

**Full Length Research Paper**

Promoting Language use to ensure Effective English language Learning: An Interactive Session in a Community Grammar School in Abeokuta Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The paper presents an action research report of a practical experience of classroom language learning experience to foster effective learning that could lead to functional use of language. The project was carried out in Abeokuta of Ogun State Southwestern Nigeria. Interactions were observed in normal classroom arrangements to bring out elements that could assist learners to be better users of English language. Relevant recommendations and suggestions were made in this regard.

Keywords: *Teaching, Learning, Interaction Language, Background.*

Introduction

First, there is the fact that language is learnt by use such as by encountering it and using it in a variety of situations. It is therefore, important to note the difference between the use and the study of language. Essays, science reports, notes, stories, written accounts of all sorts are examples of use—in these, language is the means not the end. One of the things that the teachers do to promote the use of language is preparing a functional lesson planning (Cloud & Hamayan, 2005). Study of word meanings, parts of speech, clause analysis, literary devices and style, analysis of texts and other matters of this kind undertaken by English teachers, are aspects of the study of language. Language may be the end as well as the means. Research findings are sparse on the connection between the study of language and pupils' use of the language. Many English language teachers therefore place priority on experience of using language, whether in the form of purposive use or practice exercises rather than the study of the language. Goldenberg (2008) was of the view that English learners usually acquire English when presented to learners explicitly and when they have many opportunities to use the language in meaningful contexts. In the same vein, Echevarria, Short, & Vogt (2008) opined that language acquisition process requires opportunities for the language learner to be exposed to, practice with, and then be assessed on their language skills.

In addition, because language is closely linked with thought, the utterances which each individual constructs are outward expressions of his thinking and are therefore a crucial part of his learning. To assimilate new information and incorporate it into one's existing knowledge one has to restructure it in his/her own formulations. Experience has shown how children have expressed to the instructors their difficulties in learning in the words of their teachers. This is particularly true of younger children, and it is interesting to note that children are advised to write up the reports of their work

according to their own construction and not in a predetermined form. Thus, while notes copied or dictated may be the most effective way of getting children to learn specific material, or of maintaining control of the class, they rob children of opportunities to use the language as an aid to their own thinking. If teachers understand this dilemma they can solve it in terms of their own priorities.

Furthermore, conversation is the most immediate and effective way for most people to penetrate and assimilate new knowledge. The feedback from others checks and expands one's own understanding. Consider the following example.

A particular teacher is a probationary physics teacher who was engaging students in a particular project. One of the Project team members tape-recorded a group of children working together during one of his lessons. The pupils had previously done some worksheets on ways of measuring time. For this lesson they had been asked to bring a candle or jars and tins (which could be fixed together to make sand or water timers). Some of the pupils had had difficulty in deciding how to measure the amount that their candles had burned in a given time but it was clear that different candles had produced different results. In this scenario, it would be misleading to expect all members of the team to give their reports in the same language form.

Practice is said to be a necessary condition for perfection. Language development qualifies more to benefit from this assertion in that constant use of language has been linked to gaining improvement in the control of such language. Experts believe that the beauty of language learning is in the ability of the learner to use it fluently and productively. Conscious efforts are therefore needed to ensure that the language students learn in the classroom is put to effective

use. The need to examine how this can be achieved using practical classroom experiences becomes very imperative.

The paper is specifically targeted at examining classroom language situation with the purpose of identifying those ideas about language which need to be understood to make for effective language learning and use. The research method include a description of questionnaire, Population study, and Data analysis.

Method of Data Collection

In order to analyze the collected data and draw inferences, the following were used.

research design, population, sample and sampling data collection and analysis.

Sampling Population

The sampling used for this study consist of eighty (80) pupils, forty boys and forty girls.

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant difference in academic performance of people from high level of education background when compared with low or non education background in Abeokuta.

Data Analysis

PUPILS FROM EDUCATED FAMILY

RESPONSE		PUPILS					
S/N	QUESTIONAIRES	YES	%	NO	%	TOTAL	%
1	Do you score above average in your English language examination?	70	87.5	10	12.5	80	10
2	Do you always answer questions in your English language class?	65	81.25	15	18.75	80	100
3	Do you participate in literary and debating society in your school?	75	93.75	5	6.25	80	100
4	Do you have any private or group reading after school hours?	60	75	20	25	80	100
5	Do you have any private psychological problem, disabilities?, if yes, name them.	10	12.5	70	87.5	80	100
6	Did you attend .private nursery and primary school?	60	75	20	25	80	100
7	Do you obey school rules and regulations?	70	87.5	10	12.5	80	100
8	Do you attend any extra classes of lesson after school hours?	72	90	08	10	80	100
9	Are your parents educated?, if yes, what are thier qualification?	75	93.75	65	6.25	80	100
10	Does your mother live with your father?	75	93.75	05	6.25	80	100

Source: field work in Abeokuta 2012.

Table 1: This table shows that there is significant difference in the academic performance of people from educated family background. The quality of pupils from educated background community is very high (93.75%). This comprise of pupils from educated background. Their parents are either teachers, civil servants, lawyers, doctors and pastors. 87.5 of the pupils scorer above average in examination, while 93.75% of them participate in literary and debating society in their school. 81.25% of the pupils answer questions in class during the teaching/learning interactions. 75% of them have private and group reading after the school hours, they have also attended the private

and nursery day care, before coming to primary school. 90% of them attend extra classes or lesson after school hours, while 87.5% obeys the rules and regulations of their school. Finally, 93.75% of their mothers (not divorced) are living with their fathers.

Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis states that there is significant difference in academic performance of pupils from high social economic background when compared with poor economic background. to test the hypothesis, the following questions were asked:

PUPILS FROM NON OR LOW EDUCATED FAMILY/POOR ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

RESPONSE		PUPILS					
S/N	QUESTIONAIRES	YES	%	NO	%	TOTAL	%
1	Do you score above average in your English language examination?	10	12.5	70	87.5	80	100
2	Do you always answer questions in your English language class?	05	6.25	75	93.75	80	100
3	Do you participate in literary and debating society in your school?	15	18.75	65	81.25	80	100
4	Do you have any private or group reading after school hours?	06	7.5	74	92.5	80	100
5	Do you have any private psychological problem, disabilities?, if yes, name them.	15	13.75	65	81.25	80	100
6	Did you attend .private nursery and primary school?	11	13.75	69	86.26	80	100

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7	Do you obey school rules and regulations?	20	75	60	25	80	100
8	Do you attend any extra classes of lesson after school hours?	10	12.5	70	87.5	80	100
9	Are your parents educated?, if yes, what are their qualification?	10	12.5	70	87.5	80	100
10	Does your mother live with your father?	40	50	04	50	80	100

Source: *Field work in Abeokuta 2012*

Table 2: This table shows that there is significant difference in the academic performance of pupils from non or low educated family/poor family background. The quality of academic competence of pupils from non or low educated family is very low. Most of their parents are skilled e.g mechanic and unskilled workers e.g cleaners. 12.5% of the pupils score above average in examination, while 18.75% participate in literary and debating society. 6.25% of the pupils answer question in the class, while 7.5% have group

and private reading after school hours. 13.75% do attend private nursery or day care before entering primary school, 12.5% attend extramural classes or lesson after classroom teaching, 75% of the pupils obey school ruled and regulations, while 18.75% of the pupils have psychological problem. Finally, 50% of their are not divorced, but due to economic reasons, they are not living together.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

	Behaviour of children with high economic status in schools	Behaviour of children with low economic status in schools
1	Thier children performed better in school	Their children perform poorly in school.
2	They are emotionally stable	They are not emotionally stable
3	They have confidence in whatever they do.	They do not have confidence in themselves and in whatever they are doing.
4	They are able to tolerate the acquisition of English language very well	They are not able to cope with learning languages like English language.
5	They have relevant textbooks on english.	They do not have relevant textbooks in English
6	They are focused, and they are organised in a zig	They are not focused, not organised, not stable, and do things in zag manner.
7	They have everything at thier disposal	They do not have anything at thier disposal
8	They have enough fund to feed themselves in schools.	They have enough fund to feed themselves in schools.
9	They study hard to pass	They do not study hard to pass since there is no book to read. They often have last/.lower credit passes in public exams like WASSCE and NECO.
10	They often have 'A' and upper Credit in English and public exams.	They do not study to pass since there is no book to read. They often have last/lower credit passes in public exams like WASSCE and NECO
11	They fly higher and higher	They look down on themselves, feel totally rejected.
12	They feel free, not suffering inferiority complex in the class.	They are not free, often suffer inferiority complex in the class.

Procedure

The interactions between teachers and pupils in the class are studied. This provided the opportunity to gather information about classroom language situations. A typical example of such interactions is hereby presented.

Bisi Sir, Mr H. You wouldn't be able to make a reliable candle clock.

Teacher Why?

Bisi Because both our candles burnt down different times. I think it depends on the candle.

Girl Unless you buy the same candle.

Bisi Because her candle burnt slower than our candle.

Teacher There's all sorts of things (indecipherable).

Bisi And the wind.

Teacher And the wind, yeh.

Girl Like the candles you put in candelabra last longer than these ones.

Teacher Well, they're different thicknesses, aren't they?

Boy No they're not, they're posher.

Teacher What, they're made out of something else?

Girl And then twisted.
That's what I mean.

Voices Yeh, those twisted ones.

Burning slower

Girl Yeh, because when we had a power cut two weeks ago we had a candle like that and one of them fancy ones in a candelabra. And the candelabra lasted longer than that one.

Bisi So it depends on the candle.

Boy Those twisted ones do burn slower.

Teacher I can't see why.

Boy 'Cos it has to go round the bend (Laughter).

Girl It's a different wax, I suppose.

Observation/Discussion

During the lesson there was a great deal of talk about the details of measuring and the variables that influenced their results. Now, with the teacher, these pupils are here reflecting on the implications of what they have been doing—and are bringing experiences from outside the lesson to bear too.

The teacher commenting on the transcript said: 'I like practicals. I think you can get a lot more—not what you expect—but you get a lot more from the children. It seems to be a good way to teach children to think for themselves. I think the learning itself is far more diverse than simply having an objective. The objective here is connected with the idea of time and yet I'm sure they learned far more about candles—and general principles of exactly what they're doing. They're out on a limb—they haven't been told what to do.'

In the absence of this kind of talk, expressive writing is a good substitute. Practical work and field studies by their very nature allow for exploratory talk as part of the operation, which might make exploratory written work redundant. But as this kind of talk is more difficult to organize in classrooms, personal, near-to-speech reflective writing will fulfil some of the functions of exploratory talk, and in addition provide opportunities for sustained reporting and reflection which talk does not. Here is another illustration concerning Sue Watts, a chemistry teacher. She asked her first year mixed-ability class to keep a diary of their work. These diaries are in addition to the record of experiments which the children keep. I quote from two of them.

Teacher One

Today we played another sort of guessing game on one of the benches we had three trays half full of water one was hot one was cold and the middle one was warm, first of all we put our hands into the cold and hot trays then after a minute we put our hands into the middle tray and they felt very different my right hand felt cold and my left hand felt warm but this was wrong because both of them should have felt the same because the water was all the same temperature. After we had done this we were given a thermometer and we found out the temperature of my fingers and my temperature is 35 °C.

Teacher Two

In the science laboratory we have been looking at many different things, I was particularly interested in mercury and why it is so heavy. I once learned that you get mercury in a thermometer and that if you drop the thermometer and it smashes all the mercury will spread over the floor and turn into silver balls. You mustn't touch it because it is poisonous. My mother once dropped a thermometer when she was a child and that is how I know.

These diaries give the children the chance to reflect on what they are doing. Thus Carol thinks that it is 'wrong' that her two hands felt different in the same bowl of water. She is initiating a question about the relativity of subjective judgments and her teacher will respond to this when she reads the diary. Ann selects the things she is 'particularly interested in' and brings together school knowledge and knowledge from other sources. Neither of these children could have initiated this reflective awareness of the work they have been doing in their formal reports. Both kinds of writing are important and have different functions within the subject area—in this case, science. The diary entries are like talk in some ways, though there is not the instant feedback that comes from discussion. On the other hand they give an

opportunity for coherent and extended reflection which talk does not.

Many teachers have said to us—and pupils too—about this kind of writing, 'But that's English'. This is both sense and nonsense. It is sense in that everyone interprets the present in the light of expectations built up from past experience. In as far as school experience has taught both teachers and children that different kinds of writing are, in school, associated with different subjects, they are right, but in the world, language alters according to the situations of which it is a part, i.e. what it is intended to do, and who it is for—so the diaries being primarily for the writer with the teacher as a subsidiary interested reader, are different in purpose and audience from the formal reports. Neither is functionally peculiar to science or to English.

A School-Wide View of Writing Activities that can Promote Language Learning

One of the features of the subject organization of secondary schools is that teachers of one subject have only the haziest ideas of what goes on in other subjects. A valuable result of this paper's recommendation with regard to language policies is that teachers have begun to look at the overall picture of language activities in their schools. One sample examined in this project and used for discussion was a surprise. It consisted of all the writing done in one week by three school pupils of varying abilities from three different classes. Each pupil was found to have done: (i) a piece of independent, extended writing for English, set after class discussion but free to be treated in any way; (2) notes or extended pieces copied from the chalkboard; (3) answers to comprehension questions on the chalkboard or on worksheets. (2) and (3) covered history, geography, language studies, religious studies and science. So a bird's eye view of written language activities offered to these three classes in one week showed a very narrow range, with five-sixths of the writing (coming from five subjects) giving the pupil little or no chance to use his own language, or to write extended prose as distinct from short answers.

Conclusion

Given that teachers are beginning to ask how much and what kinds of language there should be, it is clear that they need some tool of analysis. Teachers need to look at the part played by language in their lessons and communicate this to each other, then the first steps towards a language policy will have been taken. To develop a useful policy further, teachers of all subjects must then be prepared to incorporate in their thinking the sort of knowledge about language and its import for learning.

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