

**INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AT THE UPPER BASIC
EDUCATION LEVEL IN NIGERIA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO ENGLISH AND FRENCH LANGUAGES**

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Abstract

This work was undertaken to promote possible innovative ways of approaching language instructions at the upper basic level of education in Nigeria. The concern of the writers was that there has not been sufficient proof of effective teaching of the languages-English and French at the basic level of education, since the products show very weak foundation in their performances. The following issues were discussed: The concepts of basic education and innovation, the importance of language instruction, some inadequacies in the existing pedagogy and the proposed innovation. The innovative strategies advocated for includes the application of multiple theories in language teaching and learning, full participation of students in language learning situations and compulsory use of the ICTs in language teaching and learning. Some recommendations were made among which was that government should allocate enough funds for the provision of ICT facilities to actually involve students effectively in language learning.

Education is described by many scholars as a dynamic process that prepares individuals for functional lives in the society. The human society is lively because of the social interaction among its members which is made possible by the use of language. Language learning is part of the education of the child.

The Importance of Language in Instruction

Human beings live together in organized communities, hence they need to communicate in order to share ideas, knowledge and express their feelings. Language is the vehicle used by man to communicate, stressing its importance, Obanga as cited in Oparaku (2008) posits that language should be seen as mans most important gift, the vehicle for communication and creativity.

Still on the importance of language, Anukam as cited in Oparaku (2008) sees language as a quality of man that distinguishes him from other animals and any other creature under the sun. Language grows in use and dies in disuse if people who speak it go into extinction. She is also of the view that with mans numerous discoveries and inventions in the universe, language adds new dimensions to its shape every day. And that with the explosion of knowledge, language both pure and adulterated has come to occupy an indispensable place in the service of man.

Furthermore, the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, educational instruction and cultural presentation is

expressed in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Language which is a major means of communication is equally a very important factor in education. Apart from the first language, the Nigerian child for instance has the need to learn the English language which is the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. There lies the need to lay a good foundation in the study of English language in Nigerian schools. The concern of the writers was that the products of the upper basic education level do not show that they have had ample grasp of the language. This is observable in their use of the language as well as their performances in their examinations. Ugwu, Oparaku and Agoha (2015) observed that in spite of the alleged examination malpractices in external examinations in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in English Language in most schools in Imo State, candidates cluster around passes while many fail. Good performance according to them is judged by the number of credits and distinctions made by students the poor performance is obvious in the four basic skills of the languages i.e speaking, reading, writing and listening. There is therefore the need to talk about innovation in the teaching of English as well as French language at the upper basic level of education in Nigeria. The discussion was effectively done under the following subheadings:-

- The concepts of basic education and innovation.
- Justification for the study of English and French languages in Nigeria

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- The theories of learning and teaching
- The inadequacies observed in language instruction in Nigeria
- The proposed innovative strategies
- Conclusion
- Recommendations.

The Concept of Basic Education

The word basic is derived from the noun 'base', which connotes the starting point, foundation or takeoff board on which other bricks can stand and from which the main structure grows. Upper Basic Education in Nigeria is designed for students in the first three years of secondary education who have passed through the three years of primary education. This group of students are within the ages of 11-14 years. It is meant to be free, universal and qualitative so as to provide a solid foundation for other levels of education in Nigeria. Ote, Nwokocha and Igbokwe (2015) Opine that basic education does not only provide the basic knowledge but also inculcates the right attitudes, values and skills needed by everyone in order to realize their potentials. The objectives of this very important programme is realizable for Junior Secondary Classes 1-3 through the implementation of the curriculum content in the following subjects: English Studies, one Nigerian language, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Religion and National values, Prevocational, French language, Cultural and Creative Arts, Business Studies, Arabic and Entrepreneurship.

Whatever is designed to be achieved at this level and other levels of education is possible through the use of effective instructional strategies in the classroom teaching of the various subjects. If there are a lot of lapses at this point, there is the need to seek an innovation.

Innovation in Language Instruction

The word "Innovation" means to introduce something new, novel things making some changes which are geared towards improving the existing way or pattern or condition of doing things to make them more efficient and effective than before. (Duru 2011:405). In the context of this write up, innovation means to introduce a new strategy of language instruction and improve on the existing pattern as to make language teaching more effective. It has been observed that a huge gap needs to be filled by bringing in, creating, planning or formulating new methods, techniques and strategies and instructional activities aimed at sharpening the already existing language instructions. No wonder Anukam (2015) introduced the sheep and goat method as a teaching strategy. This means that the language teachers have not been making their contacts with the learners more attractive and lively, to make the learners more exposed and involved in every aspect of the teaching and learning process. The overall purpose is to make language instruction more dynamic to meet the present societal needs. Language instruction at this point in time does not need the teacher dominating the scene but a more radical approach that matches the

fast moving societal changes. For the language learner of the 21st century to be attracted to sit down at a place and pay attention, retain and reproduce what is being taught, the language instruction and the instructional environment, techniques and materials have to be qualitative and systematized bearing in mind the Chinese adage that says “what I hear, I forget. What I see I remember and what I do, I understand” there must be a shift from the traditional methods of the colonial language teaching to a more practical digitalized approach that gets the learners up and doing, that is learner centered approach.

The Justification for Effective English and French Language Instruction in Nigerian Schools

A language is a tool for social communications. According to Nnachi (2009:20) language is a vital technique for communicating feelings, ideas, sentiments and thoughts. Language is all about communication and human interaction, a mark of human intellectual superiority over all other animals. Language is important for social, political economic and all other kinds of relationships. Without a language, a lot of skills, ideas and talents will remain dormant and human activities will be limited. Language is used to facilitate communication, promote understanding, generate and disseminate ideas. This in addition to one’s native language it is advocated that one studies one or more foreign languages that will enable one to be able to interact with people outside his immediate

environment. The inclusion of English and French languages in the Upper Basic Education Curriculum is no mistake.

The Importance/Roles of Languages (English and French) in Instruction

In a normal school setting, language is mostly the major medium of instruction. Language instruction becomes a very important aspect of curriculum implementation because the learners imbibe the medium of instruction that makes them able to learn other school subjects. In the case of Nigeria, English Language which is the official language is the medium of instruction.

English language is one of the vestiges of colonialism in Nigeria. It has so much roles and importance in the Nigerian school system especially at the secondary school level. It is used in the testing system from First School Leaving Certificate through other important examinations of Upper Basic Education, Senior Secondary and Tertiary institutions.

English language is equally the medium of instruction in schools. It is also the language for parliamentary proceedings and for the conduct of official government business. To buttress this, Ezema as cited in Oparaku, (2008) identifies three reasons why English Language is taught in schools in the country:

- It is the official language of the country
- It is the official medium of instruction at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in the country.

- Many of the learners need proficiency in the language for their future career. The role or importance of English language in the national life of an average Nigerian is actually inestimable, for instance, for a Nigerian to follow intelligently what is going on in the national life, he has to read newspapers and make use of both the radio and the television whose communication modes are English language. If he is deficient in the English language, he is seriously handicapped in making use of these agents of information dissemination.

The implication of this is that without a good knowledge of English Language, one could be denied most of the benefits of the media (both electronic and print). And for knowledge of English language to be well grounded in an individual especially students, it has to start from the primary school level through the UBE to the tertiary level as it is always said, the earlier the better i.e. catch them young. The role of English Language is even appreciated more when it is remembered that the country is a multilingual nation. There are over 300 different lingua groups within the country as observed by Ezema (2002). To be able to move and communicate freely within the country, a Nigerian has to be conversant with the use of English language. The unifying position of the language in the country is therefore very obvious.

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (2014:7) government appreciates the importance of language- as a means of

promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. And that in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the Nigerian Languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

English language is still an important tool of instruction in our educational system. Nzeako (2012) opines that; English language has continued to function as a second and official language in Nigeria because, there is no consensus as to the use of any of the indigenous languages. The importance of English language has been growing by leaps and bounds. Presently according to her, English is a dominant common language in Nigeria because no indigenous language is spoken by an overwhelming majority of the people. She adds that, it has made inter ethnic communication easy and thus facilitated contact between people of diverse language backgrounds. Other roles of English Language, according to Oburuoga (2015) are as follows;

a. English is the Language of Education:

The official position today is that English language is the language of instruction from primary education to the university level. The functions of English language in education are clearly defined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004;15) which states that “the medium of instruction in primary school, shall be the language of the Environment for the first three years. During this period, English

language shall be taught as a subject". English has therefore remained the medium of instruction for both secondary and the tertiary education in Nigeria. It is listed as the number one core subject for both Junior and Senior secondary education.

b. English language is also used as the language of law:

Oburuoga (2015) asserts that it is the language in which legal business is done and documented. The laws used in Nigeria are written and interpreted in English. The statutes of government establishment, decrees, bill and bye-laws are written in English language. Legal documents like wills, Affidavits and Mortgage agreements are written and sworn in English language. It is also the language used in Federal and Supreme courts. All legal activities and prosecuted in English language.

c. The English language as an agent of national integration/security:

The multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious nature of Nigeria led to the introduction of the English language by the colonial administrations. It was introduced for inter-ethnic communication in the face of the diverse languages spoken in the country. Since the introduction of the English Language in Nigeria, there have been a lot of arguments from different sectors to replace the English language with one of the indigenous Nigeria languages. All these arguments have not yielded any positive fruit since no agreement has been reached as to which indigenous language to use. As a result of these language problems, English still remains the official

language in Nigeria and will remain so for a long time.

French language is a core subject in the Nigerian School Curriculum; at the Junior Secondary School levels specified in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

It is a means of promoting smooth interaction with our francophone neighbours (FRN 2014). It is important for social, political, economic and international relations. Knowledge of French language will add value to Nigerians as they will not only be at home in Anglophone countries but also in Francophone countries.

The knowledge of French and English languages is important because they are the official working languages of the United Nations, United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, European Union to monitor but a few. (Ubabudu 2012). Ajiboye as cited in Ubabudu (2012) asserts that 22% of the worlds French is in black Africa alone. Africa as a whole accounts for 33% of the French used for official and administrative purpose in the world. Outside France, Africa is the most important French practice in the world. Again for smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly that French is the second language in Nigeria and it is compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools, but Non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School (FRN 2014).

Language teachers oftentimes use another language to explain certain concept in other languages. It is not right to teach a particular language with another language. For instance now some English language teachers use vernacular (another tongue) to draw or drive their lesson home for their students to understand the points they are making. In affirmation to the above, Anukam (2015) states that English Teachers are today often advised to use the mother tongue in explaining difficult concepts to their students, if that would quicken understanding.

Majority of the language teachers shy away from listening and speech aspects of the scheme of work and syllabus of the various languages they teach. This according to Ugwu, Oparaku and Agoha (2015) is because they are not familiar with the correct sound production, intonation, stress pattern and rhythms of the languages. Obviously, one cannot give what one has not and for effective languages instruction at the upper Basic Education in Nigeria, the language teachers must be well grounded in the use of these languages and every aspect of them.

The Inadequacies Observed in English and French Languages Instructions at the Upper Basic Level.

The inadequacies observed in language instruction at the upper basic level are numerous and call for an innovation in language instruction. These inadequacies account for discrepancies between what is on ground and what ought to be in terms of students'

performance in the languages. These are foreign languages that need to be taught with every amount of seriousness and a simulated natural environment rather than in isolation. Some of the observed inadequacies are discussed below;

Teacher Quality

In most cases, language instruction is regarded as something which anyone can handle especially at the lower basic, middle and upper basic levels of education in Nigeria. Most of the public schools especially in the rural areas have no English and French teachers. These subjects are handled by non professionals who are hired or engaged because they were either born in French speaking countries or lived there for some time in the case of French or anybody at all in the case of English. What is not considered in such situations is that the curriculum package of these school subjects are actually meant to be implemented by professionals who are trained in these areas of specialization to do so. Agwu and Dorgu (2015) assert that the teachers' readiness, commitment and capability in the use of the necessary teaching skills must be considered as very important in curriculum implementation. Just as it is dangerous for a fake doctor to handle people's health problems, so it is dangerous for a fake language teacher to handle the language instruction because of the linguistic blunder he is bound to make. Many linguistic inadequacies are hence transferred to the students thus creating permanent wrong impressions on the learners. On the contrary, effective

language instruction requires the teachers' knowledge of the basic rudiments of the language in addition to the correct oral production and proper articulation. This can be given by specialist language teachers. Unfortunately, there are few such specialist language teachers of French and English to go round.

Inadequate Facilities and Resources

Language instruction cannot be effective without the needed facilities and resources. These include instructional materials, classroom accommodation, language laboratories, ICT facilities, space for various activities and a well equipped library. Afangideh (2009) contends that no curriculum can be implemented effectively without due consideration of the necessary equipment and materials. He adds that there is dearth of instructional materials in basic education level in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, instructional materials are needed most in the teaching of these foreign languages.

Duru (2011) outlines a good number of reasons why instructional materials must be used in teaching. These include the fact that they arouse the interest of the learners and make what is being taught real. She adds that they reduce abstractions especially in novel contents, learning experiences and concepts. This is exactly what is needed in teaching English and French languages at upper basic level where the teacher strives to create a picture of what is not there in the minds of the students.

Failure to Expose Students to Enough Language Learning Opportunities, Environment and Situations

Observations show that language instruction is done haphazardly in most cases, whereas it demands the language teacher making extra effort to create situations, learning opportunities and environment. It is not enough to depend on the class text with just few activities but the students need more exposure, contacts and engagement with planned learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

Unfortunately, the only contact students have with the language is the two or three lesson periods a week which are not enough to master the languages.

Non Involvement of Students in the Teaching/Learning Process

Some language teachers still adopt the teacher centered method in which they see themselves as the repertoire of knowledge. This happens when no effort is made to create enough learning activities for the students. With only one text book in the classroom, the teacher reads the passage, asks questions and answers them. He alone does everything while students remain passive listeners, whereas language learning requires the full participation, engagement or involvement of the students in the teaching and learning process.

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Proposed Innovations in Language Instructions at the Upper Basic Level in Nigeria

Innovation in language instruction means to introduce something new or to improve the already existing instructional methods so as to make language learning more effective and efficient. According to Delano, Reley and Crookes as cited in Reinders (2014) an innovation in a second language teaching programme is an informed change in an underlying philosophy of language teaching and learning brought about by direct experience, research findings or other means, resulting in an adoption of pedagogic process such that innovation is better able to promote language learning as it has come to be understood.

Some questions to ask in selecting an innovation strategy include:

1. Are these methods attractive to students? The new methods/technique must attract and interest students so as to draw their attention and motivate them to learn. Does method appeal to today's learner? The method/technique must take learners active participants, creative and critical thinkers in the learning process.
2. Is it rich in multimedia? The method should include the use of video, audio and text materials which are suitable to the learners and their environment.
3. Is the new program beneficial to the learners? The method/technique must be beneficial to today's learner and make him/her relevant and useful in today's society. The teachers have important decisions to make as to what suits their

learners best in a given instructional context.

The Use of ICT Facilities

There have been a lot of proposals, moves and acceptance of the use of the ICTs in teaching generally. Many scholars have emphasized the need for the application of the ICTs in teaching because of the numerous benefits derivable from them. Nzewi (2009) posits that ICT is used as an instructional tool to explore, investigate, solve problems, interact, reflect, reason and learn concepts in the classroom. It gives room for independent and individual study. This is needed by students for continuous practice of the language at home and everywhere they are.

- The use of the radio, television and computers in language teaching should be made compulsory in language teaching in schools.
- The writers also advocate the coffee break French teaching methods which can be adapted to the teaching of English language. It is an interactive communicative French lesson for students who wish to enhance their proficiency in the language. The lessons are taped and the tape can be played in the class, in cars, at home etc. This is a very fast way of learning the spoken language. The cassettes can be distributed by teachers to the students or to parents at PTA meeting. This is a more pleasurable way of studying the language with the accompanying music.
- Radio and television programmes are very useful and cheap media for

language instruction. These have long been recommended by specialists but have never been adopted by language teachers. As an innovative strategy that ensures effective use of the ICTs, lesson periods meant for the use of ICTs have to be reflected on the time table as a matter of compulsion. In this era of information and communication technology, teachers should make use of the zeal and interest students have in them to design lesson in the language in and outside the classroom to augment the traditional classroom instruction. There is the problem of non availability of electricity but many rural communities now enjoy electric power supply.

Adapting the Language Learning Theories to Language Instructions

In a classroom situation, teachers at times need multiple theories in language teaching for learning to take place effectively. Wilson and Peterson (2006) argue that teachers need to interpret combine and adapt language learning theories in order to give language learners the opportunity to learn in multiple ways. The Freeman's model (1991) as cited by Ohata (2015) argues that language teachers should be daring and exploratory in trying out new ideas, different techniques and activities that make language learning very interesting, attractive and inviting. Vygotsky's socio cultural theory of language learning (1962) posits that students develop cognitively as they learn a language. They learn better when they interact socially with others and with the environment in

language learning. This theory stresses the need for the use of songs, games, plays/drama, debates and other interactive activities and strategies which make learners active participants in language instructions. Ezenwa (2009) contends that communicative language study makes learning interesting and enhances understanding and retention in language lesson. Lawless (2014) in her own contribution introduces the language teaching methodology known as the Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM) which uses gestures, music dance and theater that can enhance understanding and retention.

Banduras's (1925) theory of observational learning is another theory that provides useful strategies for effective language instruction. This emphasizes the roles of modeling, imitation and observation in language learning. Presenting opportunities for observing imitating or modeling the owners of the language facilitates language learning. These can be achieved through listening to news, watching films, listening to experienced and good speakers of the language,

Involving Students in the Teaching Language Process as Active Participants and Decision Makers

Naturally, students at the upper level would feel they have nothing to contribute in their education. They can be involved in the following ways to ensure the modern Learner Centered Method (LCM)

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- They should be exposed to the topics beforehand.
- They can be made to propose instructional objectives.
- They can be involved in designing or collecting instructional materials.
- They can be made to participate at every stage of the lesson in asking and answering questions, reading, writing, discussing, explaining, dramatization, demonstration etc.
- Composing songs, poems, stories as part of the learning activities.
- Summarizing news and films watched etc.

Talents and intelligent types differ. According to Rodgers (2001) teachers should identify these intelligences in individual learners and plan the learning styles that best suit them. Gardner in Rodgers (2001) proposes the following model of learning activities for different intelligent types.

Intelligent Type	Educational Activities
Linguistic	Lectures, workshops, word games journals, debates
Logical	Puzzles, estimations, problem solving
Spatial	Charts, diagrams, graphics, organizers, drawing, films
Bodily	Hands on, mime, craft, demonstrations
Musicals	Singing, poetry jazz, chants, mood music
Interpersonal	Group work, peer tutoring, class projects
Intrapersonal	Reflection, interest centers, personal value task
Naturalist	Field trips plant and animal projects, show and tell

Conclusion and Recommendation

As a matter of fact, most of the innovative strategies talked about in this paper have at one time or the other been initiated by experts but not actually implemented. Teachers often shy away from moving that extra mile to improve the quality of their language instructions coupled with the lip service paid to the adoption of the ICTs in teaching and learning because of the cost of hard and soft wares. In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are made;

1. Language teachers should interpret, adopt and combine theories for effective instructional delivery. They should combine practices, techniques from different approaches where the philosophical foundations are similar to appropriately support effective language learning.

2. Language teachers should be daring and exploratory in trying out new and different techniques and strategies.

3. There should be interweaving of knowledge in curriculum planning. All stake holders should be involved, curriculum specialists, ministry of education, administrators, parents, teachers and students. When the teachers who are key implementers of the innovations are involved in the planning of the new programmes, there will be a successful implementation.

4. Interactive-communicative and interesting techniques/strategies/materials that make language lesson inviting, enjoyable, relaxing and fun are essential in the teaching and learning environment.

5. The language teacher should identify intelligent types in his/her learners and be able to plan and adapt the instructional activities to match each instructional objective.

6. The communicative approach to language learning enhances attention and retention. It makes language learning functional because language is all about communication.

7. The government should allocate enough funds to language education and should recruit adequate number of language teachers.

8. Language teachers should make good use of the interests students have in the ICTs in designing learning experiences for them.

9. The school administrators should allocate more time for language instruction in upper UBE while language teachers should appreciate the enormity of

their tasks and step up their efforts to provide many learning opportunities that can make students active participants in language instructions.

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