectively and efficiently for my classes.
- b) Create a favorable learning environment where learners are accorded their rights.
- c) Review my teaching materials from time to time by bringing in new ideas and innovations, particularly from research findings, discussion and collaboration with colleagues.
- d) Ensure that my students demonstrate reasonable mastery of current topics before proceeding to new ones.
- e) Closely monitor their progress by observing their reactions from time to time to ensure that none of them is lagging behind.
- f) Provide adequate, varied and challenging tasks and activities in the class regularly to provoke the development of their cognitive faculties.
- g) Provide adequate follow up activities for the consolidation of achievements made in the classroom.
- h) Leave room for questions and provide varied avenues of assessments in terms of quizzes, tests, homework, projects, tutorials, and examinations.
- i) Make adequate provision for office hour consultation.
- j) Be unassuming, particularly when a pre-requisite is required for the course.
- k) Relate statistics and mathematics to life by using authentic materials and practical examples that have direct bearing on my students' courses.
- l) Recognize different ability groups and provide assistance to the lower achievers.
- m) Encourage collaborative work and study groups among my students.
- n) Welcome students' criticisms, advice and suggestions that would make me a better teacher, by improving the quality, style and bringing effectiveness to my teaching methodologies and pedagogies, that would enhance their learning through questionnaires.